

THE STRANGE AND THE FAMILIAR
SHAKESPEARE AS A POINT OF ANGLO-GERMANIC CULTURAL EXCHANGE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department
of the School of Theatre and Dance

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Elizabeth Tyrrell Woolbert

May, 2015

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ABSTRACT

One way of approaching an argumentative, academic essay is to conceive of two parts: a site, or subject of examination, and a lens, the context or paradigm in which the scholar examines that subject. This thesis illustrates the process by which the works of William Shakespeare have functioned as both, specifically in England and Germany over a period of two hundred years, from the late eighteenth century to the late twentieth. After a difficult initiation into the German-speaking world and heavy resistance from proponents of French Neoclassicism, Shakespeare became an indispensable part of the German literary and theatrical worlds. This was due in part to German writers' construction of Shakespeare in terms more palatable to their countrymen, terms that grew to represent not just an aesthetic sensibility but part of the German character itself. A century later, Shakespeare was an unshakable pillar of the German canon and a favored resource for the experimental producer-director Max Reinhardt. Reinhardt's personification of German Modernism found its fullest expression when put to use animating Shakespeare's plays. Very shortly thereafter, agents and cooperatives of the Nazi government pressed Shakespeare into its service. The Nazis borrowed the familiarity and cultural currency of Shakespeare to legitimize their own bigotry, thus transforming Shakespeare from a site to a lens. A similar approach, though for a much less destructive purpose, is evident in the work of director Peter Brook. His career in post-WWII England, especially at the Royal Shakespeare Company, picks up on the same use of Shakespeare as a lens that is observable during the Third Reich. In Brook's case, Shakespeare represents a familiar element that helped make palatable a strange element, Brechtian techniques, for English tastes. Overall, this thesis demonstrates how processes of familiarization and

estrangement have contributed to the works of William Shakespeare's becoming vehicles for cultural exchange between England and Germany.

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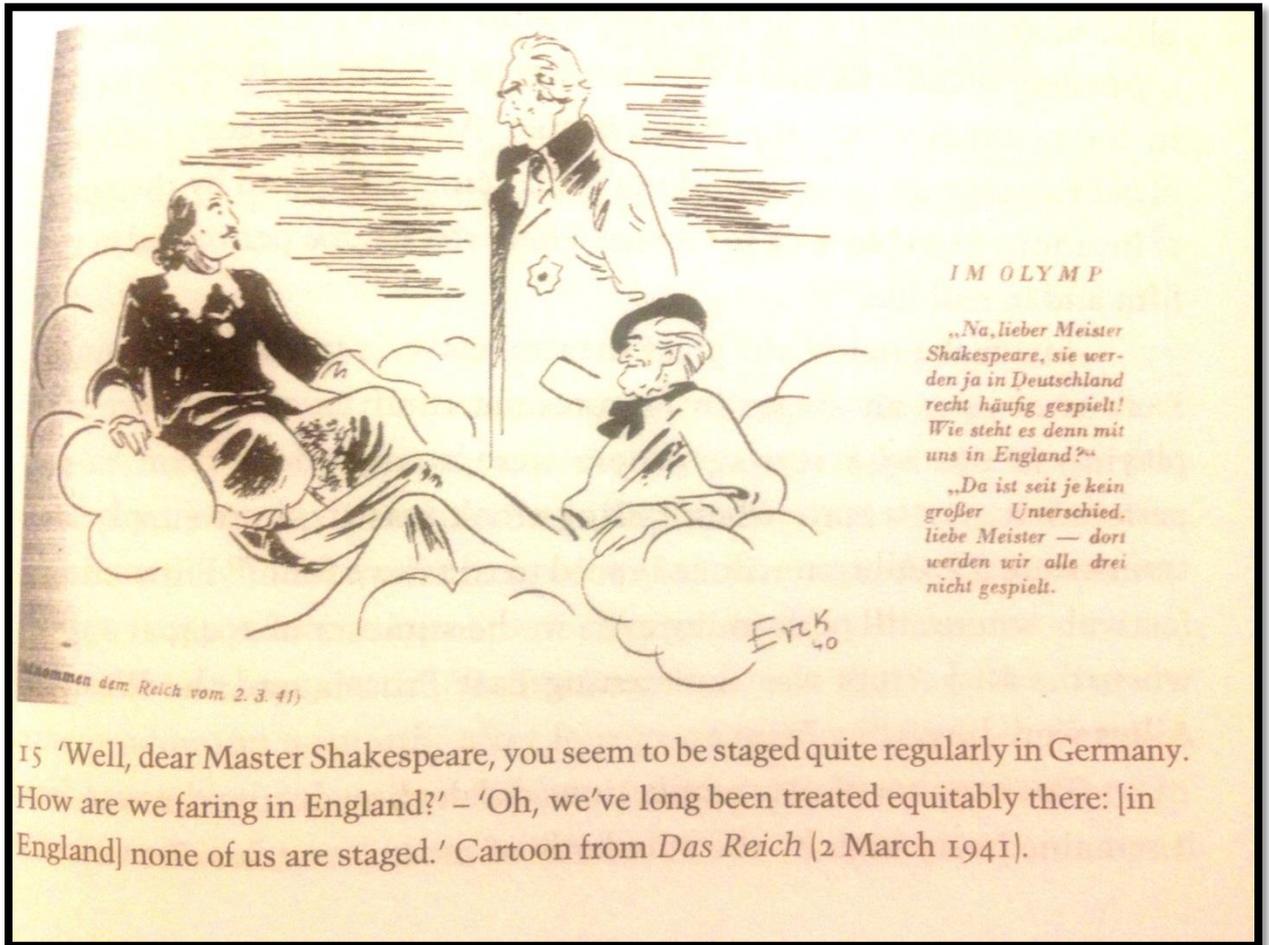
Finally, I would be remiss if I did not extend sincere thanks to the other friends and family members on whom I have relied greatly over the past two years: Michael Woolbert, Kelly Woolbert, Patrick Woolbert, James Hearne Woolbert, Anne Marie Sampietro, and Kathy Drum.

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Introduction



1 Reprinted in *The Swastika and the Stage* by Gerwin Strobl (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 211.

As soon as I realized that this project would focus heavily on the production history of Shakespeare in Germany, I started looking for a cartoon of the English playwright dressed in lederhosen. I assumed that the internet was a fertile enough landscape and that my request was not unreasonable, but sadly, it seems that no such cartoon exists. I was therefore delighted to find this illustration from a 1941 issue of *Das Reich* reprinted in Gerwin Strobl's excellent book. Lederhosen are certainly cute, but this cartoon – despite its unfortunate source – raises some questions that are more relevant to the content of my argument in this thesis, questions like:

- What is it saying about the German conception of Shakespeare?
- What is it saying about German theatre history?
- What does it imply about Shakespeare's place in English culture?
- How does the punchline articulate an argument about national claims on Shakespeare?

These questions came to dominate my thought processes as I continued my research. I had never before been so conscious of the unique bridge that Shakespeare formed between England and Germany, an ignorance that now seems unforgivable considering how rich and vast a field of study it is.

Romanticizing the Bard

My first chapter examines one of the means by which “Shakespeare in Germany” became such a rewarding area of scholarly investigation. There is something remarkable about the German enthusiasm for Shakespeare. It is not the enthusiasm itself, for that is almost commonplace. What sets Germany's love of Shakespeare apart is its patriotic, even imperialistic quality. If you can imagine Shakespeare's works as a landscape, then somewhere on its beaches would be a firmly-planted German flag. By the end of the nineteenth century, German scholars were claiming Shakespeare as one of their own, counting him among celebrated native poets such as Goethe and Schiller. How did Shakespeare achieve canonical status in Germany? What forces contributed to the “felicitous melding”¹ between Shakespeare's oeuvre and German culture? Traditionally, scholars have ascribed credit to the translation work of August Wilhelm Schlegel. I would like to suggest here an expansion on that discourse, focusing not on an individual scholar but rather a facet of Shakespeare criticism in Germany: the highly important, but often overlooked, romantic construction of Shakespeare in German terms. Shakespeare scholarship of the late eighteenth century provided a new vocabulary in which the

English playwright was transformed into an agent of the German spirit. My focus is on three writers in particular: Lessing, Herder, and Goethe. Their works construct a romantic image of Shakespeare that made the drama itself more accessible to German audiences and contributed to the active construction of a national German identity.

Site and Lens

From there my discussion leaps forward in time, skipping the nineteenth century to pick up in Wilhelminian Germany and continuing through the administration of the Third Reich. Chapter Two hones in on the moment in German theatre history when Shakespeare's job description expanded. The two case studies that illustrate that transition are Max Reinhardt, renowned producer and director, and the National Socialist German Workers' Party, which made it a policy to enlist Shakespeare's plays as Nazi propaganda. Reinhardt's artistry embodies the modernist spirit of early-twentieth-century Germany. Inspired by the effervescent creativity that surrounded him, the director assembled paradigm-altering productions of Shakespeare's works. His directorial style revolutionized the performance tradition of Shakespeare and overthrew Naturalism. Reinhardt's career exemplifies the use of Shakespeare's works as an important cultural site because those plays constitute the milestones that mark major points in his development. When Reinhardt left Germany, the very group that pushed him out was beginning to put Shakespeare to their own particular uses. From 1933 into the early '40s, the Nazi government appropriated the Shakespearean canon as a contextual filter for the distribution of ideology. Its leaders' own writings, cultural organizations, governmental agencies, and even the German press assisted in a process that Wayne Kvam has called "Nazification."² To varying degrees, the plays of Shakespeare were adapted so that they

conveyed a message that accorded with Nazi ideology. Sometimes that could be accomplished with characterization and a well-designed set. In other cases it involved bold choices to adapt the material itself. While Reinhardt's focus had been on the animation of a story (site), theaters operating under National Socialism participated in the communication of a very specific worldview *through* a story (lens).

The Strange and the Familiar

Finally, in Chapter Three I move to post-WWII England and the Royal Shakespeare Company, where Peter Brook's work with the iconic playwright bears comparison to that of the Nazis – but only in the most mechanical sense. This section explores the role that Peter Brook played in popularizing Bertolt Brecht for a British audience. Brecht's modern centrality to the field of theatre studies is easy to recognize; no English-speaking drama student graduates without some study of Brecht's theories, plays, and methods. We might therefore be tempted to forget that there was a moment in which this was not yet the case, a moment when Brecht was not a canonical playwright. Brecht even visited London in the mid-1930s and tried unsuccessfully to interest producers there in his works. From the '30s to the '50s, newer companies like the Theatre Workshop and the English Stage Company mounted Brechtian productions that suffered negative reviews expressing distaste for the content and style as well as from the stigma of Brecht's association with Marxism. (Even Kenneth Tynan, an admirer of Brecht, was unhappy with British companies' versions of Brecht's plays.) What finally made Brecht's aesthetic more appealing to the mainstream theatre audience of twentieth-century Britain was its application to the works of William Shakespeare. Peter Brook's work for the Royal Shakespeare Company exemplifies this process. Brook is especially famous for

exploring the works of Artaud, but the Brechtian experimentations observable in his productions of Shakespeare deserve more critical attention, especially his 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Royal Shakespeare Company. The success of this and other “Brechtian Shakespeares” reveals the function of his canon as an interpretive lens.

Some vocabulary requires elaboration. In Chapter One, the adjective *German* should be taken to mean “the German-speaking world.” The nation as it exists today was not yet a reality in the late eighteenth century, so discussions of Germania encompass several different political divisions. As this study is not as concerned with the individual principalities among German-speaking peoples, the term *German* transcends political boundaries and refers more to cultural cohesion. Another potentially problematic word appears in Chapter Two. When I use *völkisch* to describe a Nazi adaptation of Shakespeare, there is an implication greater than one might assume. *Volk* is a German word that roughly translates to “a nation of people who share the same cultural values, a people united in their worldview.” *Völkisch* might seem like just the adjective form, but it actually bears a more charged connotation, referring specifically to the brand of racist nationalism promoted by the Nazis.

For me, this study illuminated a previously unknown and yet strikingly rich area of Shakespeare studies. My work over the past several months has introduced me to the history of Shakespeare as a point of interaction between two nations in which the theatre is an integral part of cultural life. His canon’s international fame has facilitated cultural exchange on a massive scale. First the Germans imported Shakespeare into their national repertoire; they then developed a new (albeit sinister) way of using the plays; ultimately,

the English were able to use that new method as a means of reciprocal incorporation, using to bring Bertolt Brecht into their own fold. Encountering this “brave new world” in my study of Shakespeare has made me appreciate this all-important playwright in a way that I never before considered.

Romanticizing the Bard: How Shakespeare Became a German

Shakespeare's plays have become such an integral component of Western culture that it is hard to imagine their needing a P.R. campaign. In Germany, where Shakespeare's prominence trumps that of many native artists, the need seems even more remote. Yet that is exactly what took place throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century: a German P.R. campaign on behalf of Shakespeare. Until then, French Neoclassicism had dominated the tastes of the German-speaking aristocracy, and since Shakespeare's works rarely conformed to neoclassical rules, they were largely dismissed. It was not until the early years of Romanticism that artists, scholars, and critics began to advocate for incorporating Shakespeare's plays into the German repertoire. The timing is significant because German Romanticism was not only an artistic movement; it had an intensely patriotic (i.e., anti-French) inflection.

Shakespeare's works thus became a site for the aesthetic battle between Neoclassicism, representing the taste of the Bourbon court at Versailles, and Romanticism, ostensibly representing the essential qualities of an authentic German culture, one that had escaped French influence by surviving among the lower classes. When men such as Lessing, Herder, Goethe, and others celebrated Shakespeare's vast imagination, proximity to nature, or emotional depth, for example, they were cheering for what they saw as reflections of the German spirit. Romanticism offered a different lens through which to examine Shakespeare's works and an alternative vocabulary with which to discuss him, one that had an arguably greater "Germanness" to it and more accurately revealed Shakespeare's inner self. Over time, romantics' focus on the German qualities within Shakespearean drama led to a total conflation of Shakespeare with an authentic

German essence. If Shakespeare exemplified qualities that the Germans saw in themselves, then it followed that, at least in spiritual terms, Shakespeare must be a German, too. In its fight against French aesthetic imperialism, German writers' claim on Shakespeare created a space for the English playwright in the German psyche.

As mentioned, the German love affair with Shakespeare did not begin at first sight. The earliest records of his presence in the German-speaking world in no way foretell the relationship of reverence and admiration that has dominated for the past two hundred years. The earliest record of his name in German literature hails from 1682; it appears in a work by Daniel Georg Morhof, a "baroque polymath" well known to Ben Jonson.³ There are at least two references to Shakespeare in the sections on English poetry and on theatre, but neither of them is exactly auspicious: the author lists Shakespeare alongside several other English artists whose works he has never read. Before 1762, German knowledge of Shakespeare was fragmentary and existed mostly in the form of excerpts – "snippets from scenes and monologues from the famous plays, especially from works such as *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Richard III*."⁴ For a century and a half after his death, Shakespeare remained virtually unknown in the German-speaking world.

