Hamlet in the Stalin Era and Beyond:
Stage and Score
Les mises en scène et mises en musique d’Hamlet
à l’ère stalinienne et après

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Note on Transliteration, Abbreviations and Sources

Throughout this dissertation I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration of Russian words, without diacritics. Names appear in this way unless they are already known in the West, in which case they are given in their Anglophone forms (Francophone for the substantial summary/résumé substantiel). If a name is part of bibliographical information, it appears according to the Library of Congress rules, unless that information itself uses a different form; thus, for example, the main text refers to Meyerhold throughout, but as part of a Russian title or Russian bibliographical entry the same name appears as Meierkhol’d.

All quotations are reproduced with their original spelling and transliteration.

All translations from secondary sources are the author’s own unless otherwise indicated.

Abbreviations

The standard format of Russian archival description is f. (fond or collection), op. (opis or file or register), ed. or ed. khr. (edinitsa khraneniia, item or file) or d. (delo, item) or no. (number). Verso is used to indicate a sheet’s reverse side and corresponds to the Russian ob. (oborot).

MKhAT: Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi (akademicheskii) teatr [Moscow Art Theatre]

NLR: Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi natsional’noi biblioteki, St Petersburg [Manuscript department of the National Library of Russia]

R: Rehearsal number (in musical scores)

RGALI: Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustv, Moscow [Russian State Archive of Literature and the Arts]

TsGALI: Tsentral’n’yi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstv, St Petersburg [Central State Museum of Literature and Arts]

VTO: Vsesoiuznoe teatral’noe obshchestvo [All-Soviet Theatre Society]

Sources

Résumé substantiel

L'idée de ce projet remonte à ma première rencontre avec Shakespeare : au début des années 1990, lors d'une séance à 'Asr-é Djadid' – un petit cinéma 'underground' à côté de l'Université de Téhéran – j'ai vu la version cinématographique d'Hamlet par Grigori Kozintsev avec la musique de Chostakovitch. Le film était doublé en persan et partiellement censuré pour être en accord avec les règles imposées par le régime islamiste. Deux jours plus tard, j'y retournais pour voir le film une seconde fois. Je remarquais alors que la scène de folie d'Ophélie était plus courte, plus censurée, et que la musique de film de Chostakovitch était très fragmentée. Je n'avais donc d'autre choix que de chercher cette musique ainsi que le texte de Shakespeare pour m'en assurer. Des années plus tard, après mes études à l’Académie Nationale de Musique d’Ukraine à Kiev - quand j’ai enfin pu comprendre le film en langue russe directement - j’ai pu mieux apprécier le travail du réalisateur, du traducteur (Pasternak) et du compositeur. À partir de ce moment, je ne pouvais plus lire le texte d’Hamlet sans revoir, dans mon imagination, les scènes du film et sans entendre la musique de Chostakovitch. Une question se forma dans mon esprit : aurais-je si fortement aimé Hamlet si je ne l’avais pas découvert au travers du prisme russe/soviétique ? Est-ce Hamlet de Shakespeare ou l’appropriation russe de cette pièce qui m’a autant troublée ? L’Hamlet russe est-il une entité à part et indépendante de l’Hamlet de Shakespeare ?

Ainsi est né le projet d'une recherche sur la performance d’Hamlet en Russie en privilégiant la question de l’interprétation et de l’identité nationale russe. Mes formations en musique et en théâtre et mes connaissances de la langue et de la culture russe, me permettent d’étudier les mises en scène et mises en musique d’Hamlet qui forment la ligne directrice de mes recherches. Cependant, lors d’un premier séjour de recherches en Russie en 2012, je compris que le sujet était beaucoup trop vaste à aborder en détails. Sans une limitation du corpus dans un contexte historique plus étroit et sans choisir des cas de figure représentatifs, mon projet risquait de devenir un simple catalogue non-exhaustif. Encore une fois, c’était la musique en général et celle de Chostakovitch en particulier qui m’ont servi de guide. Ainsi, je décidais de retenir pour ma thèse la première création de Chostakovitch sur le texte de Shakespeare, sa musique pour la mise en scène scandaleuse d’Hamlet par Nikolai Akimov au Théâtre Vakhtangov de Moscou en 1932, et d’y ajouter la rencontre de Prokofiev avec cette tragédie à

**La musique dans Shakespeare et notamment *Hamlet***

Bien qu’une partie de la musique inspirée par Shakespeare constitue une part importante du répertoire de concert, les études qui traitent spécifiquement ce sujet – ‘Shakespeare et la musique’– sont étonnamment peu nombreuses.