When more Shakespearean material did penetrate German literary culture, it met resistance from proponents of French Neoclassicism. Of course, neoclassicists derived their rules from Greek playwrights, who earned great praise for their careful attention to "agreement and order," which "gave rise to perfection."⁵ By observing those playwrights' works and recording the principles by which they functioned, Aristotle had rendered good taste "immutable."⁶ It therefore behooved contemporary artists to follow Aristotle's

and Sophocles's instructive examples. According to the neoclassical aesthetic, the most desirable qualities of drama were those outlined in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The rules particularly important to French and German neoclassicists were:

- Plot above character,
- Climactic structure,
- The unities of time, place, and action,
- Genre purity, and
- Promotion of an elevated morality.

Johann Christoph Gottsched is the most prominent of the German neoclassicists. His *Critical Poetics* of 1730 exhibits a clear French influence, which Simon Williams traces to Nicolas Boileau. Williams points, for example, to Gottsched's "insistence on probability, ... suppression of the imagination, and rigid formal laws such as the doctrine of the three unities" as evidence of the French influence, and Gottsched himself confirms it when he argues overtly for the superiority of their model.⁷ Gottsched was especially fervent about the unities of time and place. To him, a plot that exceeded twelve hours in dramatic time offended probability, and "a story that is not probable is worthless."⁸ Gottsched was not alone in his preference for French Neoclassicism. His contemporary Christoph Martin Wieland professed great respect for French literature because they rightly looked to the Greeks for their artistic models. Wieland hailed Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* as the quintessential tragedy and believed that if German playwrights followed the rules demonstrated by Sophocles and outlined by Aristotle, they would produce similarly praiseworthy works.⁹

And that is where the problem emerged for Shakespeare. His plays consistently operated outside – perhaps even flouted – neoclassical parameters. Most early translations into German were therefore also highly adaptive efforts to "fix"

Shakespeare's plays, to bring them in line with neoclassical expectations. The effort to simplify plots and reduce ambiguities in plays such as *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Titus Andronicus* had resulted in "severely eviscerated versions."¹⁰ Capsar von Borck was the first to translate an entire Shakespearean work into his own language; in 1741 he produced a German *Julius Caesar*.¹¹ Borck converted Shakespeare's iambic pentameter to alexandrine lines, a difference of two syllables per line of verse.¹² His work did nothing to improve Shakespeare's standing in Germany, and there were no subsequent whole-play translations for a decade afterward.¹³ Luise Gottsched, spouse of the Johann Christoph, also produced some translations of Shakespeare, and she even attempted to reproduce the blank verse. Unfortunately, iambic pentameter was unfamiliar to German readers at the time, and her efforts also failed to advance Shakespeare as worthy of German attention.¹⁴ The first major translator of Shakespeare's plays into German was actually Wieland, who took a novel approach to the problem of the verse; he cut it altogether. The twenty-two plays that he translated between 1762-1766 were written entirely in prose.¹⁵ Additionally, in an effort to make Shakespeare's plots "fit more staid eighteenth-century tastes," Wieland excised their "'less tasteful' elements."¹⁶ Although Harrison claims that the quality of Wieland's work virtually eclipsed Borck's,¹⁷ Lessing laments in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* that when it was "just barely ... finished," the Wieland collection had already lost scholarly credibility.¹⁸ Frederick the Great himself disparaged Shakespeare's canon as a collection of "laughable farces."¹⁹ This was not yet the Germany that loved Shakespeare enough to claim him as their own.

Because of its incompatibility with French literary rules, Gottsched argued in "On the Good Taste of the Poet" that Shakespearean drama was deemed unfit for German

audiences. The dramatic qualities that attracted him and other neoclassicists to the Greeks were things like singularity of intention and the unity of one principal action, and English plays “in general . . . transgress[ed] against this rule.”²⁰ Interestingly, Gottsched pointed to the common ancestry between the English and German peoples as the reason that Germany lacked a strong dramatic tradition. He blamed the “barbarian peoples” who conquered Europe after Rome’s fall.²¹

The charges made against Shakespeare by his “boldest enemies” are parroted mockingly in Herder’s essay “Shakespeare.” The author says that critics have

Declared that though [Shakespeare] may be a good poet, he is not a good dramatist; and even if he is a good dramatist, he is incapable of the great classical tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides, Corneille, and Voltaire, who have taken this art to its furthest limits. And Shakespeare’s boldest friends have been mostly satisfied with finding excuses and making apologies . . . for his always transgressing against the rules.²²

More specifically, German literary intellectuals were highly critical of several tendencies within Shakespeare’s plays:

- The mixing of genres, “jumb[ing] the most sublime tragedy with the lowest comedy,”²³
- The disregard for the “indispensable” Aristotelian unities (such as in *Julius Caesar*, whose plot extends from “before the murder of Caesar . . . until after the Battle of Philippi” and therefore requires the audience to observe the passing of several successive, albeit fictional, nights while they remain “seated always in the same place, without eating, drinking, or sleeping”²⁴), and
- Characters of moral ambiguity.

For reasons such as these, Gottsched and other Germans who favored the French neoclassical aesthetic maintained that Shakespeare’s works were unfit as models for

modern German playwrights. Even Wieland, who nurtured a love for Shakespeare in spite of his neoclassical leanings, believed that the English playwright's works were permanently flawed.

Neoclassical demands affected Shakespeare in performance as well as in text. The only production of *Hamlet* in the eighteenth century was that by Friedrich Ludwig Schröder. In an exercise of obedience "to the tastes of the late eighteenth century that dislike[d] undeserved deaths," he allowed by Hamlet and Laertes to survive.²⁵ Of course, many municipal theaters in Germany simply refused to stage Shakespeare at all, preferring instead the works of French playwrights such as Racine and Moliere.

Resistance to that French influence is evident as early as the early seventeenth century. Simon Williams and Marvin Carlson have both argued that the Thirty Years War, a conflict that began as a religious dispute among German provinces and burgeoned into a massively destructive international war for political dominance in central Europe, was partly responsible for anti-French sentiments within the German-speaking world. Carlson goes so far as to claim a direct relationship between the Thirty Years War and German Romanticism; the former perpetuated resentment between the two cultures and, more interestingly, it undermined the very foundation of neoclassical ideals, which had little relevance to a battle-ravaged countryside. How could one reconcile "the harmony, wholeness, placidity, and restraint of classicism" with the "apocalyptic" feeling of reality?²⁶ Carlson makes a compelling argument for the Thirty Years War's destructive effect on German receptivity to Neoclassicism. And it is easy to trace those seeds of animosity toward the French to the next violent event between them, the Napoleonic Wars.

But as we have seen, neither episode eradicated the French influence on German cultural tastes. There was no dearth of neoclassical rhetoric in eighteenth-century Germany. It seems that a more precise description of the relationship between these two wars and German Romanticism is that they established patriotic points of reference upon which the romantics could base their promotion of an alternative aesthetic.

Three voices that in the late eighteenth century began to loudly reject neoclassical condemnations of Shakespeare were those of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832). They and their works are part of a concerted refutation of Neoclassicism. One of the duties of furthering that cause was answering Shakespeare's detractors, which these three men all did with great zeal.

They responded directly to the claim that Shakespeare's disregard for the (neo)classical unities²⁷ counted as a flaw against his works. To them it was only natural that the culture of ancient Greece and the culture of Elizabethan England produced dramatic styles that bore little resemblance to each other. Herder made the point that, considering the differences between the two societies in question, the alternative was an impossibility. "In Greece," he explained, "drama developed in a way in which it could not develop in the north."²⁸ To Herder that was such a simple point that he branded as a fool anyone who condemned Shakespeare for not adhering to neoclassical prescriptions. For him and other German writers, the fact that Sophocles's world was so far removed Shakespeare's meant that the former's ideas about art did not constitute an appropriate means of judging the art of the latter, and even less so for eighteenth-century France. Goethe extended the argument further by locating the difference not just in the social

structures but in the very *souls* of the people who populated the two vastly different worlds.

It was not that the German romantics were anti-Aristotelian. They simply made no secret of their acute disdain for the French version of classical rules. The alternative, Romanticism, originated in Germany, and therefore championing it became a patriotic exercise. Key elements of romantic thought include:

- Primacy of subjective experience and the imagination;
- Association of the complexity of human experience with the vast complexity of nature;
- Extreme, even transcendental, emotion;
- The artist as a genius with greater access to the divine;
- Celebration of the local and vernacular; and
- Yearning to return to a perceived medieval unity or mythic past.

For Timothy Chamberlin, editor of an impressive anthology of primary sources, Shakespeare criticism of the period provides confirmation of Romanticism's flowering among German scholars. "The change in orientation [from neoclassical to romantic ideals] shows clearly in the attitude toward Shakespeare,"²⁹ which was overwhelmingly, emphatically positive around the turn of the nineteenth century. At a time when a need for cultural and national identity permeated the German-speaking world, at a time when validation of the self and its place in the whole was a vital concern of the period's artists, philosophers, and scholars, the German romantics observed in Shakespeare a reflection of themselves. That recognition of the familiar within the strange is the source of German Romantics' zeal for Shakespeare.

A major point of romantic departure from Neoclassicism is its fundamental conception of art and art's purpose in the world: while neoclassical authors emphasized moral instruction, German romanticists were more concerned with the evocation of

strong, unpredictable, and sublime emotions. Christoph Friedrich Nicolai's "Treatise on Tragedy," for example, which he sent in summarized form to Gotthold Lessing in 1756, illustrates this shift,³⁰ breaking with didactic claims of neoclassicism that tragedy should serve to improve manners."³¹ The volatile emotional themes of Shakespeare's plays coupled with the extreme emotions they evoked in readers therefore augmented Shakespeare's appeal to the romantics. The preference for emotion over other methods of perception, especially logical reasoning, was a major upset in the ideological balance. Carlson cites it as the original occasion of friendship between Ludwig Tieck and Friedrich Schlegel – a "shared affinity for Goethe and Shakespeare and an aversion to rationalism."³² Romanticism's tendency to favor emotions over reason was part of a developing confidence in the capacity of "sensuous cognition"³³ to reveal existential truths.

Dramatic criticism of Shakespeare's works colorfully demonstrates the romantic emphasis on emotional impact, in part because the rhetorical tone of romantic Shakespeare criticism borders on histrionic. Throughout the works of Lessing, Herder, and Goethe, we see the end of Germany's coy flirtation with Shakespeare and the beginning of a shout-it-from-the-rooftops love affair. Even a cursory glance reveals their excitability – frequent readers of scholarly prose might be surprised by the number of exclamation points that pepper Herder's "Shakespeare" and Goethe's "On Shakespeare's Day."³⁴ For Goethe, the attraction was instantaneous; apparently the first page of Shakespeare that he read "made me his for life."³⁵ His first Shakespeare readings were excerpts, though, and his feelings were even grander after Herder encouraged him to read the plays in their entirety (which at that time also meant in their original language).

Goethe was overwhelmed with a “boundless enthusiasm,”³⁶ and at age 22 he composed the passionate rhetoric of “On Shakespeare’s Day.” In this “intense articulation of *Sturm und Drang* bardolatry,”³⁷ he addresses Shakespeare as “my friend” and says, “if you were still among us, I could live nowhere but with you.”³⁸

In fact, the experience of reading Shakespeare could be so emotionally moving for those with romanticist sensibilities that it became transcendental. Consider the following accounts from Herder, Goethe, and Wieland. In various ways, each of them describes the transformative power of Shakespeare’s works.

Herder: When I read him, it seems to me as if theater, actors, scenery all vanish! Single leaves from the book of events, providence, the world, blowing in the storm of history. Individual impressions of nations, classes, souls, all the most various and disparate machines, all the ignorant blind instruments—which is what we ourselves are in the hand of the creator of the world—which combine to form a whole theatrical image, a grand event whose totality only the poet can survey.³⁹

Goethe: [W]hen I had finished the first play I stood there like a man born blind who in the blink of an eye had been given his sight by a miracle-working hand. I recognized, I felt in the most vivid way that my existence was infinitely expanded, everything seemed new to me, unknown, and the unaccustomed light made my eyes hurt.⁴⁰

Wieland: Anyone who speaks of traces of a great genius that are often to be found in his works awakens the suspicion he has never read them. It is not traces but the continuous radiance and ample outpourings of the mightiest,

richest, most subline genius that ever inspired a poet that overwhelm me as I read his works, make one insensitive to his flaws and irregularities, and allow me beneath the magic of his omnipotent imagination to think as little of French rules and French models, as it could occur to me in a majestic forest, illumined by the warmest sun, to lament that Leotre hadn't come to the aid of nature here with his measuring tape and pruning shears.⁴¹

These passages indicate that early figures of German Romanticism shared a perception of Shakespearean drama as a site of transcendence, where both the self and its part in a whole are equally illuminated, where one reconciles with the infinite complexity of human experience.

That reconciliation is of great importance to the romantic advocacy of Shakespeare. The objects of neoclassical indictment, Shakespeare's formal complexities and moral ambiguities, were reconceived as the very means by which the playwright presented a faithful representation of human nature. In Herder's view, "Shakespeare could only be true to nature when he rolled his great world events and human destinies through all the places and times where they took place."⁴² Lessing praised the "deep insight into the nature" of human experiences such as love and jealousy. To him and other romantically minded individuals, Shakespeare's plays seemed directly informed by great universal truths of existence. Specifically, he cited *Romeo and Juliet*, the only tragedy "whose work was helped by love itself," and *Othello*, "a perfect primer" for jealousy, respectively.⁴³ Romantics read Shakespeare as a grand pageant of human nature and experience, illustrating the infinitely complex worlds within and among individuals.