Wes Folkerth dans son ouvrage *The Sound of Shakespeare* montre que, pour le public de Shakespeare l’audition n’était pas une simple source d’informations complémentaire à la vision mais plutôt une dimension différente et même supérieure, en ce que l’audition donnait accès à une vérité intérieure : les processus psychologiques, les motivations, le royaume invisible de l’esprit. La vision était simplement un conduit au monde matériel. ¹ Dans la même veine, Bruce Johnson dans son article « *Hamlet: Voice, Music, Sound* »² suggère qu’en tant

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qu’acteur, Shakespeare écrivait pour le résultat sonore, « pas pour les livres, et il a écrit pour un public habitué à une sémiologie auditive finement accordée » pour une société en transition et qui vivait « une tension, entre deux modes de connaissance : visuelle et auditive ». Ainsi Johnson observe que le paysage sonore d’*Hamlet* est « un porteur important de significations ».

Dans *Hamlet*, il y a plusieurs moments de musique instrumentale : Claudius utilise des canons pour ses beuveries (I/4), les trompettes, en plus de leur fonction royale et de routine, introduisent l’arrivée des comédiens (II/2) et la flûte prend un rôle important dans une scène (et le discours) avec Hamlet (III/2), ce que Kozintsev considéra comme le point culminant et spirituellement le plus élevé de la tragédie (voir chapitre 5).

Dans ses études sur la musique dans les tragédies de Shakespeare (*Music in Shakespearean Tragedy*), Frederick Sternfeld nous rappelle que les tragédies élisabéthaines (suivant les traditions de Sénèque) étaient sans chansons. Shakespeare faisait alors figure d’exception dans son utilisation de chansons dans ses tragédies, et notamment dans *Hamlet, Othello* et *Troilus*. Dans ses méthodes novatrices, Shakespeare « assigne des chansons aux personnages principaux, il imprime les textes de ces chansons, et il fait des références spécifiques à des passages de ce texte dans les dialogues autour des chansons en les utilisant en tant que composants importants de la structure tragique. » L’auteur anglais utilisa non seulement des chansons tragiques en soi, mais présenta également des chansons de comédie apparemment incongrues comme partie intégrante de la tragédie. La chanson du Fossoyeur dans *Hamlet* en est un exemple frappant, dont le sens macabre ainsi que la langue non raffinée, brute, renforce le contraste entre les attitudes du personnage et celle d’Hamlet envers la mort.

Sternfeld note le génie de Shakespeare en ce qui concerne les chants d’Ophélie et de Desdemona : ici les chansons créent « une concordance subtile entre l’intrigue et le personnage ». Ophélie et Desdemona, toutes deux, commencent en chantant de vieilles chansons familières, mais, en proie à leurs maux, leurs angoisses et leurs pressentiments progressent graduellement d’un fragment lyrique à l’autre. Malgré la dissemblance des circonstances de leur destin, la mort et la transfiguration de chaque héroïne est associée à

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l’image d’un saule⁴. L’observation de Sternfeld concernant les similitudes entre Ophélie et Desdemona renvoie à l’interprétation que fit Sergei Radlov de ces deux héroïnes, qu’il décrivit à Prokofiev lors de son travail sur la mise en scène d’Hamlet en 1937-1938 (voir chapitre 3).

À l’instar de Radlov, en se référant à l’étiquette élisabéthaine et aux restrictions concernant la performance musicale dans les salons, Sternfeld affirme que « le fait qu’Ophélie chante devant une assemblée de la cour est en soi un symptôme du dérangement et de la folie. » De plus, Shakespeare évoque l’état lamentable de l’esprit d’Ophélie par son « alternance entre prose et vers, en parlant et en chantant, et le manque de continuité et de congruence. »

Une étude comme celle de Sternfeld révèle également la grande complexité de la traçabilité des chansons de Shakespeare, jusqu’à leur source et leur mélodie originale. La musique élisabéthaine originale, étant, pour la plupart des chansons d’Ophélie, perdue, les chercheurs ont opté pour divers compromis, y compris le recours à la tradition orale.

**Shakespeare en musique**


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⁴ Mis à part son association avec la notion de deuil (Psalme 137), le saule symbolise chez Shakespeare l’amour abandonné. Pour plus de renseignements voir « Willow » dans Vivian Thomas et Nicki Faircloth, Shakespeare's Plants, Gardens and Landscapes: A Dictionary, Londres, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

également les « morceaux de musique classique qui répondent à ces textes » ont créé, à leur tour, de nouvelles réponses artistiques.