For romantics and their contemporaries, another necessity in the faithful expression of human nature was the abandonment of Aristotelian unities, and reading Shakespeare is exactly what convinced the young Goethe to renounce them (at least for a time; later in the poet's life his tastes become more neoclassical). Shakespeare's form seemed so liberated that, like a foil character, it highlighted the constrained and restrictive quality of Neoclassicism. Goethe's imagery in "On Shakespeare's Day" already confirms this. "The unity of place seemed to me as anxiety ridden as a prison," the poet says, "the unities of action and time burdensome fetters on the imagination."⁴⁴ Herder too observed this difference between the Greek and Elizabethan models. He explained that one of the important ways Shakespeare depicted human nature on the stage was by releasing drama from the requisite unity of time. In his essay "Shakespeare," Herder writes, "His grand events begin slowly and ponderously in his nature, as they do in nature itself. ... Shakespeare is the greatest master, simply because he is only and always the servant of Nature."⁴⁵ *King Lear* and *Othello* served as particularly positive examples of Shakespeare's effective eschewal of neoclassical rules.⁴⁶

The use or disuse of the unities affects the world of a play, but what about the characters who populate that world? From a German perspective, Shakespeare's penchant for extraordinarily diverse and exceptionally complicated characters constitutes an additional example of the playwright's successful representation of human nature. Lessing juxtaposes the title character of *Othello* with that of Voltaire's *Orosman*, ostensibly based on Shakespeare, and concludes that Voltaire's protagonist comes up "threadbare."⁴⁷ A. W. Schlegel lists the complexity of Shakespeare's characters as something that "recommended" the Englishman to him as a major author.⁴⁸ The great

variety of linguistic modes spoken by Shakespeare's characters, ranging from lofty verse to coarse, vernacular prose, and its capacity to highlight the great variety of humanity, also garnered the romantics' appreciation. In Herder's words, Shakespeare's language is that "of all ages, all sorts and conditions of men; he is the interpreter of Nature in all her tongues."⁴⁹

The profound impact of Shakespeare on early romantic writers is clearly evident in the consistently superlative praise that late eighteenth-century criticism heaps upon the playwright. Even Wieland, who was not willing to totally abandon neoclassicism, could not deny the immense pleasure that reading Shakespeare brought him. "Who can imagine a greater poet of mankind in the northern world," Herder challenged his readers, "and a greater poet of his age?"⁵⁰ Among his German advocates, Shakespeare was not only "the greatest northern dramatist,"⁵¹ but also the "the foremost dramatic poet of all ages and peoples."⁵² In fact, Wieland's aforementioned insistence that Shakespeare should not serve as a model for contemporary playwrights to emulate (because they would only succeed at imitating his faults) was predicated on the assumption that Shakespeare was so good as to be beyond imitation. "It would take an individual born with the spirit of the fine arts" to successfully imitate Shakespeare, he said, because "Shakespeare's genius can't be duplicated."⁵³

The use of the term "genius" by Wieland is significant, especially considering Natalie Tenner's observation that it was "a label the early Romanticists did not bestow lightly."⁵⁴ Wieland used the term again when he cited Shakespeare's "genius and imagination, [...] depth of feeling and faithful representation of nature"⁵⁵ as the reasons that the English playwright remained superior to the French neoclassicists Voltaire and

Racine despite his aversion to the rules. Herder called Shakespeare a genius,⁵⁶ as did Schlegel, who argued that Shakespeare was a genius not to always be confined by “aesthetic propriety.”⁵⁷ Lessing’s use of the word had even foreshadowed its romantic significance when conceding that Shakespeare wasn’t perfect. One of the earliest essays in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, number 5, from May 15, 1767, admits that Shakespeare’s acting talents may not have been as brilliant as his poetic skill (an idea that Arons explains derived from an English biography of Shakespeare by Nicholas Rowe). Lessing’s diction is remarkable, though, because as he addressed a less praiseworthy aspect of Shakespeare, he described it as a “lesser genius.”⁵⁸ Even Shakespeare’s flaws still fell within the “genius” realm.

Part of the definition of a romantic genius was a unique proximity to the divine. The genius was assumed to at least have greater access to realm of the eternal than other mortals. The conflation of Shakespeare with a deity is abundantly clear in Goethe’s essay “On Shakespeare’s Day”; some passages are eerily reminiscent of the biblical book of Genesis. In Goethe’s words, Shakespeare “animated [his plays] with the breath of *his* spirit, *he* speaks from them all, and one recognizes their kinship.”⁵⁹ Echoes of the playwright’s supposed divinity ring throughout Herder’s “Shakespeare,” which addresses the eponymous figure in such enormous terms that only a semi-supernatural being could live up to them. “[T]here came a mortal man, endowed with divine powers,”⁶⁰ he wrote, a man who “embraces a hundred scenes of a world in his arms, composes them with his glance, breathes into them an all-animating soul, and enraptures us ... our entire soul from beginning to end ... discovered the godlike art of conceiving an entire world out of the most disparate scenes as one great event.”⁶¹

Romantic and other authors recognized the following in Shakespeare's works:

- Immeasurable emotional depth;
- The capacity to provoke intense feelings within the reader;
- Complex worlds and characters that seemed to be more truthful representations of human nature and experience; and
- The qualities of a "genius artist" apparently plugged in to a realm of perception unavailable to other mortals.

Those unconventional observations culminated in a "recognition of essential similarities between the German and English peoples"⁶² that led Herder to proclaim, "I am closer to Shakespeare than to the Greek."⁶³ It is important to clarify that the kinship dynamic would have been one of English derivation from Germanic origins. Shakespeare therefore inherited a Germanic tradition, and German scholars could claim him as one of their own.

Whereas German neoclassicists had preferred to imitate the French because of their supposed inheritance of Greek sensibilities, nationalist Germans preferred looking to their cousin Shakespeare as a model. Goethe's essay "On Shakespeare's Day" draws a parallel between the English playwright and the German people. He says that by honoring Shakespeare they also honor themselves, because "we have in ourselves the seed of merits we know how to value."⁶⁴ Again, this language suggests that writers such as Goethe perceived something in Shakespeare's works that reflected an essential Germanness.

Because I have asserted an inherently patriotic element to the romantic reception of Shakespeare, it is worth pointing out that the particular kind of Germanness that the romantics saw in Shakespeare was that of the *Volk*. Natalie Tenner provides a more eloquent explanation of this term than I can. As she says, Volk refers to

the people in the German states who had not been affected by the influence of other countries, particularly France. . . . a sort of

mythologized working class who revered nature and the human soul and who could trace their origins back to the Teutonic tribes that allegedly stood strong against the corruption of Ancient Rome. This group embodied the ideals that existed at the very center of Romantic thought: emotion, individual freedom, the inner spirit, and nature. . . . In this crucial period of discovering and creating a cultural history, the Volk provided the links to traditional German culture, understood as access to something authentically German.⁶⁵

Through the connections that romantic authors drew between Shakespearean drama and an authentic German spirit, Shakespeare became instrumental in the construction of a cohesive German identity. According to Timothy Chamberlain, Shakespeare was even more influential German culture of this period than contemporary folk poetry. For one thing, as Natalie Tenner argues in her essay “Creating Ideal Audiences,” Shakespeare was helpful in the rejection of French Neoclassicism; for another thing, his works provided Germany with dramatic material by an artist “whose spirit was the same as theirs.”⁶⁶ Something that strikes me about the scholarship on this subject is the way that Tenner, like many others, speaks of the special affinity between Shakespeare and the German spirit without qualifying it as a matter of perception or otherwise questioning the romantics’ belief in it. It is as if the German-Shakespeare spiritual connection were irrefutable fact. This observation is not intended to undermine but rather to applaud the remarkable profundity of the tradition.

The dominance of the French neoclassical style faded in the nineteenth century, “challenged by a rising middle class that used models from English and national German

literature to give its own literature identity. Shakespeare,” says Simon Williams, “was a pivotal figure in this.”⁶⁷ As the impulse to resist, reject, and renounce French influence in Germany grew, Romanticism’s unique association with authentic German culture became an effective tool in the cultivation of a cohesive German identity. The fact that Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, “[a]lmost as much as *Faust I*, ... clearly and consistently expressed the very soul of German consciousness,” that the play “encompassed much of what Germans felt intrinsically defined their sense of character and intellectual complexity”⁶⁸ quite naturally led to the conclusion that Shakespeare and the German Volk were spiritual kin. In the nineteenth century, Shakespeare was “a German poet.”⁶⁹ Gradually, German theatre artists began to pick up on this notion, and when they sought a “new dramatic form to convey the German spirit,” they turned to William Shakespeare.⁷⁰ When Hamburg was conquered by Napoleon’s forces, for instance, and the French censor “refused to allow any plays which might encourage German nationalist spirit,”⁷¹ including all of Goethe and Schiller, the theater subverted that restriction by turning to the perceived German essence hidden within Shakespeare’s works.

Site and Lens: Shakespeare Under Aesthetic and Ideological Experimentation in Pre-WWII Germany

Max Reinhardt was the theatrical equivalent of a mad scientist, and the control element of his daring dramatic experiments was William Shakespeare. Although Reinhardt did have extensive experience with other playwrights' works, he maintained a consistent professional and artistic engagement with the Shakespearean canon. All of the innovative choices for which the director has been celebrated are evident in his Shakespeare productions, from the hugely popular *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Neues in 1905 to his later work at the Grosses Schauspielhaus. As the previous chapter illustrated, a naturalization process beginning in the late eighteenth century eventually led to Shakespeare's being adopted as a German poet. Shakespeare's role in Reinhardt's massive success signifies the culmination of that process. He used Shakespeare as a site for the expression of new and unorthodox production methods, but always in the service of the narrative. His focus was vivid storytelling, not the advocacy of particular style.

The Nazis, however, used Shakespeare somewhat differently. After Adolf Hitler's ascent to power in 1933, the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), or German Workers' Party, made an active effort to appropriate Shakespearean drama as propaganda. The scholarship and the production history of the WWII period reflect a fascinating shift: rather than using Shakespeare as an experimental site, as Reinhardt did, Nazi versions of Shakespeare used the plays as a lens for the legitimization of their socio-political philosophy. In the same way that rhetoricians use narratives as illustrative examples to prove their theses, so too did the National Socialists employ Shakespeare to justify their own position. Shakespeare's high cultural currency made his works available

as a filter through which Nazi ideology might be disseminated more easily among the German public.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, a young actor moved from the traditional splendor of Vienna to the vibrant, active, artistically experimental city of Berlin. Within a few years, he had changed career paths and conquered the local theatre scene as a daring new type of producer and director, achieving widespread international fame by his early thirties. His popularity in Germany was the kind that coaxed Prussian princes to sneak out of their royal residences and into his theaters to secretly watch dress rehearsals, a bold form of rebellion considering the kaiser's official boycott of these particular theaters.⁷² The young actor-turned-director was Max Reinhardt, renowned for his promotion of new works, new styles, and new technologies, as well as for his abiding love of Shakespearean drama.

Several vivid analogies have served to qualify Max Reinhardt's particular talents and contributions to German theatre. There is the idea of Reinhardt as a pioneer, used in 1923 by the Weimar Republic's President Ebert⁷³ and echoed by Edmund Wolf, who called Reinhardt an expander of the frontier.⁷⁴ Other analogies include Gregori's conception of Reinhardt as a "landmark" on the "road of theatrical history, at its turn from a one-sided literary management of the stage to one more essentially dramatic."⁷⁵ Rudolf Kommer qualifies Reinhardt in warlike terms when he credits the director as one who "fought the royal battle against drab naturalism."⁷⁶ Others have used more supernatural phrasing to describe Reinhardt, such as Frank E. Washburn-Freund's equation of Reinhardt with a prophet in direct communication with the divine.⁷⁷ Leyen cast him as a "miracle-working magician"⁷⁸ and Wolf elaborates on Reinhardt's

supposedly magical powers when he describes watching the director assist a young actress playing Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

[W]hatever Reinhardt does, what he gives her, he also in fact takes from her; what he rings out in her with so much insistent patience is exactly herself, her characteristic way of reacting, her idiosyncracies—only transmuted as though the core of her being, her individual essence, had already been crystallized in her acting, as though she had already found her 'own melody'. . . . It was Reinhardt's truly incomparable gift to divine and absorb the individuality of actors he worked with, and to bring out in them exactly those nuances of speech, movement, expression which were most truly their own but had lain dormant until the magician appeared. The effect was sometimes as though in these few hours of work years of growth had been compressed.⁷⁹

A letter from Gerhart Hauptmann to Reinhardt on the director's fiftieth birthday echoes that sentiment, addressing Reinhardt in a manner perhaps more fit for Prospero: "You have stirred up the Germany of yesterday," he says, "by a storm of beauty and a whirl of magic, which will live in the memories of all those who have experienced it."⁸⁰ My personal favorite characterization of Reinhardt and his singular talent comes from the Danish critic and playwright Sven Lange, who states, "He is a wizard—this strange little man."⁸¹ What I find most revealing about these various images is their common emphasis on Reinhardt as a steward of the new and the unknown. The image of the frontier and that of a magician both suggest something beyond our current understanding, and even the battle metaphor implies the triumph of the new over the old. All of these descriptions of

Reinhardt signal the arrival or discovery of something new, strange, and unfamiliar, and this is crucial to an understanding of Reinhardt as a theatre artist. Reinhardt's relentless pursuit of new modes of expression and his inexhaustible creativity earned him a singular reputation and enormous influence in German theatre.

That reputation for experimentation firmly situates Reinhardt as a man of his time. He came of age artistically at the height of the "stormy"⁸² modernist period, most renowned for its prolifically innovative artistic activity. With less than a century as a unified nation under its belt, Germany entered an experimental phase. The term *Modernism* does not refer to an organized, monolithic system or an ideological consensus. Hermann Bahr provides a more eloquent image to illustrate the modernist atmosphere in his essay "The Spiritual Sources of Reinhardt." He describes Berlin cultural life at the turn of the twentieth century, during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

In those days when, of an evening, a few Berliners foregathered to have a good time together, they were hardly seated before they were asking:

‘Well, what shall we do now?’ It actually seemed as if the entertainment of the evening consisted in dropping into a different café every half hour on average, to discuss the vital question: “Where shall we go now?”

Evidently a real thrill was induced by every change of café. And it was the same way in intellectual matters. Danger as well as strength lay in the haste with which Wilhelmian Berlin unceasingly ‘changed the café,’ whether the “café’ were philosophy, art, or even religion.⁸³

Berthold Viertel's depiction of modernist Berlin is similarly vivid, though more violent, when he likens “work in Berlin” to “tempestuous onslaughts and daring raids.”⁸⁴ In the

theatre, the various –isms developing in Germany at that time explored new methods of designing, staging, and acting for the modern audience. They utilized newly available technology such as more sophisticated lighting equipment and the *Drehbühne*, or revolving stage. Among the innovative groups were movements such as *Stilbühnenbewegung*, or the “style stage movement.” also known as relief staging, defined in Hortmann as “various efforts to create simplified and non-realistic yet expressive surroundings for the theatrical event.”⁸⁵ Symbolist drama was another development of the early twentieth century, as was Felix Emmel’s *Das ekstatische Theater*.⁸⁶

Max Reinhardt occupies an esteemed position in the modernist pantheon. In Bahr’s comparison between Berlin’s peripatetic intellectual and café cultures, the author concluded with an assertion that if, after five minutes at the altar of a new art form, one turned to Max Reinhardt and asked, “What now?,” the director would have been “ready with a prompt answer to this perpetual question.”⁸⁷ Reinhardt’s contemporaries as well as successive generations of theatre artists and scholars have expressed agreement that his work embodied the modernist spirit more than any other theatre artist’s. Huntly Carter’s book on Reinhardt, for instance, attests that “no one in [the twentieth] century has expressed this spirit in the theatre more persistently and more thoroughly ... [Reinhardt] embodies the modern militant spirit ... marked by audacity and fighting force.”⁸⁸ Granted, Carter made that statement less than a fifth of the way into the twentieth century, but that just further illustrates the potency of Reinhardt’s experimental appeal. Even a negative reaction can serve to demonstrate the extent to which Reinhardt personified the sensibilities of Modernism. Although Modernism flourished during

Wilhelm II's reign, the Kaiser himself "perorated at every opportunity against Modernism," and against Max Reinhardt in particular.