Winton Dean étudie la relation compositeur-librettiste dans des opéras moins connus ou oubliés de Verdi, en analysant la nécessaire distillation et la concentration des textes de Shakespeare comme rôle déterminant dans le succès de chaque opéra. Publiée pour l’année anniversaire de Shakespeare en 1964, la collection d’essais édités par Phyllis Hartnoll (historien de théâtre), Shakespeare in Music⁷, à laquelle la contribution de Dean appartient, est un exemple rare d’un ouvrage qui essaye de couvrir à la fois « la musique chez Shakespeare » et « Shakespeare en musique », mais avec une inclination évidente pour ce dernier. Le chapitre d’introduction de John Stevens (spécialiste de musiques anciennes) nous montre que Shakespeare hérita et améliora une tradition de musique de théâtre qui était utilisée non seulement pour l’embellissement mais aussi pour évoquer une palette d’émotions et d’associations symboliques. Le reste de l’ouvrage examine la postérité musicale de

Shakespeare au travers de chansons, d’œuvres de concert (y compris la musique de ballet, de cinéma et la musique de scène) et de l’opéra. Chacune de ces sections offre une approche différente : une histoire critique des chansons écrites sur les paroles de Shakespeare, une approche esthétique, les aspects pratiques d’une adaptation du texte de Shakespeare pour un opéra, une analyse détaillée de Roméo et Juliette de Berlioz en retraçant sa source d’inspiration (qui était en fait l’adaptation de Garrick et non le texte original de Shakespeare.)

**Hamlet en musique**

En ce qui concerne les créations musicales sur Hamlet, c’est le personnage d’Ophélie et en particulier ses chansons et sa mort qui présentent la principale attraction de la tragédie. Ces moments sont mis en exergue à la fois dans les recherches générales sur Shakespeare et dans des études plus spécialisées. Le plus souvent, les études portent sur la relation entre la folie, la musique et les femmes chez Shakespeare en faisant valoir que « les chants d’Ophélie sont peut-être le plus célèbre exemple de la relation entre la folie et le chant et reflètent un discours plus large sur la folie dans la culture anglaise ancienne, avec ses associations persistantes entre la musique, l’excès, et le féminin. »8 Par conséquent, les études concernant la mort d’Ophélie et ses caractéristiques musicales dans les adaptations cinématographiques d’Hamlet comprennent plusieurs études féministes9 où l’analyse perspicace et les observations sont ensuite infléchies afin de tenir compte des programmes féministes.

Les scènes de folie et la mort d’Ophélie ainsi que l’art de Shakespeare pour juxtaposer musique, mots, mouvement et paysage, ont suscité de nombreuses réponses d’artistes de différentes disciplines à cet épisode court mais sémantiquement chargé de cette tragédie. On pourrait dire qu’en exportant la mort d’Ophélie hors scène avec seulement la description visuelle de Gertrude, Shakespeare appelle à l’imagination créatrice de son auditoire (et plus tard des artistes) pour visualiser ce moment tragique. La célèbre représentation de la mort d’Ophélie par John Everett Millais (peint en 1851-1852) a elle-même acquis une signification symbolique et une survivance riche y compris dans les films et la musique pop. Les musiciens ont également répondu à l’appel, principalement, mais pas exclusivement, par des chansons : la folie et la mort d’Ophélie sont évoquées musicalement par de nombreux compositeurs tels que Berlioz (« La Mort d’Ophélie », 1848), Frank Bridge (« Il y a un


À l’instar de la plupart des pièces de Shakespeare, Hamlet a généré un large éventail de réponses musicales. Comme on le verra dans le chapitre 1, le xixe siècle a vu s’épanouir le culte de Hamlet et le Hamlétisme parmi les compositeurs romantiques en Europe et en Russie. Dans l’opéra, comme Albright l’observe, la relation entre les conventions à l’époque de Shakespeare et celles de l’opéra ont tendance à mettre l’accent sur des moments tout à fait différents. Ce fut certainement le cas d’Hamlet d’Ambroise Thomas (1868). Mis à part sa fin heureuse inattendue, Thomas réduit « être ou ne pas être » au strict minimum, tout en faisant de la romance entre Hamlet et Ophélie l’intrigue centrale. La scène de folie d'Ophélie est l’une des scènes les plus longues et des plus élaborées dans tout l’opéra français. L’Hamlet de Thomas reste encore la version opératique de cette tragédie la plus souvent mentionnée et a éclipsé les réalisations par le Letton Jānis Kalniņš (1936), par le Géorgien soviétique Alexi Machavariani (1964) et par le Russe Sergei Slonimsky (1991), dont je fais mention dans le chapitre 5 de cette thèse. Winton Dean remarque, dans son aperçu des opéras inspirés par Shakespeare et leur libretti (qui est antérieur à l'œuvre de Slonimsky et n’aurait pas connu celle de Machavariani), qu’Hamlet a « tenté les anges, mais qu’uniquement des êtres inférieurs s’y sont rués ». Ces « anges » incluent des compositeurs comme Schumann, Berlioz, Chostakovitch et Prokofiev qui, tous, à un moment donné, ont voulu composer un opéra inspiré d’Hamlet.