We can only speculate as to how much of Reinhardt's experimental tendency was innate and how much was the product of living in the effervescent artistic climate of pre-war Berlin. Hermann Bahr is confident that when Reinhardt transferred there from Vienna, the city was veritably abuzz with the electric potential of concentrated creativity.

It was

no longer the Berlin that Bismarck knew, that felt itself content and secure in its cold Prussian traditions and its past. Still less was it the romantic Berlin of ETA Hoffman. No. It was an entirely new Berlin, a city that had shot up over night and was being impelled forward, ever forward, with a consuming impatience ... like his own.⁸⁹

Whether Reinhardt's experimental tendencies were inspired or merely awakened by Berlin's culture of creativity, they made themselves known early in his career. His desire to expand beyond Naturalism, for instance, became apparent soon after joining the company of the Deutsches Theater, under the direction of Otto Brahm. Brahm's preference for Naturalism was clear in his work as a producer and director and exerted a great influence on the young Reinhardt. Specifically, it influenced him to seek other modes of dramatic expression.

Of the various fragments that compose the modernist mosaic, Naturalism was the one that dominated in Berlin at the turn of the twentieth century, and the one that Reinhardt most actively worked against. Interestingly, Bahr argues that Naturalism had also been part of a reaction against dominant trends; its "great objectivity, complete

subordination of the actor to the author, and [the] drab, colorless honesty that went so far as to avoid all dramatic effects” were counters to the “empty, declamatory Court Theater manner.”⁹⁰ Artists of the early twentieth century appear to have been grateful to Naturalism for answering the “grand style” of the opera, “with its long, sweeping ... manners [and] an often overcrowded and therefore characterless stage.”⁹¹ By the time Max Reinhardt moved from Vienna to Berlin, Naturalism enjoyed “a long and really living tradition.”⁹²

Aesthetically, Naturalism adopted a “subdued tone, almost a whisper at times,” and a “uniformly gray, drab milieu [that was] supposed to take away all staginess and transform it into real life.”⁹³ Hermann Bahr credits Naturalism with helping to purge the German stage of some vices, and Reinhardt himself has been praised for his work as a Naturalist actor under Otto Brahm, but ultimately it was a tradition with which Reinhardt had to start a fight.⁹⁴

The incompatibility between Reinhardt and Naturalism came from their having vastly different aims for dramatic art. Naturalism sought to recreate a “factual reality” on stage,⁹⁵ to harness “the power of language and the representation of apparent everyday reality.”⁹⁶ This imperative made for drab theatre. He saw Naturalism’s lack of imagination as its greatest deficiency. According to Fiedler, *imagination* would have been synonymous with *image* in Reinhardt’s mind,⁹⁷ and that gray, drab milieu could not hope to fulfill his need for visual illustration.

Reinhardt’s inner “thirst for progress impelled him to seek a wider sphere of action,”⁹⁸ and in 1901 Reinhardt joined the *Freie Bühne*, but as that venue was really just another naturalist extension of Otto Brahm’s vision, it did not quench his need for new

experiences. In the same year Reinhardt founded a cabaret-style theater in Berlin called the *Schall und Rauch* (“Sound and Smoke”), which played host to the experimental types of the Berlin arts scene.⁹⁹ Fiedler points to the *Schall und Rauch* as the first major milestone in Reinhardt’s long career of theatrical envelope-pushing, the first major manifestation of his “skepticism about the theatre of his time” and “his drive toward more colorful means of expression.”¹⁰⁰ It was there, amidst variety shows, vignettes, and satirical drama that Reinhardt first began developing a conception of “what the new theatre should become.”¹⁰¹

Max Reinhardt’s plans for dramatic experimentation with a broad scope and grand scale developed rapidly from there. The irrepressible energy of his imagination urged him forward, and before his thirtieth birthday, he had worked out a plan that would facilitate his getting to explore a wide variety of texts and production styles. As Reinhardt prepared “to make his spectacular break with Otto Brahm,” he invited Arthur Kahane to meet him at the Café Monopol. During that “lengthy session,” Reinhardt “outlined the all-encompassing conception of theatre which actually was to take shape in the near future—three different sized theatres, many different styles, joy!” and ultimately engaged Kahane as a literary adviser.¹⁰²

After only one season Reinhardt renamed the *Schall und Rauch* the *Kleines Theater* (“Little Theater”) and shifted the venue’s focus. Instead of musical performances, vignettes, and other small entertainments, the *Kleines* would feature full-length, avant-garde works by the up-and-coming playwrights of Europe. That same year he took over the *Neues Theater* as well.¹⁰³ “In the *Kleines Theater* and the *Neues Theater*, Reinhardt made his first attempt to apply to the stage the results of modern artistic

culture.”¹⁰⁴ He continued his practice of producing new works, taking on (and succeeding with) even the most challenging contemporary playwrights like Maurice Maeterlinck.

The liberation from Brahm’s influence combined with access to two different performance venues gave Reinhardt the chance to start more seriously addressing the needs of modern theatre in a practical way, and as Hortmann says, Shakespeare was “at the heart of the struggle.”¹⁰⁵ Since the latter half of the previous century Shakespeare had been one of the ruling powers on the German stage – in fact, after the successful marketing of Shakespeare by the romantics, the inclusion of Shakespeare in the reperotry became necessary for a theater to qualify as a legitimately artistic institution.

Unfortunately, the marriage of Shakespeare with Naturalism was an unhappy one, and one of the motivating factors of Reinhardt’s career seems to be an impulse to repair the damage done to Shakespeare’s plays by naturalist productions. One of the disadvantages of Shakespeare’s canonicity was that his works had attained a fixed meaning, “once and for all ... settled by critics, scholars, and school-teachers, who persistently warned directors not to tamper with hallowed traditions.”¹⁰⁶ Naturalist treatments of Shakespeare perpetuated those agreed-upon interpretations despite cultural changes in Germany over time. Wilhelm Hortmann’s beautifully written book *Shakespeare on the German Stage: The Twentieth Century* outlines the effects of Naturalism on Shakespeare and other canonical playwrights, effects that Reinhardt worked hard to counteract. Among them were charges that:

- Repertory productions remained unchanged for years, reusing the same sets, costumes, texts, and actors;
- Naturalist Shakespeare demanded meticulous historical detail, which in turn required enormous and complicated set designs, leading to “huge, noisy, unnecessary scene changes” (Hamlet called for eighteen of them);

- To mitigate the distracting effects of the scene changes, scenes were rearranged, “upsetting the dramaturgic balance”;
- Actors’ interpretations of characters, though different in gesture and speech, were conceptually identical; and
- High culture in Germany was rendered inaccessible to the German people – according to Theodor Fontane, Shakespeare in Germany had been “‘castrated’ under the influence of teachers and professors, [and could] no longer captivate the common people.”¹⁰⁷

The preservation of standard performance traditions over a long period of time eroded the demographic to whom Shakespeare appealed. Although his works became the most highly-regarded in terms of literary and poetic achievement, they began to lose their sense of direct relevance to audience members’ own experiences. Overall, Naturalism constituted an “impotent” approach to the classics¹⁰⁸ that resulted in a rigidly presentational evening of literary theatre.

There are few people who can watch idly as something they love suffers, and Reinhardt was no exception. His profound and lifelong love for the works of Shakespeare motivated him to redeem the plays for a modern audience. If you recall the earlier reference to Frank E. Washburn-Freund’s equation of Reinhardt with a prophet, it should be obvious that the divine with whom he was supposedly in contact was none other than Shakespeare: “Shakespeare became his god.”¹⁰⁹ Reinhardt’s own writing lauds Shakespeare as the “greatest theatrical genius” and credits the English playwright with knowing and feeling “more keenly” than anyone else “what is essential in dramatic art.”¹¹⁰ The scholarly consensus regarding Reinhardt’s relationship with Shakespeare is that the one perceived a spiritual kinship with the other, a reflection of his own inner self reminiscent of that experienced by the figures of German Romanticism. In Shakespeare, Reinhardt found “the poet and dramatist who refuses to put his plays into a single style,”¹¹¹ a conviction that Reinhardt adamantly shared. The comedies’ particularly

“romantic affirmation of life, love and joy ... coincided with [Reinhardt’s] own philosophical convictions and artistic interests,”¹¹² and the overlap between the artists created the opportunities for exciting work.

Reinhardt’s full-throated answer to naturalistic drudgery is nowhere more evident than in his legendary 1905 production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Neues Theater in Berlin. This particular play epitomizes my earlier analogy between Shakespeare and a scientific control for Reinhardt’s experiments. Fiedler says as much in “Reinhardt, Shakespeare, and the ‘Dreams’” when he observes that “each time he arrived at a crucial point in his career, Reinhardt mounted a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.”¹¹³ Over three decades and five different countries, Reinhardt created over a dozen distinct stagings of this one play.¹¹⁴ The first one, however, made an indelible impression on German cultural memory. Kommer provides a beautifully dramatic description of the effect it had on its contemporary theatre community:

Upon this state of things burst Reinhardt’s first Shakespearean production. It was a revelation. Berlin was jubilant. He had not added a word, he had not cut a line. And yet, it seemed a new play entirely. ... [I]t had a message that did away in one evening with all the voluptuous pessimism and sordidness of the preceding fifteen or twenty years of naturalism. Through the whole season, the Neues Theater was besieged by multitudes clamoring for seats, and there was no French bedroom farce, no Viennese musical comedy, no Hungarian melodrama, that could compete with this or the following Shakespearean productions in their popular appeal.¹¹⁵

The critics' reception of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was just as giddy. Reinhardt's production "took Berlin by storm" and made him "overnight the premier director in Germany," winning what Tollini claims was the unanimous approval of "contemporary critics [who] all commented on the new approach to Shakespeare."¹¹⁶ In short, "*A Midsummer Night's Dream* made Reinhardt famous."¹¹⁷

The rapidly spreading fame that Reinhardt acquired in 1905 came with a litany of perks. As Hortmann observes, the success of that production is what allowed the director to start seriously implementing his theatrical vision, taking over direction of the Deutsches Theater and beginning "to lay the commercial foundations of the theatrical organization outlined to Kahane three years before."¹¹⁸

It has become a scholarly given that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was Max Reinhardt's personal favorite play by William Shakespeare, and as such, it became the "*urquelle*, the primordial source and means of his dramatic expression."¹¹⁹ Surprisingly, across the dozen or so different manifestations of *Midsummer* under Reinhardt's direction, the basic interpretation of the story did not change; he simply sought new and different ways of expressing it, pursuing "the challenge of different scenic realizations in new venues and environments, in changing pictorial styles and above all work with new actors."¹²⁰ Even without a revolving stage, Reinhardt was still able to achieve the atmosphere of an enchanted forest,¹²¹ such as the version that he staged in Munich. The much smaller dimensions of that venue forced him to scale down his image of the play, but Gusti Adler claims that Reinhardt approached the challenge with delight.¹²² In the 1920s, Hugo von Hofmannsthal reports, Max Reinhardt mentioned that he was considering a bare-stage production of *Midsummer* in Vienna, "in front of a green curtain

representing a forest. This may be taken to prove that he has the rare creative faculty of freeing himself from his own ideas, even the most successful of them.”¹²³

There had been other artists earnestly attempting to rescue Shakespeare from the rigid grip of Naturalism. Otto Brahm himself “tried to find a style beyond the naturalistic which could be used for the classics. But he did not succeed.”¹²⁴ Maximilian Harden says in “The Genius of Max Reinhardt” that all of Brahm’s attempts at Shakespeare production were “miserable failures.”¹²⁵ Hortmann also provides an overview of some of the other experimental theatre artists producing Shakespeare in the first decades of the twentieth century. The English playwright’s broad interpretability “invited all kinds of approaches.”¹²⁶ He cites, for example, a Dusseldorf production of *Macbeth* in 1906 that “reached beyond realism towards symbolic signification,” but the artists could not fully solve certain problems and apparently no one – neither the participants nor the spectators – “were as yet sufficiently prepared for such a profound change.”¹²⁷ An impulse to reform Shakespearean production conventions was behind the *Stilbühnenbewegung*, a movement in favor of wide and shallow “relief staging.” Again, however, reception was lukewarm. Hortmann explains that performances in this style “were not as frequent as might be supposed” because actors, critics, and theater patrons were slow to alter their visual expectations.”¹²⁸ Hortmann’s analysis seconds the impression that Reinhardt was the most successful popularizer of unconventional Shakespearean performance.¹²⁹ In the wake of failed attempts to wrest Shakespeare from Naturalism’s hold, it “remained for Reinhardt”¹³⁰ to redeem Shakespeare among the new generations of German artists. Luckily, “his innovations were legion and his enthusiasm for the performing arts total.”¹³¹

The notion of totality is important to Reinhardt's directorial style because it was one of the primary weapons with which he combated the rigid and outdated naturalistic form – by consciously appealing to all the spectator's senses, not just his ears and his intellect. Reinhardt “ended the sway of this literary play ... [making] the theatre, which, for a time, had become the exclusive domain of the art of speaking, once more the common property of all the arts.”¹³² The vibrant and vivacious quality of his work occasioned applause from many contemporaries, including the Viennese critic Richard Specht, who identified Reinhardt as “the most powerful creator of the living theatre.”¹³³ Music, dance, and pantomime, as well as vibrant colors and dramatic lighting, many of which would have been part of the parade of delights at cabaret theaters like the Schall und Rauch, became cooperative storytelling mechanisms in full-length productions.¹³⁴ Max Reinhardt's relentless creativity and love of drama reanimated a theatre culture that “had become ossified in naturalistic conventions.”¹³⁵ Reactions to the 1905 *Midsummer* clearly indicate that it was a theatre experience of intense sensual stimulation. Bahr asserts that it successfully incorporated all the arts, and Gusti Adler's depiction makes it sound so enchanting that readers today might associate her imagery with something out of a *Harry Potter* novel. She speaks of “dance and music, woven into the dialogue of the play. A symphony of words, sounds and colour was thus obtained, fascinating a public who had lost almost every feeling for the unique aim of the theatre.”¹³⁶

Max Reinhardt helped subvert spectators' visual expectations by making unconventional casting choices. He opened his doors to actors of questionable talent, even gaining a reputation as a director with a magic touch that could turn mediocre artists into stars.¹³⁷ He also frequently hired young performers without much experience,

including children. His choice for Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Vilma Degischer, for example, was a seventeen-year-old dancer “who had never done any acting.”¹³⁸ This was unusual in the German theatre tradition; most companies had long operated according to a system that favored seniority. Reinhardt’s habit of casting younger actors created a certain amount of backlash among the artistic community because they perceived it as an affront to the “‘classical’ figures one associated with Shakespeare acting at that time.”¹³⁹ This practice was already underway by 1905; Tollini says that Reinhardt’s *Midsummer* “made the most of young actors and their energy,” quite “unlike the traditional ensemble of the National Theater to whom the production of the ‘Classics’ was usually entrusted. Just as notable as the youth of Reinhardt’s ensemble was its size. Reinhardt relied on a humongous cast of peripheral performers “busy with a life of their own” to create the appropriate mood.¹⁴⁰

Midsummer was visually surprising in more than just the composition of its cast. The whole thing *looked* different from those that had preceded it in Germany. Part of that had to do with characterization. Gertrude Eysoldt’s 1905 incarnation of Puck, for instance, is described by Hermann Bahr as having “replaced the conventional balletic movements with a demonic Natural-force, bristly, unkempt, hairy, stuck in an animality.”¹⁴¹ The dancing “first fairy” of *Midsummer* also signifies a departure from the production norms established before Reinhardt’s time; for her, the tradition of classical ballet was replaced with movements reminiscent of Isadora Duncan.¹⁴²

Another reason why Reinhardt’s productions looked different from those at other theaters was their broad range of scenic designs. When a play necessitated brightness and color, Reinhardt turned to the contemporary decorative style of Berlin.¹⁴³ When

Shakespearean comedies demanded accentuated movement, “he used curved bridges, gangways, passengrs, stairs ... utilizing all three dimensions of the space at his disposal,” and he proved equally skilled in his visual conception of tragedies like *Julius Caesar*:

No one who has seen his production of *Julius Caesar* at the Grosses Schauspielhaus will ever forget the thirty or forty steps in the centre of the arena, leading up to Caesar’s throne. When stabbed from behind, the great Julius tumbles down step to step, being stabbed again and again by the conspirators against whom he is reeling on both sides of the steps. The ‘vertical dimension’ has never been used to greater advantage, and yet Reinhardt, who never theorizes, did not elaborate his steps into a *Weltanschauung* [“worldview”], as one of his followers did, who is using steps on every possible and impossible occasion, reducing them to mystical abstraction and leading them thus *ad absurdum*.¹⁴⁴

The visual world and spatial relationships of Reinhardt’s 1905 *Midsummer* are two of the production’s most-talked-about-qualities. Contemporary accounts of its imagery are, across the board, vivid, fanciful, elaborate, and inflected with a tone of wonder and astonishment.

Kommer’s final point in the excerpt above warrants further comment. Some theatre critics of the period, such as Max Epstein, only “grudgingly” gave Max Reinhardt credit for his innovative stage devices because they would have preferred to dismiss them as gimmicks of spectacle. Many of Reinhardt’s champions have therefore wholeheartedly expressed the conviction that in a Reinhardt production, the representation was always

fitted to the story, and stage devices were “never permitted to deteriorate into tricks and stunts.”¹⁴⁵ In his essay “On the Living Theatre,” Reinhardt himself argued for a conservative approach to the use of “stage properties and machinery”; he knew well that if unnecessarily imposed on a play, they would be detrimental to the work overall.¹⁴⁶

The truly revolutionary stage devices associated with Reinhardt’s name include the *Drehbühne*, “revolving stage,” the *Rund Horizont*, “round horizon,” and the *Oberlicht*, “over light,” lighting system.¹⁴⁷ It must be acknowledged that Reinhardt himself was not the absolute first artist to develop or use such equipment. The *Drehbühne* had appeared nine years earlier in Munich, a product of the Munich-based theatre technician Karl Lautenschläger and Ernst Possart,¹⁴⁸ for performances of Mozart’s operas at the Residenz Theater.¹⁴⁹ Reinhardt, however, put them to more famously admirable use. Furthermore, Reinhardt did not have access to all of these options at all of his theaters; the different conditions and resources afforded him a variety of paradigms in which to make art. He had access to a *Drehbühne* at the Neues Theater, though, and one of the most important services it performed for him was solving the “problem”¹⁵⁰ of Shakespeare. Hortmann seconds that assessment; he says that before the revolving stage played host to the *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1905, it had never enjoyed “such a direct and fitting dramaturgic function . . . [As if] to confirm Oberon’s rule of magic, the wood itself began to dance.”¹⁵¹

Apart from the actors and the set, the other major component of Reinhardt’s stage imagery was, of course, light. In 1905, the lighting for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* astounded audiences by providing “the impression of a different world.”¹⁵² Tollini goes so far as to say that the director’s experiments with light were what finalized his

dissatisfaction with the “simple photographic naturalism”¹⁵³ that had predominated on German stages.

Reinhardt was unquestionably a master of delighting his patrons’ eyes, but the imperative of a total theatrical composition demanded he attend to their ears, too. Music and sound were thus crucial parts of Reinhardt’s personal aesthetic. His use of music varied depending on the demands of each specific project. Musicians had no fixed position from one play to the next; they performed their work in different parts of the theater according to the music’s role in the show. “Even where music remains in the background,” Einar Nilson explains, “it has important functions to fulfill in Reinhardt’s productions.”¹⁵⁴ Nilson, a Swedish composer who collaborated with Reinhardt for many years, says that productions of modern works typically allowed the musicians to remain totally visible to the audience, while Shakespearean plays were more likely to be disguised in costumes, hidden in the pit, or concealed behind set pieces, as in *Much Ado About Nothing*, or at least in costumes that made them consistent with the rest of the imagery.¹⁵⁵ In *The Merchant of Venice*, song and dance accentuated the contrast between jubilant Venetian society and the titular character’s more somber temperament.¹⁵⁶ Hugo von Hofmannsthal considered the music of 1905’s *Midsummer* to have exemplified the artful mastery of the director, the source of dramatic cohesion in the production, and the chief instrument by which to reveal “a complete new world.”¹⁵⁷

Even more fascinating than Reinhardt’s use of music was his unique attention to the capacity of other sounds to create his desired environment. That facility was part of what made him such an exceptional director, as “no one before him had any idea of the significance of different sounds as aids to characteristic atmosphere on the stage.”¹⁵⁸ He

masterfully orchestrated the aural scores of his productions. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the city's carnival atmosphere was just as evident in the "suppressed shouts of joy which merge into Gratian's merry catch" as in the songs and "happy violins."¹⁵⁹

As many visual artists know, negative space is equally important to a composition as all its other elements, and Reinhardt knew that the same principle applied to sound. In addition to music and vocal effects, he could create "breathtaking effects out of mere pauses."¹⁶⁰ Hortmann describes the particularly potent effect of a pause following Shylock's statement "I have an oath in heaven," "a deathly pause of disbelief [before] a babble of outraged voices."¹⁶¹ The meticulous attention that Reinhardt paid to the aural composition of his productions, including dialogue, music, orchestrated crowd responses, exclamations, and silences, was one of the things that made him an exceptional director and a master of atmosphere.

The fact that Shakespeare was absolutely central to Max Reinhardt's career has been recognized by his own contemporaries as well as successive generations of artists and scholars. In a repertoire "more widespread than any other theatre artist's work to this day,"¹⁶² Shakespearean titles continually featured in Reinhardt's seasons, sometimes repeatedly. Hugo von Hofmannsthal surmises that Reinhardt's devotion to Shakespeare was so great that

If by chance he had been imprisoned during [WWI] and, like so many artists, had been compelled to spend years in a prison camp in Siberia, for example, I have no doubt that he would not only have organized excellent theatrical productions there, but, what is more, would have found in the very conditions and limitations of the place, in such a strange and unhappy

situation, unexpected spurs to his imagination. It is not unlikely that on the edge of Manchuria or on the banks of the Amur, looking out over military barracks and with his actors drawn from the captured Europeans, Siberians and Chinese, he would have presented an unforgettable performance of “King Lear.”¹⁶³

Hofmannsthal’s comments here are very important. They represent an intersection between the two themes of the Reinhardt-Shakespeare partnership and Reinhardt’s irrepressible creativity. In an artistic atmosphere rife with experimentation, we must recognize that Shakespeare remained one of the favorite sites for those experiments’ application. There is no better illustration of this truth than the career of Max Reinhardt.

The rise to power of the National Socialist Workers’ Party occasioned a crucial addition to the way Shakespeare functioned for Germans. Reinhardt’s theatrical experimentations with Shakespeare’s works had used them as a site; his productions were all about illuminating and communicating the story. A survey of Shakespearean performance in the Third Reich demonstrates an ingenious new way to appropriate Shakespeare: as a lens for the dissemination of ideological propaganda.

One the biggest challenges to understanding Nazi Germany is reconciling its leaders’ unquantifiable savagery with their own conception of themselves as stewards of high culture and civilized society. It helps to remember that the original development of German nationalism did in fact rely on pride in cultural and artistic achievements, so it makes sense that Nazis would seek to legitimize their power by putting on airs of great refinement and sophistication. By that time theatre-going had long been an expected part of life for educated Germans. The stage was therefore ripe for reclamation as a moral

platform. Adolf Hitler himself asserted that German theatre was “to be cleansed of the manifestations of a decaying world and placed in the service of a moral political-cultural concept,” and a very specific one at that. Nazi administrators pointedly employed culture “in the service of dominant ideology.”¹⁶⁴ Building on the tradition of the The Combat League for German Culture, who since the Weimar Republic¹⁶⁵ had actively worked to promote Nazi ideology through the arts,¹⁶⁶ in 1933

the Nazi government created the Reich Chamber of Culture, which rapidly became the compulsory occupational organization for Germans working in the artistic and cultural fields. The chamber was actually an umbrella organization of seven “subchambers” set up for the fields of music, theater, the visual arts, literature, cinema, radio, and the press. These agencies operated under the supervision of Josef Goebbels, the Reich minister for propaganda and public enlightenment as well.¹⁶⁷

One of the primary strategies by which Nazi administrators put their plan into action was by reviving classical works and reanimating them with a Nazi spirit.¹⁶⁸ The whole operation was a manipulative way to construct an image of Nazi leaders as high-class men of good taste, and therefore likely to be credible and competent leaders of a nation. Hostetter calls it a “façade of gentility,” one that the Nazi government often publicized and sometimes even toured in order to “improve their international, humanitarian reputation.”¹⁶⁹

To put their cultural mission into effect, the administration combined two distinctly German traditions to produce theatre that supported their own particular morality in a context that had almost guaranteed appeal. Those traditions were the

Schiller-Tieck model of drama as an agent of moral pedagogy and the well-established German love of Shakespeare. Anselm Heinrich phrases this idea well in his essay about Nazi claims on Shakespeare. “As in so many other artistic spheres,” he says, “the Nazis cleverly used an already existing discourse, intensified and radicalized it, and incorporated it into their cultural propaganda.”¹⁷⁰ The use of a familiar paradigm to popularize an alien style or ideology is a practice further explored in the next chapter. The Nazis’ use of this technique is one of the first examples in which Shakespeare functions as the familiar lens through which to communicate something strange.

Theatre seasons in Germany of the 1930s were positively riddled with Shakespearean productions. Gerwin Strobl has observed that in 1936 there was more Shakespeare produced in Germany than “in the rest of the world put together,” and the next year even the Hitler Youth organization got a Shakespeare festival.¹⁷¹ Strobl also noted in his book *The Swastika and the Stage* that the cycle of history plays produced for the young members’ benefit was the first of its kind.¹⁷²

Although there was some ultra-conservative dissension about the place of a British playwright in the German canon, many prominent German figures professed great love and respect for Shakespeare. Rainer Schlösser was one of them. Schlösser worked for as the *Reichsdramaturg* in Goebbels’s ministry. In 1938, as war loomed just around the proverbial corner, he produced a list of foreign artists whose works were prohibited on the German stage. The list named several British men, but Shakespeare “naturally” escaped banishment because he qualified as German.¹⁷³ Goebbels too was an avid Shakespeare fan, calling him a genius and placing him above all other poets in the world.¹⁷⁴ Nazi leaders put the widespread love of Shakespeare to good use by arguing

that there was a special chemistry between the playwright's genius and their contemporary historical moment, that it was in fact "never closer to the German people than in the present time,"¹⁷⁵ as though the Third Reich signified the national fulfillment of the perceived inherent German spirit within Shakespeare's works.

Scholars in the Third Reich based their argument for Shakespeare's Germanness on both physical and intellectual evidence. So-called scientific experts who analyzed Shakespeare's portrait were able to discern "solidly Nordic characteristics."¹⁷⁶ Within that supposedly Germanic frame there was also assumed to be a Germanic spirit, and specifically an Aryan disposition. Critics insisted political readings of Shakespeare's plays exposed an underlying philosophy well aligned with that of the National Socialists, identifying the "*Führerprinzip*, one of the key premises of National Socialist politics, as integral to Renaissance drama," especially in works like *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Henry V*, plays that earned reputations as "schools of patriotism."¹⁷⁷

It might strike the reader as odd that the events of foreign nations' histories could be effectively appropriated for the use of German patriotism in such a politically volatile climate, but they were actually far more effective than the original plays of artists who subscribed to Nazi ideology. "Nationalist ... or outright Nazi plays could not be relied upon to attract a regular paying audience."¹⁷⁸ They often received harshly negative reviews, and one was cancelled after only five performances.¹⁷⁹ Facing what was almost a vacuum of playable works, German theatre producers turned to outside assistance. Two-thirds of the scripts performed at the Staatstheater were classical plays by "long deceased playwrights who had little in common with the Nazi government,"¹⁸⁰ especially the cultural favorite, Shakespeare.

So how was National Socialist philosophy borne out in Shakespeare production? Some theaters fell directly under Nazi leaders' administration, like Herman Göring's Staatstheater, but others attempted to resist political pressure on their stage. Heinz Hilpert, one of the managers of the Deutsches Theater after Reinhardt's departure from Germany, thought that the best course of action at the beginning of his tenure was to produce an unoffensive comedy. In 1934 he put up *As You Like It*, yet German reviewers sympathetic to Nazi ideology still managed to frame the production in *völkisch* terms, as a celebration of racial purity¹⁸¹ and as exemplary of German qualities.¹⁸²

Other than artistic resistance, another challenge that the Nazis faced in their appropriation of Shakespeare was the problematic issue of race that emerged in two well-loved titles, *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. In order to bring them more into line with National Socialist ideology, some tweaking was necessary.