Pour Berlioz, le texte de cette tragédie, sa musique et sa performance devint un leitmotiv presque obsessionnel de sa vie. Bien que le compositeur créa plusieurs œuvres à grande échelle d’après des pièces de Shakespeare (Roméo et Juliette, Le Roi Lear et Béatrice et Bénédict), Peter Bloom montre que ce fut Hamlet (et seulement plus tard Roméo et Juliette) qui occupa une place centrale et toute personnelle dans la vie et l’œuvre de Berlioz, peut-être parce que le compositeur rencontre sa future épouse, l’actrice anglo-irlandaise Harriet Smithson, quand elle jouait Ophélie au Théâtre de l’Odéon en 1827. En outre, Berlioz cite régulièrement Shakespeare – et Hamlet en particulier – dans ses lettres, ses articles et les entrées de son journal intime. Les citations d’Hamlet (et de Roméo et Juliette) sont même

10 Daniel Albright (éd.), Berlioz, Verdi, Wagner, Britten, 1.
12 Peter Bloom, Berlioz, dans Daniel Albright (ed.), Berlioz, Verdi, Wagner, Britten, 7-76.

Pour ce dernier, comme Jonathan Kregor le fait remarquer, « Liszt tenta de saisir une approche spécifique dérivée d’une mise en scène particulière. »  

13 Le travail du compositeur sur son dernier poème symphonique coïncidait avec son amitié pour l’acteur allemand d’origine polonaise, Bogumil Dawison, connu pour son style mélodramatique et pour dépeindre un Hamlet qui était en contradiction marquée avec le prince faible à la Goethe. Ce nouvel Hamlet de l’acteur Dawison n’était pas un rêveur mais « un homme d’action attendant le bon moment pour agir ».

Pour Tchaïkovski, également, un acteur, Lucien Guitry, fut le catalyseur de son *Hamlet*, Ouverture-fantaisie, Op. 67 (voir chapitre 1). Contrairement à Liszt, la musique de Tchaïkovski engage moins un approfondissement psychologique que des images spécifiques. Quand Lucien Guitry demanda ensuite à Tchaïkovski de composer la musique pour sa mise en scène de la pièce, le compositeur trouva la tâche plus difficile et moins satisfaisante (voir chapitre 1). L’*Hamlet* de Tchaïkovski ont moins retenu l’attention académique que son *Roméo et Juliette* ; cependant, il a bénéficié d’une postérité particulièrement riche et ont été utilisés à plusieurs reprises pour diverses adaptations d’*Hamlet* pour le ballet (voir chapitre 5) et pour des musiques de film, notamment pour la version moderne d’*Hamlet* par Michael Almereyda (2000).

Comme Sanders l’a noté, un fil conducteur majeur existe entre les diverses réponses musicales à Shakespeare : « la majorité de ces œuvres ont trouvé leur inspiration d’une certaine façon dans un contexte théâtral. »  

14 La plupart des compositeurs mentionnés ci-dessus ont été sollicités pour composer une musique pour une mise en scène, et cet


engagement à son tour a eu un impact important sur leurs rencontres ultérieures avec les œuvres de Shakespeare. Lorsqu’ils ne répondent pas directement à une commande, ils sont inspirés, comme dans les cas de Berlioz et de Liszt, par des performances et des acteurs particuliers.

Comme on le verra dans le chapitre 2, la première rencontre créative de Chostakovitch avec Hamlet se fit également grâce au monde du théâtre. Son travail sur la mise en scène d’Akimov en 1932 s’avéra être un moment déterminant : le compositeur reviendra à cette tragédie tout au long de sa vie. Les musiques de Chostakovitch pour les adaptations théâtrales et cinématographiques d’Hamlet sont devenues des œuvres indépendantes non seulement dans le cadre du répertoire des salles de concert, mais aussi (comme avec Tchaïkovski) pour des adaptations d’Hamlet pour le ballet et autres mises en scène. Ceci constitue une fascinante étude de cas : la façon dont la musique scénique, qui, en dépit de sa nature spécifique liée au contexte d’une mise en scène particulière, peut continuer à vivre dans des formes altérées, séparées des besoins pratiques et pragmatiques de leur contexte d’origine et des « impulsions esthétiques et créatives » du réalisateur/metteur en scène ou de la société pour laquelle la musique avait été composée. Ceci est probablement le niveau le plus complexe d’appropriation et de transformation du texte de Shakespeare, car il a été soumis à plusieurs étapes de traduction, d’appropriation et d’adaptation. Cependant, il reste encore une autre étape, celle de la réception du public soumise au contexte de l’époque de la performance. Elle est également repérable – bien que partiellement – à travers des revues et des études universitaires.

**Hamlet et la Russie**

Malgré les conflits récurrents entre la Russie et l’Occident, Shakespeare, pour les Russes, a été et reste presque aussi sacré que leurs propres auteurs. Comme Irena Makaryk l’observe : « Shakespeare offre une fenêtre sur la culture russe et son attitude envers l’Occident. »

Inspiré, peut-être, par la célèbre description de Saint-Pétersbourg comme une « fenêtre sur l’Europe », cette image apparaît également dans le titre de l’ouvrage d’Eleanor Rowe sur Hamlet russe (Hamlet : A Window on Russia). En ce qui concerne la présence d’Hamlet dans le contexte socio-politique russe, on retrouve de nombreuses autres métaphores alternatives: le masque, le récipient, et – suivant les conseils d’Hamlet aux acteurs de mise en abîme – le

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miroir : « jouer comme si vous teniez un miroir face à la nature » (III/2/17-24). Bien que ce soit l’addition de chacune de ces images qui permette de suggérer l’importance d’*Hamlet* en Russie, leur utilité dépend plutôt de la signification que les commentateurs leur attribuent. Pour Rosenberg, l’idée de « masque » implique qu’*Hamlet*, en tant que personnage, n’est pas une entité fixe. Ainsi seul un artiste/comédiien, à titre individuel, peut déterminer quel masque *Hamlet* doit porter. L’idée de « récipient » évoquée par Aleksei Semenenko implique qu’en tant que texte canonisé, *Hamlet* devient un cadre et un récipient rempli d’un nouveau contenu à chaque fois qu’il est interprété. Enfin l’image largement utilisée du « miroir » suggère que les publics russes ou soviétiques pouvaient à tout moment lire, dans ce qui se passe sur scène, les caractéristiques de leur propre société. Ces concepts et images sont à la base d’une partie de cette thèse. Ils sont ensuite affinés et nuancés selon les résultats détaillés de mes recherches.

Les études récentes dans le domaine de l’appropriation transculturelle de Shakespeare tant au niveau global qu’au niveau local, ont fait valoir que l’œuvre du Barde ne reflète pas seulement les discours sociaux, politiques et culturels d’une société, mais qu’elle a également un rôle dans leur formation. Un tel « effet boomerang shakespeareien (Boomerang Shakespeare) », comme Alexa Huang le note, est symptomatique de la globalisation économique et des développements culturels internationaux\(^{17}\). Aucunes des notions de l’appropriation « globale » ou « locale » ne sont des nouveautés dans le domaine de la shakespearologie. Déjà, dans son poème dédicatoire dans l’édition Folio de 1623, Ben Jonson évoque l’universalité de Shakespeare. Mais, dès 1623, comme Leah Marcus l’observe, le « Shakespeare universel » était une notion opposée aux performances localisées du Barde. La vague de nouvelles études depuis les années 1990, cependant, s’éloigne de cette opposition binaire entre un Shakespeare global et un local. Dennis Kennedy va encore plus loin en suggérant que « certaines des appropriations étrangères [de Shakespeare] peuvent avoir un accès plus direct à la puissance des pièces. »\(^{18}\) À cet égard, il est largement reconnu que l’Europe de l’Est offre un cas particulièrement intense\(^{19}\). L’influence de Shakespeare sur le monde slave, comme Kennedy le souligne, réintroduit une compréhension occidentale du Barde. En tant que tel, *Hamlet*, par exemple, qui « pour l’Ouest libéral » est « une expression