Othello had a very respectable production history in Germany before the ascent of National Socialism. In Weimar Germany there was a tradition of "forcefully exuberant African Othellos."¹⁸³ When bigotry was institutionalized, this tradition was no longer a valid option. Conservatives asserted that sympathy for *Othello* was part of the "Negro Craze," a cultural phenomenon that in 1930 compelled Wilhelm Frick, interior minister of Thuringia, to proclaim a policy "*wider die Negerkultur – fu"r deutsche Volkstum*"¹⁸⁴ ("against nigger culture – for German folklore"¹⁸⁵). One solution involved shifting focus from the racial dimension to the tragic psychological destruction of *Othello*, "paragon of manly and martial virtues," by jealousy.¹⁸⁶ And the innovative way that theatre artists distracted audiences from the miscegenation (which, according to the Nuremberg Laws, would have constituted a criminal offense), was the transformation of *Othello*'s ethnicity.

Hitherto assumed to be a man of sub-Saharan Africa, the Nazi Othello became “a Berber, a member of a safely distant and romanticised warrior race.”¹⁸⁷ Critics’ most common compliments for the performance of this character became “noble” and “brown.” By the end of the war, “Othello had finally been transformed into a tinted (or, perhaps, bronzed) Prussian officer.”¹⁸⁸

The Merchant of Venice also had a markedly different production style in Weimar Germany than it did during the Third Reich. Before the Nazis came to power, actors playing Shylock generally adopted a much more compassionate, humanistic tone. In fact, from the Enlightenment through the early twentieth century, there was a tradition of playing Shylock as a tragic figure who deserved audience sympathy.¹⁸⁹ Andrew Bonnell has described those before 1933 as “liberalistic.”¹⁹⁰ There was an extant tradition of playing Shylock as either a tragic figure, “a victim of Christian persecution,” or as a “fierce ... avenger of historic wrongs.”¹⁹¹ But as conservative ideology spread, plays that were at all sympathetic toward the Jews, such as Lessing’s *Nathan der Weise*, were banned. This was partly based on new literary criticism like that of Wolfgang Keller, who maintained that “Shakespeare has no sympathy for Shylock.”¹⁹² As evidence Keller submits that all the noble characters in *The Merchant of Venice* mock and deride Shylock, that the only person with anything flattering to say about Shylock (or Jews in general) is the money-lender himself.¹⁹³

Stage depictions of Shylock began to transform concurrently, developing into a new dual tradition. After 1933 depictions of Shylock were either broadly comic or completely villainous. Bonnell describes several examples of *Merchant* productions that opted for a the caricaturistic depiction of Shylock rather than a dangerously sinister one.

These include productions in Hannover in 1933 starring Hans Ebert, in Aachen starring Otto Kircher, one at the Landestheater Saarpfalz in Kaiserslauten, and “fourteen productions of the same work in a similar style”¹⁹⁴ at the Bremen Staatstheater. Erwin Kleist’s 1939 performance in Erfurt, however, “exposed” Shylock as heartless, unprincipled, and obsessed with blind hatred, expressing “*das verzehrende Wüten unheimlicher Triebe und Leidenschaften*,”¹⁹⁵ (“consuming fury, ravage sinister appetite, and passions”)¹⁹⁶ – a depiction quite removed from those “liberalistic” versions from Weimar Germany.

As with *Othello*, there were even more interesting adaptations than a simple change of how the character was acted. In the Gottingen town theatre, director Rudolf Sellner added a “claque planted in the audience to engage anti-Semitic heckling of Shylock.”¹⁹⁷ Another major change that Nazis like Rainer Schlösser imposed on *The Merchant of Venice* was the emancipation of Jessica from her father. “As someone who knew his Shakespeare,” Strobl mentions in a footnote to *The Swastika and the Stage*, “the Reichsdramaturg remembered the lines by Launcelot that might conceivably be taken to imply that Jessica was not actually Shylock’s child.”¹⁹⁸

Some of Shakespeare’s works – Strobl lists *Macbeth* and *Richard III* – were popular among the Nazis and their ilk without any call for adaptation. Catherine Alexander points out *Coriolanus* as very popular among the Nazis because of the eponymous Roman’s strength as a leader.¹⁹⁹ But the title that may qualify as requiring the least amount of adaptation in Nazi performance was the tragedy of *Hamlet*. According to Ernst L. Stahl, *Hamlet* had the capacity to perfectly illustrate Shakespeare’s “Nordic-disposition.”²⁰⁰ In her book *The Berlin State Theater Under the Nazi Regime*, Elisabeth

Schulz Hostetter has composed an excellent semiotic analysis of that venue's treatment of Hamlet and the various means by which directors used it to advance the National Socialist agenda.

Hamlet's Scandinavian heritage positioned him closer to Germany than some of Shakespeare's other settings (like Italy), but what enhanced his perceived German character was his matriculation in Wittenberg. The set also clearly reflected a German sensibility; Hostetter says that its "monumentality ... referred directly to the mammoth scope of typical Nazi architecture."²⁰¹

The most notable departure that Nazi-era directors made in their treatments of *Hamlet* had to do with the prince himself. To best represent the ideal Aryan, Hamlet's characterization necessarily shifted from a tradition of intellectual, moody, quasi-romantic introspection to one of greater initiative and even aggression.²⁰² Hostetter argues that the 1936 version, directed by Lothar Müthel, achieved just such an effect. Müthel "understood that the formerly 'melancholy Dane' had to be transformed into a more accepted 'Führer figure'. His conversion resulted in a heroic, activated interpretation in which Hamlet became a young man obsessed with civic duty."²⁰³ The most important part of that characterization is the element of civic duty. Müthel worked toward a representation of the National Socialist emphasis on the community as opposed to the individual. More importantly, however, Müthel amplified the presence of Claudius and of the people of Denmark so that the predominant theme was the fate of the nation, not the individual.²⁰⁴

In scholarship as well as in production style, the Nazi appropriation of William Shakespeare's plays represents a noteworthy development in the function of Shakespeare

for the German-speaking world. It is of course impossible to determine the degree of success that their ideologically loaded productions achieved in the spectators' minds, but the fact remains that people were using Shakespeare differently than they had before. Since the nineteenth century, generations of scholars and artists had grown up and grown old in an atmosphere of devout reverence to the English playwright. That caused some to frown on experimentation and others such as Reinhardt to use experimentation as a way to celebrate the plays, but what both those traditions shared was a sense of service to the play and the playwright. The script was a site, a landscape, that could be brought to life in a number of different ways. When Shakespeare became Nazi propaganda, however, it took on a new role: a lens of perception through which National Socialist ideology could acquire a patina of legitimacy.

The Strange and the Familiar: Peter Brook's Brechtian Shakespeares at the R.S.C.

A Midsummer Night's Dream has a long, proud production history in England. Since the nineteenth century it has appeared in major stagings all over London as well as several in Stratford-upon-Avon, with big-name directors like Frank Benson, Max Beerbohm Tree, Harley Granville-Barker, and Tyrone Guthrie. Most of these, with the exception of Granville-Barker's 1914 bare-stage production at the Savoy, shared a similar aesthetic. R.A. Foakes notes in his introduction to the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that as late as 1949, the Michael Benthall production at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford included costumes that "strikingly resemble[d] those of the productions of 1856 and 1938,"²⁰⁵ especially the gauzy, flowery look of Titania and her fairy court. There was even a standard musical score, composed by Mendelssohn in 1826 and 1843 and present in several of the English productions.²⁰⁶ Later versions of *Midsummer* directed by George Devine (1954), Peter Hall (1959, 1962), and Michael Langham (1960) all attempted to liberate the text from the Romantic foliage in which it was planted, but according to Foakes, none of these mid-century experiments with *Midsummer* garnered much praise from reviewers. Theatre artists sought a new way to approach the text that would continue to resonate with their audiences.

Enter Peter Brook. Considering the play's history, his 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Royal Shakespeare Company was especially welcome. "From its first night, when the audience rose to its feet to applaud at the interval, this production dazzled and delighted audiences by its freshness and inventiveness, and continued to do so on tours around the world for several years."²⁰⁷ The

set was a brightly-lit white box, the trees of the Athenian wood were metal spirals, Titania slept upright on an enormous red plume, and the fairies tumbled about on trapezes. Charles Marowitz rightly recognized that the show owed much of its success to its relative strangeness; he explains that “The shock of dislocating the play is so great, the effect of seeing it re-assembled in a bright, hard context free of traditional associations so refreshing that we are hypnotized by the very ‘otherness’ of the creation.”²⁰⁸ Dazzling imagery can always threaten to distract viewers from the text, but the majority of writers who have commented on this performance say that was not the case. Ron Rosenbaum, for instance, says in *The Shakespeare Wars* that the real magic of Brook’s *Midsummer* lay underneath its outward trappings.²⁰⁹ The story itself, the text, held a place of primacy for Brook and his cast, and Brook’s directorial choices were meant to illuminate the text rather than impose a separate vision onto it. John Barber’s review of the production immediately recognized it as one that would “surely make theatre history,” largely for Brook’s having found “found new ways of giving form to its poetry and power.”

Furthermore, Brook’s *Midsummer* was vital to the mainstreaming of a Brechtian aesthetic in English theatre; it represents a galvanizing intersection between elements both strange and familiar to the British theatre community, wherein the director rendered the former more palatable and the latter more exciting. This production precipitated an explosion of Brecht production at the RSC. Between November 1975 and January 1986, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced nine of his works, and some of them had even gone on tour, performing on multiple English stages. During that time Brecht was the RSC’s second-most produced playwright, following only Shakespeare himself. Brecht was becoming a household name in English-speaking theatre.

The place of authority that Brecht's name and works came to occupy can make it easy to forget, however, that his assimilation into the English mainstream was a culmination of a longstanding process. The early history of Brecht production in England is marked by difficulty, misunderstanding, and resistance. In 1934 he had already acquired notoriety in Germany for his style as a playwright and director. He visited London that year and made an effort to expand his influence beyond Germany, pitching his shows to London theatre companies who expressed little interest in putting them on. Margaret Eddershaw points out that the only offer he received was for *The Threepenny Opera* to be published in English.²¹⁰ *Threepenny Novel* did make it onto English shelves, appearing as *Penny for the Poor* in 1937.²¹¹

The problem was not that Brecht was entirely unknown in England. There had in fact been multiple opportunities for English audiences to experience one or another of Brecht's works. Eddershaw's *Performing Brecht* provides an excellent survey of Brecht's presence in England from the 1930s to the 1990s. She cites BBC broadcasts in 1930 and 1933 of *The Lindbergh Flight* and *The Lesson*, operas for which Brecht had written the libretti, as evidence that knowledge about Brecht was indeed filtering into English media. Additionally, London's Savoy Theatre produced his only ballet, *Anna Anna* (also known as *The Seven Deadly Sins*), in 1933, but its reception was "marked by a lack of comprehension and rejection."²¹²

Nor was the problem that England lacked an avant-garde theatre scene. A review of 1930s British theatre activity suggests an atmosphere rather conducive to the production of works on the cutting edge of theatrical form and/or political engagement. Claire Warden's recent book *British Avant-Garde Theatre* makes it clear that the

longstanding conception of Britain as bereft of experimental theatre is simply fallacious. Eddershaw argues that the “cultural renewal” taking place in Russia inspired the British government to found the Council for Proletarian Art in 1924. Two years later this organization’s name changed to the Workers’ Theatre Movement, which she explains became a sort of umbrella organization for socialist theatre groups. It is true, though, that those interested in the avant-garde were part of a self-selecting elite, artistically- and intellectually-minded people who actively sought new forms in the arts. Some members of that demographic were already avid fans of Bertolt Brecht. These were provincial, politically-conscious theatre companies, like Joan Littlewood’s and Ewan MacColl’s Theatre of Action, whose leaders even named Brecht as one of “the chief sources of our political attitude and theatre style.”²¹³ In 1935 Theatre of Action produced a selection of scenes from *Mr. Puntila and His Servant Matti* as well as *Roundheads and Peakheads*. Over the next few years there were more translations of Brecht’s plays available in England, as well as more productions by Theatre of Action, London Choral Union, and London Unity, all of which identified as socialist groups.²¹⁴

Critical response to these early productions of Brecht in England was mixed, but unfortunately the development of a practical familiarity with Brecht abruptly halted when war consumed the European continent. Eddershaw provides numerous examples of favorable reviews of Brecht plays in the 1930s, such as John Fernald’s 1938 production of *Senora Carrar’s Rifles* that was praised for its storytelling and its political commentary. Perhaps if it had not been for the war, British exposure to Bertolt Brecht’s plays and production methods would have expanded, leading to a smooth and gradual assimilation of Brecht’s aesthetic. As Pat DiGeorge explains, “the government closed the

theatres for fear that they would be hit by the bombings.”²¹⁵ DiGeorge goes on to describe the gradual re-opening of the theatres and their function as an important escape for weary citizens. The theatrical style that came to dominate English theatre in the 1940s included “light comedies, crime thrillers, and imported American musicals,” and even newly-founded touring companies funded by the Arts Council offered little that was new and exciting.²¹⁶

Production of Brecht titles picked up again in the 1950s, perhaps encouraged by the 1956 visit from the Berliner Ensemble, which Dominic Shellard describes as triumphant.²¹⁷ As in the 1930s, these productions were mostly among radical, young, provincial companies like The Stretford Civic Theatre, Progress Theatre, Theatre Workshop, and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (in London, so an exception to the trend of provinciality). The documentation that exists regarding these events is generally negative. As early as 1966, Martin Esslin recognized that the previous decade of English theatre was overwhelmed with anti-Brecht sentiment, perpetuated by “daily and weekly theatre reviewers, who not only dismissed a whole series of productions of Brecht’s plays in English with contempt (which most of them fully deserved), but consistently denounced Brecht himself as a fraud and the inflated idol of faddists and perverse intellectuals.”²¹⁸ Eddershaw describes Theatre Workshop’s *Mother Courage* as “a sad and unfitting conclusion” to that company’s contribution to the Brechtian tradition in England. There were significant challenges in trying to realize Brecht’s vision on English stages. The language, the acting style, and the political objectives of Bertolt Brecht in early-twentieth-century Germany were alien to many mid-twentieth-century English theatre artists and patrons. As Dan Rebellato concludes in *1956 and All That: The*

Making of Modern British Drama, there persisted a frustrating incompatibility between Brecht and an English audience.²¹⁹

Part of the friction between Brecht and English audiences derived from political antipathy, exacerbated by misunderstanding. Shellard sees Martin Esslin and John Willett as contributors to the unreceptive atmosphere. Specifically, Shellard refers to Esslin's assertion in *Brecht: a Choice of Evils* (1959) that Brecht's works succeeded "in spite of the marxism [*sic*] and theory" and John Willett's translation of *Verfremdung* as "alienation," both of them "giving succor to those who depicted the playwright as a threatening political entity. Indeed, die [*sic*] cold war continually shaped the reception of Brecht, allowing some to depict Epic Theatre as fixed and propagandistic, instead of fluid and inviting discussion."²²⁰ Knowing that Brecht's political concerns could potentially discourage their target demographic, some artists chose to downplay them – a well-intended effort to appeal to an audience quite hostile toward Marxism and Communism. Sam Wanamaker recalls an instance of that enmity: "The cry 'Communist' or 'Marxist' or 'Left-wing' (as I heard a distinguished critic of a distinguished newspaper hiss in an angry tone before the curtain went up on the first night of *The Threepenny Opera*) is raised before they've had a chance to judge what he does have to say."²²¹ Even Brecht himself acknowledged the difficulty of political theatre, since "not all that many people are willing to pay for the pleasure of getting indignant."²²²

In addition to political tension, the language of Brecht's plays presented its own challenge. Elsom describes Brecht's German as idiosyncratic, a newly-developed, proletarian amalgam of four different German dialects. Its unique character made it particularly difficult to convert into English: "the normal problems of translation were

unnaturally exaggerated. Deliberately stilted Brechtianisms sounded merely quaint in English.” Without the native power of Brecht’s “verbal style,” which “helped actors to achieve the estrangement effect without falling into a dull, documentary flatness,” the English “had to work towards ‘estrangement’ by other means, often contorted and unnecessary ones.”²²³

Another unsuccessful way of approaching Brecht’s plays in England was overzealous fidelity, attempting to exactly recreate the work of the Berliner Ensemble, thereby losing the sense of immediate purpose and validity of the work in its new, English context. William Gaskill said of his own work as the director of the RSC’s 1962 *Caucasian Chalk Circle* that he misunderstood Brecht’s instructions. George Devine’s production of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, starring Peggy Ashcroft, has been characterized by Michael Billington as “too slavishly Brechtian, following the rule-book rather than the natural impulses of the English style.”²²⁴ *The Good Woman of Setzuan* received extremely harsh reviews that admonished every part of the production from the director to the cast to the playwright. Harold Hobson compared Brecht’s storytelling technique to that of an infant’s school book, while the critic from the *Evening Argus* was extremely put off by the necessity in Brecht for “direct communion with the audience.”²²⁵ In *British Theatre Since the War*, Dominic Shellard attributes *Good Woman*’s critical failure in part to an incomplete understanding of the play, exemplified in Devine’s mistranslation of the German word *Mensch* as “woman” when it actually means “person.”