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Le festival « Globe to Globe » en 2012 inaugura une nouvelle vague de débats et d’études autour du phénomène de l’influence et de l’appropriation de Shakespeare, ainsi que de la complexité à définir ces termes dans la pratique moderne. À cette occasion, Dennis Kennedy nous rappelle que c’est bien la flexibilité plutôt que l’universalité des textes de Shakespeare qui sert comme facteur principal de sa popularité mondiale. Pour démontrer l’importance globale et l’universalité d’*Hamlet* en particulier il suffit de rappeler qu’un projet primé du « Globe to Globe » fut le projet de « Globe to Globe *Hamlet* ». Ce dernier reprit le spectacle d’*Hamlet* par le Théâtre du Globe (réalisé par Dominic Dromgoole et Bill Buckhurst) dans différents pays en l’espace de deux ans. De toutes les pièces de Shakespeare, *Hamlet* est sûrement la plus profondément liée à l’identité nationale russe, au point qu’il a été suggéré qu’on puisse concevoir l’essence de chaque période de l’histoire russe (depuis l’arrivée d’*Hamlet*) rien qu’en observant l’interprétation de cette tragédie par les contemporains de cette époque. Ce ne sont pas seulement les réactions positives à cette pièce qui sont révélatrices ; les arguments contre *Hamlet* et les réponses créatives anti-Hamletiennes sont tout aussi importants pour faire de cette pièce « un miroir qui montre avec une précision extraordinaire l’évolution de la société et la culture russe. » Curieusement, en dépit de l’attitude hostile exprimée par Lev Tolstoi envers Shakespeare et *Hamlet*, c’est après une lecture de *Guerre et Paix* que William Morris écrit le 1er mars : « Hamlet [...] aurait dû être un Russe, et non pas un Danois », confirmant que l’affinité entre les Russes et le prince danois a été reconnue au-delà des frontières du pays.

21 Ibid.
L’appropriation de Shakespeare et d’*Hamlet* en Russie a déjà été l’objet de plusieurs études : la plupart étant en russe et /ou par des chercheurs russes (voir la bibliographie). En outre, il existe des recherches telles que celle d’Aleksei Semenenko qui étudie les traductions de la tragédie en russe, et *Hamlet: A Window on Russia*, par Eleanor Rowe24, qui, bien qu’ayant été publié il y a près de quarante ans, offre une vue d’ensemble de la présence d’*Hamlet* dans la littérature et le théâtre russes. Cependant, des études spécialisées sur les mises en scène soviétiques/russes d’*Hamlet*, que ce soit en Occident ou en Russie, sont rares et peu connues25. Par conséquent, l’examen critique et la contextualisation de tous ces travaux constituent une partie nécessaire de la méthodologie de ce projet.

Les problèmes et les vides signalés ci-dessus fournissent le contexte et, en partie, la motivation de cette thèse, mais ils ne sont pas exclusivement son objet.

**Choix du corpus et problématique (l’époque de Staline)**

La question centrale que cette thèse pose est la suivante : est-ce qu’*Hamlet* – une tragédie dont l’histoire de l’interprétation et de la réception en Russie fut liée à des notions de doute et de réflexion sur la question maudite d’« être ou ne pas être » – a pu survivre aux terreurs de l’époque de Staline? La réponse courte est « oui ». La réponse longue, analysant les formes de cette survie, constitue le corps de cette thèse. Pour répondre à cette question, ce projet étudie l’influence d’*Hamlet*, ses interprétations russes / soviétiques et l’essence des activités créatives à cet égard dans un climat politico-culturel étroitement surveillé. Il se concentre sur la conception, la réalisation et la réception de deux interprétations théâtrales d’*Hamlet* dans le contexte de l’ère stalinienne : en 1932 par Nikolaï Akimov avec la musique de Chostakovitch et en 1938 par Sergei Radlov avec la musique de Prokofiev.

Bien sûr, il ne faut pas considérer l’époque de Staline (1928-1953) et ses manifestations comme une entité monolithique. Elle englobe plusieurs phases, en commençant par la fin du pluralisme culturel des années 1920, en passant par diverses étapes de la Révolution culturelle (1928-1932), de terreur (1934-1939), et le relâchement (relatif) pendant la Grande guerre patriotique (1941-1945). Par conséquent, chaque exemple de l’appropriation et de l’interprétation d’*Hamlet* au cours de cette période a inévitablement été le résultat d’une négociation à différents niveaux : entre les artistes, les institutions culturelles, le Parti et ses doctrines, les attentes du public formées par les traditions liées à l’histoire d’*Hamlet* en

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Russie. Tout d’abord, on remarque une tradition sur *Hamlet* et la notion d’Hamletisme, qui était depuis longtemps intégrée dans l’identité nationale russe. Ainsi, toute nouvelle tentative d’interprétation d’*Hamlet* a dû faire face à l’image déjà imprimée par cette tradition dans l’esprit du public, des artistes et des commentateurs. Parfois, comme c’était le cas notamment avec la mise en scène de Nikolaï Akimov en 1932, cette tradition a joué un rôle au moins aussi décisif que les doctrines officielles dans la détermination de la réception, et donc le destin du spectacle.