Year	Production Details
1950	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> at the Stretford Civic Theatre, Manchester.
1953	<i>The Good Woman of Setzuan</i> at the Progress Theatre, Reading.
1954	<i>Mother Courage</i> (staged reading) at the Institute for Contemporary Arts.

1956	<i>Mother Courage</i> at the Theatre Workshop. Dir. Joan Littlewood.
1956	<i>The Threepenny Opera</i> with the English Stage Company. Dir. Sam Wanamaker.
1956	<i>The Good Woman of Setzuan</i> with the English Stage Company the Royal Court Theatre. Dir. George Devine.
1962	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> at the Royal Shakespeare Company. Dir. William Gaskill.
1962	<i>The Exception and the Rule</i> at the Conference Hall of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Dir. Michel Saint-Denis. One-night studio production following the last four scenes of Marlowe's <i>Doctor Faustus</i> .
1963	<i>The Lower-Middle Class Wedding Party</i> at the Conference Hall of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. "Rehearsed" by Sandy Black, transl. Michael Kustow. One night event, part of a series of pieces under the general title "Royal Shakespeare Studio."
1965	<i>Puntila and his Servant Matti</i> at the Aldwych Theare, London. Dir. Michel St. Denis.

Brecht in England, 1950-1965

Whatever the specific issues were in each individual production, it is clear from an historical perspective that English theatre artists struggled to incorporate the works of Bertolt Brecht into their milieu. The 1956 and 1965 visits to London by the Berliner Ensemble only made the perceived English mishandling of Brecht's works more obvious by comparison. Praise for the Berliner Ensemble from Harold Hobson, who is not remembered as a lover of Brecht, is therefore even more striking. He wrote, "The poverty of British productions of Brecht, heavy, sententious and void of life, was exposed by the Berliner Ensemble [who] had discovered a truth hidden from their British rivals, namely that Brecht and entertainment are synonymous."²²⁶

English theatre's relationship with Brecht followed a relatively similar pattern in the 1950s as in the 1930s; however, an important difference was the appearance of Kenneth Tynan. In 1955, while working as a theatre critic for *The Observer*, Tynan saw his first performance by the Berliner Ensemble at a festival in Paris. From then on, he was a rapacious consumer of Brecht's works, and was therefore perhaps even more critical when he saw Brecht's plays produced in England. Tynan was particularly

displeased with Joan Littlewood's portrayal of *Mother Courage* in the 1956 Theatre Workshop production. In his review titled "Dimmed Debut," he described her as "dismally unequal to the strain," "a lifeless mumble, looking both over-parted and under-rehearsed."²²⁷ Of course, Tynan's harsh criticism derived from a profound respect for Bertolt Brecht; the English critic was perhaps the most outspoken post-war advocate for the German playwright's presence in English theatre. Dan Rebellato echoes Martin Esslin's observation that Tynan's promotion of Brecht is analogous to Shaw's earlier efforts on behalf of Ibsen, with "the same effect of bringing the playwright into common discourse."²²⁸ Tynan was also one of first to observe Brechtian qualities in productions of Shakespeare, such as the RSC productions of *Richard III* (1961) and *Cymbeline* (1962). Both were directed by William Gaskill, who joined the RSC at a time when Peter Hall was focused on "creating, for the first time with that company, a full-scale ensemble of the continental (German) kind."²²⁹ Eddershaw argues that both of those productions were notably Brechtian, and Tynan himself praised *Cymbeline* for that quality, attributing its success to the fact that Gaskill had "caught the Brechtian bug."²³⁰

Gaskill's work constitutes one of the earliest examples of a Brechtian aesthetic in Shakespeare production, but it was Peter Brook who popularized a Brechtian approach to Shakespeare as its own performance genre. Kenneth Tynan glowingly reviewed Brook's 1962 *King Lear* at the RSC, the action of which "unfolded on a bare, Brechtian stage, under full white lights throughout, and revolved round a stubbornly ambiguous performance by Paul Scofield."²³¹ Nenad Jovanovic convincingly argues in his essay "Brook, Lear, and the Modified *Verfremdung*" that Bertolt Brecht deserves greater credit as an inspirational source for the stage and film productions of *King Lear* that Brook

directed. This is a clear challenge to the conventional assumption (championed by J.L. Styan and “parroted,” according to Jovanovic, by subsequent scholars) that Jan Kott’s book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* was Brook’s dominant philosophical resource. Jovanovic explains that it is common to see the Brechtian contributions relegated to the realm of gimmickry, to encounter claims that they exist in subordination to Kott’s and Beckett’s combined influence. He promises to revise the scholarly understanding of Brecht’s influence on these *Lears* by showing that the Brechtian elements, “labeled by journalists and academics as mere gimmicks, in fact are agents of meaning in their own right.”²³² Jovanovic identifies several sites of *Verfremdung* in Brook’s staged *Lear*, including elements of design, characterization, and even in the cutting of the script. The central argument is that these Brook’s use of distancing devices “did not create an air of conscious theatricality for [their] own sake,” but rather that they supported and communicated the most prominent themes within the text itself.²³³ Such themes include the world’s “constant state of decomposition,” the absence of divine authority, the need to supplement that absence with individual human accountability, the material (class-based) constrictions on human activity, and the implications of sight and blindness. Jovanovic’s connections between alienation devices and the play’s thematic content are clear. He describes with beautiful detail the way Brook’s aesthetic, characterized by a sparseness of props, a set of “simple and rough” furniture and “geometrical sheets of rusty metal dangling from the flies,” contributed to the rhetorical efficacy of the text.²³⁴ Other directorial choices in moments such as the opening court sequence, when Lear makes an unexpected entrance; the storm scene, in which the depiction of the storm is

both recognizable and yet abstract; and the battle between Edgar and Edmund also figure into Jovanovic's discussion as effective illustrations of the play's argument.

But it was Brook's 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that "changed the lives of an entire generation of Shakespearean players and directors" and "changed the way Shakespeare has been placed ever since."²³⁵ The opening chapter of *The Shakespeare Wars* by Ron Rosenbaum narrates the author's experience of that show: "I felt 'transported' in the literal sense of being physically as well as metaphysically lifted from the muddy vesture of the earth to some higher realm."²³⁶ Rosenbaum is not the only person who perceived something exceptional happening with that performance. Nicholas Hynter related to Rosenbaum over lunch that he too left Brook's *Midsummer* feeling somehow changed.²³⁷

Glenn Loney posits that one reason for the astonishing power of Brook's *Midsummer* was the contrast between what audiences expected and what they actually encountered. Quoting Clive Barnes, Loney explains how this particular play was unique in the degree to which it had been "fouly encrusted over with nineteenth-century romanticism."²³⁸ By 1970 British and continental audiences had witnessed dozens of this text's incarnations, and with only a few exceptions they conformed to a shared idea of what Athens and its adjacent forest look like: a lush, verdant, Romantically sylvan world. The most famous example is the 1935 film version of *Midsummer* directed by Max Reinhardt, who staged the play several times in live theatres before Warner Bros. Studios invited him to make it for the cinema. Even some modern productions revert to that old imagery; within schools and even universities, for instance, it is not unusual to see fairies wearing little more than leaves, glitter, and plastic wings. Such an approach does have its

own value, and some theatregoers prefer that version of the play's world, but emphasizing the visual reality of the narrative setting has a doubly disadvantageous effect. First, it invites the willing suspension of disbelief that allows a spectator to temporarily forget that he is in a theatre watching actors at work. Second, it relieves those actors of some of their narrative responsibilities. If the world of the play exists in complete material detail on stage, then the performer need not work as hard to construct it within his and the spectators' imaginations; he can respond to stimuli without having to contribute as much. Peter Fiddick's review of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* points out that Brook must have known well in advance that the dominant image in most audience members' minds would have been "a thing of bosky dells and gossamer wings, if not actually of Mendelssohn. What he seems driven to work on is not merely his own concept of Shakespeare's most lollipop text – the concept that is of a man in the vanguard of modern European theatre – but his audience's concept."²³⁹

In Brook's effort to resuscitate the play, he called upon some distinctly Brechtian production methods. The most obvious connection between Brook's *Midsummer* and the Brechtian paradigm is its appearance, which departed from tradition in a way that inspired commentary from almost everyone who observed it. The costumes, for example, represented a strikingly new vision of the characters. Brook's cast donned brightly colored, loosely flowing garments quite removed from the style that audiences were used to seeing in Shakespeare. The inspiration for this directorial choice may have been the Chinese opera, to which Bertolt Brecht also owed a great stylistic debt. In "Some Stars from the East," Tynan's review of the Berliner Ensemble performance of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* at the Paris Drama Festival in 1955, the critic draws several comparisons

between the German director's work and the Chinese opera's aesthetic. Among the similarities he lists: the juxtaposition of drama, ballet, and opera ("no longer separate arts") and "the mixture of mime, speech, and song in the service of the ... narrative."²⁴⁰

Even more remarkable than the costumes was the set, designed for Brook by Sally Jacobs. Eschewing the traditional scenery of the Athenian woods, Brook again opted for a bare, white stage. The advantage of playing within such a space is the reorientation of the spectators' attention. Against three blank walls, the narrative could stand out with arresting detail. "For setting, he offers a dazzling white box," the "naked harshness" of which "is used by Mr. Brook as a means to expose the actors' words and emotions."²⁴¹ Fiddick remarked that Brook's imagery "allowed groups of faces [to] stand out against the background concentrating the attention more than any spotlight could."²⁴² Brook realized that the text tells the story well enough and does not require the outward trappings of literal representation in order to communicate its premise.

As mentioned above, Brook's approach to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was not enormously concerned with poetic faith, i.e., his direction did not expect the people in the audience to forget that they were in a theatre watching actors work. In the centuries since Shakespeare's lifetime, theatre technology had developed in such a way that all the proverbial cogs and gears within a theatre were masked, including actual machinery and equipment as well as offstage actors and crew members. This is a basic strategy of rhetoric: you present your audience with exactly what you want them to observe, and if your argument is engaging enough, the conclusions they draw will ostensibly derive from just that information. Drama can sometimes function in a similar way. If someone in the audience sees a character flying and cannot visually perceive the line by which the actor

is suspended, then she may be very briefly convinced that something magical is taking place before her eyes. Bertolt Brecht's rhetorical strategy relied on the revelation of those mechanisms, broadening the audience's dramatic gaze. Kenneth Tynan describes the Brechtian mode in contrast to that of Stanislavsky: the former would tell you "You are in a drawing-room ... witnessing life," while the latter would prefer to say "You are in a theatre ... witnessing actors."²⁴³ Brook's *Midsummer* had no interest in convincing the audience of something as magical as flight, not even for fairies. Instead of simulating such magic, Brook employed trapezes. That way, the desired *effect* – elevation, superior position – was achieved without illusion.

Some of Brook's choices were in fact deliberate revelations of the theatrical mechanism, a practice strongly advocated by Brecht himself. John Elsom says in *Post-war British Theatre* that

Brecht used to insist that no bourgeois trappings should disguise how theatrical effects were achieved. At one time, he wanted to keep the house lights half on, so that members of the audience could see one another and not get too carried away by the drama. ... He believed that an audience of workers would appreciate watching other people work, operating the lights, moving the props and casually preparing themselves for their entries on stage. This emphasis on stage-craft was intended to take away the false mystery from the theatre, its illusory glamour, thus allowing a truer concentration upon the dramatic arguments.²⁴⁴

The wings on Brook's stage for *Midsummer* remained visible to the audience, meaning that the crew as well as the actors waiting for their next entrances remained visible as

well. Brook's direction invited spectators to freely embrace the mechanism of drama, to consciously acknowledge the constructed nature of the theatre event. This was one device with which Brook estranged his patrons from the narrative illusion, cultivating a more objective way of looking at *Midsummer*, a way that discouraged total submission to/immersion in the fantasy of ancient Athens and fairy courts.

Equally reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht was the way Peter Brook continually penetrated the fourth wall. Donald Richie's review of the production, appearing in the Spring 1971 issue of *The Drama Review*, notes that several characters, even when ostensibly addressing each other, turned downstage and delivered their lines directly to the audience.

After the bravura entrance of the artistes the play begins, and we find that Hermia is not speaking with Theseus, though her lines are directed to him, but with us. Later, Lysander and Hermia, though conversing together, are kneeling downstage and, again, addressing the audience. Over and over we discover that not only Puck ... but almost everyone in the cast (including Bottom) are speaking over the footlights. These are not asides. They are halves of a conversation which the audience is offered and which, in the second half of the play, it takes up.²⁴⁵

Of course, some such moments appear authorial – i.e., embedded within Shakespeare's text – Puck is one who regularly has to engage the live persons watching the show. Others, however, derive from Brook's imperative to relate this story's relevance to the twentieth-century public. Richie's review importantly describes several moments of Brook's direction through which he systematically destroyed the "convention of

separation” between the audience and the performers.²⁴⁶ According to Richie, Brook’s choices for *Midsummer* clarified the sameness of the Athenian world and our own. Rather than approaching the script as just a delightful romp of a comedy, Brook used it to illustrate truths about the real world. The Brechtian strategies he adopted for *Midsummer* worked together to illustrate the doubleness of the text, such as the parallels between the fairy and human courts. The Royal Shakespeare Company’s website provides details about how this was done:

By doubling the roles of Oberon and Theseus and those of Titania and Hippolyta . . . , Brook made it clear that the Fairy King and Queen were the alter egos of the mortal rulers. In this way, Brook suggested that the conflicts and erotic adventures of the nocturnal wood were the uncontrollable eruption of subconscious fears and desires.²⁴⁷

Brook was well aware of traditional depictions of English fairy magic in *Midsummer*’s stage history. He was equally aware of them as having little relevance in the late twentieth century, little capacity left to awe and amaze: “It’s quite clear . . . that this line that runs throughout the play cannot be presented convincingly through dead or second-hand imagery.”²⁴⁸ He therefore translated the idea of magic into something his patrons would more likely react to with appropriate delight, the much-celebrated circus element. Charles Marowitz has called it “a sleight-of-hand composed with scenic tricks and stage illusion.”²⁴⁹ Foakes says that the opening-night audience was so exhilarated by the originality of the production, by the actors who were “running, tumbling and swinging in a white space, with Bottom as a button-nosed circus clown” that it rose for a standing ovation at intermission.²⁵⁰

Critical and popular response to this production was overwhelmingly positive. Witnesses praised Brook for a sense of excitement that felt somehow entirely new and also like a reclamation of the atmosphere of the original production. Barber lauds Brook for having found “new ways of giving form to its poetry and power”:

Old lines came up fresh and comic, or distressingly apt. For it was Mr. Brook’s triumph to generate an atmosphere in which only the poetry mattered. The lovers were as exposed and as distraught as modern adolescents. Mr. Brook has found a way of making Shakespeare eloquent to this generation.²⁵¹

Kenneth Tynan, Brecht lover that he was, was one of the first in England to advocate a Brechtian aesthetic for the works of William Shakespeare and other early modern playwrights. In “Some Stars from the East,” he urges his countrymen to learn from the Brechtian model, which he identifies as potentially the best way to approach works like *Henry IV*, *Tamburlaine*, and *Peer Gynt*. Brecht himself was no stranger to Shakespeare, and his own essays express a desire to disrupt the traditional modes of Shakespearean performance. A footnote to “Emphasis on Sport,” for example, says, “I even think that in a Shakespearean production one man in the stalls with a cigar could bring about the downfall of Western art.”²⁵² Although he concedes that “an epic way of acting isn’t equally valid for every classical work,” it seems “most easily applicable, i.e. to hold most promise of results, in works like Shakespeare’s.”²⁵³ Brecht identifies something foreign, something incongruous in the notion of producing and playing Shakespeare with great reverence. Elisabeth Hauptmann describes Brecht’s conception of Shakespeare as “the best member of his [own] audience”; he seemed confident that

Shakespeare wrote things from which he and his friends derived fun.²⁵⁴ Brecht aimed to revive the sense of fun in his own theatre practice, the same kind of inclusive, spontaneous, distracted, somewhat dangerous quality of live theatre at the sixteenth-century Globe.

Brook identifies the works of Shakespeare as the site of the Deadly Theatre's most secure installation. According to Loney, part of what Brook was reacting to was the "almost religious piety about the productions" of Shakespeare, which seemed more like "offerings on the Bard's altar."²⁵⁵ Neither Brecht nor Brook could happily tolerate the trend of Shakespeare-worship that robbed his plays of their human relevance. Brook describes his problems with the trend of classical Shakespearean performance: "I have seen Shakespearean productions in Russia so conventional in approach that two full years of discussion and study of archives give no better result than scratch companies get in three weeks."²⁵⁶ In the same chapter of *The Empty Space*, Brook cites Brecht's company, the Berliner Ensemble, as an example of effective use of time, so admirable that he promotes it as a superior business model to the system in England.

Year	Production Details (all produced by the RSC)
1975	<i>Man Is Man</i> at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. Dir. Howard Davies.
1976	<i>Man Is Man</i> at The Roadhouse, London. Dir. Howard Davies, transl. Steve Gooch.
1976	<i>Schweyk in the Second World War</i> at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. Dir. Howard Davies, transl. Susan Davies.
1977	<i>Schweyk in the Second World War</i> at the Gulbenkian Studio, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Dir. Howard Davies, transl. Susan Davies. 7 performances.
1977	<i>Schweyk in the Second World War</i> at the Warehouse, London. Dir. Howard Davies.
1977	<i>The Days of the Commune</i> at the Aldwych Theatre, London. Dir. Howard Davies.
1978	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> , touring production. Dir. John Caird, transl. James and Tania Stern.
1980	<i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> at the Warehouse, London. Dir. John Caird, transl. James and Tania Stern.
1980	<i>Baal</i> at the Gulbenkian Studio, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Dir. David Jones
1980	<i>Baal</i> at the Warehouse, London. Dir. David Jones

1982	<i>Journey into Exile</i> at the Warehouse Festival. Performed by Bettina Jonic. Part 1 of a two-part evening followed by <i>Alarums and Excursions</i> by Heine Heinrich.
1984	<i>Mother Courage</i> at the Barbican Theatre, London. Dir. Howard Davies, adapter Hanif Kureishi.
1986	<i>Happy End</i> on tour with <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> . Dir. Stuart Hopps and Di Trevis. Play by Dorothy Lane, songs by Brecht.
1986	<i>Happy End</i> at the Whitbread Flowers Warehouse, Stratford-upon-Avon. Dir. Stuart Hopps and Di Trevis. Play by Dorothy Lane, songs by Brecht.
1986	<i>Happy End</i> on tour. Dir. Stuart Hopps and Di Trevis. Play by Dorothy Lane, songs by Brecht.
2013	<i>A Life of Galileo</i> . Dir. Roxana Silbert and Mark Ravenhill.

Brecht at the RSC, 1975-1986

As is clear from the Royal Shakespeare Company's production archives, Brecht's plays enjoyed significantly more attention after 1970. Peter Brook's work on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* helped season the Brechtian dish in such a way that it was made appetizing to mainstream English theatregoers. The combination of the German playwright's style with the English playwright's texts had proved somewhat alchemical, allowing for a celebration of a centuries-old, national treasure while simultaneously creating something entirely new and meaningful for a contemporary audience. Critics, scholars, and regular patrons have all commented on the miraculous sense of joy, of fun, that Brook cultivated in his *Midsummer*. Ron Rosenbaum put it best, perhaps, when he said, "I felt my consciousness raised to a higher pitch."²⁵⁷ This is the ultimate fulfillment of Brecht's dramatic purpose. By marrying elements of the strange and the familiar, Peter Brook both renewed England's enjoyment of Shakespeare and successfully advocated for its adoption of Brecht.

Conclusion

Many years ago, a professor introduced me to the idea that culture is something dynamic, ever shifting, always reacting to and against itself, rather than a fixed, quantifiable thing. That idea returns to me now as I review the research that has gone into this project. The forces of action and reaction, initiation and response, run throughout the chapters of this thesis. The German romantics actively campaigned against French Neoclassicism. Max Reinhardt's artistic environment inspired him to creative action. The Nazis responded to a need for popular marketing of their ideology. Peter Brook convinced his audiences that unfamiliar dramatic techniques could be put to good use. And the most profound take-away from all this is that Shakespeare formed the axis of every single one of these events. I believe that this is a hitherto unexplored facet of Shakespeare's versatility: his capacity to function as either a site or a lens in performance practice as well as scholarship. As a site, his works have played host to innumerable creative visions of people who devise new and exciting ways to tell the stories. As a lens, they have created a context for translating and comprehending strange and challenging ideas.

The temporal scope of this research turned out to be much broader than I originally planned, and its increase in width may have necessitated the sacrifice of depth in some instances. This is regrettable, as almost everything that was winnowed out in the editing process (as well as all the material I have yet to read) seems valuable in some way or another. A revision of this work would incorporate more primary source material, such as other works by German romantics like Goethe (and some authors not addressed thoroughly herein, such as the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich Schiller, and Ludwig Tieck),

and especially more German-language theatre reviews from the early twentieth century. I have also privately lamented my own negligence of Shakespeare's German presence in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Several important works, including Freytag's *Technique of the Drama* as well as the yearly publication of the German Shakespeare Society would be excellent enrichments of this discussion and fill in the temporal gap. One of the most difficult passages to excise from this text, and one that I think would have a rightful place in an expanded version, has to do with a famous 1937 production of *Richard III*. Directed by Jürgen Fehling at the Berlin Staatstheater, it is the most famous example of an artist's use of Shakespeare to criticize and subvert Nazi ideology. The scholarship surrounding this production is so vivid and emotionally provocative that I must say again, it's the stuff of movies. One more thought process that has not made it into this draft is Bertolt Brecht's own use of Shakespeare as an instructional lens. Although Brecht did not work as extensively with Shakespeare as Reinhardt, he was no stranger to the English playwright. Some of his rehearsal techniques – of which there is video footage – use Shakespeare's narratives and scripts as part of rehearsal exercises. Shakespeare helps Brecht illustrate important points about his theatrical style, and I look forward to investigating that notion further.

Another direction in which this discussion could conceivably go has to do with present-day approaches to Shakespeare pedagogy. As we have seen, the works of Shakespeare have attained such a unique position in the Western cultural consciousness that they function well as either sites or lenses for investigation and expression. I would like to suggest that there is currently a notable swing of the pendulum toward the "lens" side, a swing that is especially perceptible in programs like the R.S.C.'s "Stand Up for

Shakespeare” program, which seeks to de-mystify Shakespeare for young people. Although that privileged place in our cultural consciousness remains unthreatened, it should not be denied that Shakespeare presents academic challenges to today’s young people. The meter, the vocabulary, the classical allusions and culturally specific references all create barriers between the material and the student’s comprehension. And yet Shakespeare remains a staple part of English and American curricula. In order to transcend the distance between youngsters’ minds and Shakespearean drama, to familiarize the strange, as it were, “Stand Up for Shakespeare” uses methods that are eerily reminiscent of Brechtian estrangement devices. I believe that a productive line of academic research would be an investigation of how in the twenty-first century classroom, *Verfremdung* is available as an effective pedagogical tool for Shakespeare.

If it is true that great works of art are never finished, merely abandoned, then I reckon that the same holds true for Master’s theses. There are almost innumerable opportunities for revision, improvement, and expansion in this study, all of which I hope to continue pursuing in my future academic work, because it is my opinion that the underlying concept of this argument has broad and useful applicability in both the theater and the classroom.

Appendix

From Arthur Kahane's *Diary of a Dramaturg*, Chapter 15: Encounters – Max Reinhardt

My first encounter with Reinhardt was of course not my *first* encounter with him. I had already become acquainted with him several years before in the fourth floor gallery of the Vienna Burgtheater.

...

Whoever hasn't personally experienced the fourth gallery of the Burgtheater will never be able to grasp it. The fourth gallery of the Burgtheater was not a theater ticket category (the cheapest!) with unnumbered seats, but rather a temple (temple, not synagogue); a consecrated site of enthusiasm; a gathering place for art-loving young Vienna; the schooling for art, and namely of a strict view of art, a meeting place of the most precise theatre knowledge, of the most trained theatrical understanding and of the relentless theatre criticism; and a school of the strongest talents.

...

Drama students were an essential component of this community. And Max Reinhardt was one of them when I met him. His colleagues in that age group said in agreement about him: "He was the strongest talent of us all!"

...

[Quoting Max Reinhardt:]

What I picture is a theater that again gives the people joy. That leads them beyond themselves, out of the gray misery of everyday life into a brighter, purer air of beauty. I feel how people are tired of reliving their own misery again and again in the theatre and how they long for bright colors and an elevated life.

That is not to say that I want to renounce the never-before-achieved truth and authenticity, the great achievements of naturalistic acting. I could not do that even if I wanted to. I have gone through this school and I am grateful that I could. A strict schooling in inflexible truth is indispensable since its development, and there is nobody that can bypass it. But I would like to continue that development, to apply it to other things than to situation- and environment-description, beyond the "poor people smell" and the problems of social criticism, would like to apply the same highest degree of truth and authenticity to the purely human, in a more profound and refined art of the soul, and would also like to show life from the other side of pessimistic denial, but as equally true and genuine also in happiness and filled with color and light.

I don not mean to attach myself to a particular literary program, to Naturalism as little as to anything else. Of course, I feel that, for me, the highest art of our time, that of Tolstoy, far surpasses Naturalism, that in foreign countries Strindberg, Hamsun, Maeterlinck, Wilde follow whole other methods, in German art Wedekind and Hofmannsthal take other paths; and I sense new, young powers in growth everywhere, on new tracks. Where there are new

talents in our time, from whichever side they come, they shall be welcome to me. I will also not shy away from experiments, when I believe in their worth: What I will NOT do, is experiment for the sake of the experiment, literature for the sake of literature. I can only do what I believe in. With a flop, with a critical success, neither the author nor the theater is served, and whoever performs the work of a poet or playwright doesn't help him, but rather it's whoever boosts the poet or playwright to success with the public, who gets him across.

You would actually have to have two parallel stages, a larger one for the classics and one smaller, more intimate, for the chamber art of the modern poet. ... if nothing else, so the actors don't stiffen into a single style and are able to test themselves in both modes of presentation. And because in some cases it will be necessary, to play modern writers like the classics and certain classic works with the complete intimacy of the modern art of the soul.

And actually you would still have to have a third stage, don't laugh, I mean it seriously, and I already see it in front of me, a quite large stage for a large art of monumental impact, a festival theater, detached from everyday life, a house of light and of consecration, in the spirit of the Greeks, though not only for Greek works, but dedicated rather to the great art of all times, in the form of the amphitheater, without a proscenium curtain, without an upstage curtain, possibly even without decoration, and in the middle, the actor, completely oriented to the pure effect of personality, completely oriented to the word, the actor in the middle of the audience, and the audience itself, drawn in, turned into a *Volk*, itself a part of the plot, of the piece. For me the frame that divides the stage from the world was never something essential, my fantasy never liked submitting to its tyranny: I see in it only a makeshift of the stage of illusion, of the proscenium theatre, that arose from the special needs of Italian opera and is not valid for all times, and everything that explodes this framework, broadens and increases the effect, strengthens contact with the public, whether toward intimacy or toward the monumental side, will always be welcome to me. In the way that everything that is suitable to increasing the undreamt possibilities of the theatre will always be welcome to me."

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