La nature collaborative des adaptations de Shakespeare – que ce soit dans le théâtre, le cinéma, l’opéra ou le ballet – entraîne des tensions supplémentaires entre les approches des artistes qui pourraient chacun avoir sa propre vision, affectant les perspectives de succès ou d’échec de l’œuvre finale. Ici aussi l’*Hamlet* d’Akimov, avec la musique de scène saillante de Dimitri Chostakovitch, fournit un exemple révélateur de la façon dont les couches sémantiques ajoutées par une musique de scène partiellement autonome pourraient conduire à une réception complexe du spectacle. À l’opposé, la réalisation de Sergei Radlov en 1938, resta fidèle à l’image d’Hamlet comme le prince des peuples en assurant une coordination étroite entre les composants individuels du spectacle – en particulier entre la traduction par l’épouse du metteur en scène, Anna Radlova, et la musique de scène composée par Sergei Prokofiev. Ainsi ce spectacle s’assura une place dans le répertoire russe et un succès qui fut malheureusement stoppé par le déclenchement de la guerre en 1941 ainsi que le destin complexe et tragique des Radlovs (voir chapitre 4). Ces deux mises en scène, conçues à des moments importants de la politique socio-culturelle de l’ère Stalinienne, ont eu le plus grand impact sur le public et dans la presse parmi les autres *Hamlet* de cette période. Elles occupent, de ce fait, une position centrale dans cette thèse.

Les idées reçues au sujet du climat politico-culturel de l’ère stalinienne, autre facteur important dans la tradition de l’*Hamlet* soviétique, sont le résultat de points de vue réductionnistes sur cette époque qui continuent, encore, à circuler dans la littérature secondaire. Une partie importante de chacun des chapitres consacrés aux mises en scène d’Akimov (chapitre 2) et de Radlov (chapitre 3) est donc réservée à un réexamen de ces distorsions. Un autre cas flagrant concerne le mythe de l’interdiction d’*Hamlet* par Staline. En l’absence de documents officiels soutenant la crédibilité d’une telle interdiction, certains chercheurs sont plus prudents et ont nuancé leur hypothèse par des adjectifs comme « officieux », « pratique » et « tacite ». Cependant, un examen plus approfondi d’une preuve existante, réalisée au chapitre 4, devrait aider à rétablir les faits.

21
La méthodologie

Il peut être improbable qu’« il y a plus de livres écrits sur Hamlet que ceux qui ont été écrits sur la Bible »26. Ce qui est certain, en revanche, c’est que beaucoup d’informations disponibles dans les archives de théâtre, de l’Etat et des familles en Russie n’ont pas été étudiées et incorporées dans la littérature secondaire. Ce projet a donc entrepris un examen et une évaluation approfondie d’une partie de ces matériaux. Il va de soi qu’il en reste encore beaucoup à découvrir.

Plus largement, cette thèse est une étude transculturelle, trans- et interdisciplinaire complexe, qui se situe à un carrefour entre la musique, le théâtre, le cinéma, la danse, la littérature, la traductologie et la politique culturelle, ainsi que les théories associées. Mais c’est en particulier l’élément musical – qui a fourni la motivation initiale de cette recherche – qui est le plus développé. Tout au long de l’histoire musicale et culturelle de la Russie, de l’Union soviétique et de la Russie post-soviétique, Hamlet a été à plusieurs fois réinventé, que ce soit sous la forme de musique de scène, d’œuvres symphoniques autonomes, de musiques de film, d’opéras, de ballets, ou de chansons sur les paroles de Shakespeare et les poèmes russes inspirés par Hamlet et ses héros. Il faut aussi évaluer tout cela à l’aune de leurs propres contextes musicaux et dans le contexte de l’œuvre de leurs auteurs respectifs27. Cependant, ces pièces doivent aussi être prises en considération dans le contexte idéologique et politico-culturel de leurs créations et de leurs réceptions. Pour comprendre les processus d’appropriation et de réception, surtout pour la période stalinienne, il faut se référer aux débats qui ont eu lieu au plus haut niveau du Parti, entre les créateurs et les représentants du Parti, ainsi que dans la presse, tels que rapportés dans la littérature secondaire et complétés par mes propres recherches sur les documents d’archives.

La méthodologie de cette thèse se compose donc de:

- La contextualisation et l’étude historique de l’époque de Staline au travers de documents et de sources secondaires, en particulier les écrits de Katerina Clark et de Marina Frolova-Walker ainsi que des publications récentes telles que celles de

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- La présentation et l’évaluation de la littérature secondaire, y compris celle en russe.

- L’analyse des spectacles sélectionnés explorant des interactions entre la musique et le théâtre.

La littérature sur les théories de la mise en scène en Russie est abondante, comprenant des aperçus généraux écrits par des chercheurs tels que Laurence Senelick, Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, Nicholas Rzhevsky et Anatolii Al’tshuller28, et des études détaillées sur ou par les figures autoritaires du théâtre russe tels que Konstantin Stanislavski, Vsevolod Meyerhold et Nikolai Evreinov29. Ces écrits sont mentionnés mais ne figurent pas directement dans cette thèse, qui cherche plutôt à rétablir les faits historiques et trouver le bon équilibre entre les différentes interprétations. Beaucoup plus rares sont les études portant sur l’analyse de la performance théâtrale. En outre, je suis convaincue que le rôle de la musique dans les mises en scène du corpus de cette thèse est plus important que le crédit qu’on lui a accordé. Il semble alors essentiel de renforcer cet aspect avec les rares contributions théoriques dans le domaine de la musique et du son pour la scène, notamment au travers des écrits de Patrice Pavis et David Roesner.


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Pavis reconnaît deux types d’analyse de spectacle: ‘l’analyse-reportage’ et ‘l’analyse-reconstitution’. Le premier type décrit le déroulement du spectacle en en éclairant les points forts, etc. Ce type d’analyse se fait au cours du spectacle, ou immédiatement après, et saisit la performance de l’intérieur mais plutôt de manière superficielle en restituant les détails et en faisant l’expérience concrète de ce qui touche le spectateur au moment de la représentation.

Le deuxième type d’analyse, ‘l’analyse-reconstitution’, s’inscrit dans les traditions de conservation et d’entretiens des monuments historiques/culturels et il est par sa nature post festum. C’est ce type d’analyse qui est utilisé pour le corpus de cette thèse.

Elle collectionne les indices, les reliques ou les documents de la représentation ainsi que les énoncés d’intention des artistes écrits pendant la préparation des spectacles et le cas échéant, les enregistrements mécaniques. Pour cette thèse, il faut par ailleurs ajouter les rapports scénographiques, les discussions des comités de censure et de la culture, les exposés des metteurs en scène pour les établissements culturels d’état comme GlavRepertKom (Glavnyi repertuarnyi komitet, la commission d’approbation du répertoire des artistes, chargée également de la censure), les correspondances entre le metteur en scène et le compositeur, mais aussi les documents qui décrivent le climat politico-culturel et les doctrines du régime au moment de la préparation du spectacle et de sa création car, comme l’affirme Pavis, une composante majeure de cette analyse est la contextualisation du spectacle. Et même si l’analyse-reconstitution ne peut pas faciliter « une évaluation esthétique objective » de la performance, elle offre les moyens d’une évaluation du concept de l’artiste et de l’effet de l’œuvre finale sur les spectateurs de l’époque.

Insistant sur la nature même d’une performance comme la représentation du texte dramatique, Pavis s’oppose à la segmentation analytique basée sur le texte original et suggère que le processus de découpage soit « en conformité avec l’organisation temporelle du cadre rythmique. » Adapté pour le corpus de cette thèse, ce découpage est basé sur des unités observables et audibles (y compris musicales), suivant le rythme de la performance, les mouvements et la composition musicale de la mise en scène, en accordant une attention particulière aux moments où le texte de Shakespeare a été modifié par le traducteur et /ou le metteur en scène et est donc hors de synchronisation avec la structure dramatique de l’original.

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Parmi les composantes des deux principales mises en scène analysées dans cette étude, il y a des fonctionnalités telles que le jeu d’acteur, sa voix, l’éclairage, les couleurs et les mouvements sur scène qui ne peuvent être reconstruits que partiellement, en utilisant des témoignages rapportés et les écrits des critiques. Cependant, la nature éphémère de la représentation théâtrale signifie aussi que certains éléments auraient pu rencontrer d’autres réactions, d’autres témoignages, lors d’autres nuits de performance. Ces éléments non réellement mesurables seront donc utilisés et rapportés avec prudence et seulement quand il y a un intérêt particulier.

Si les études sur l’appropriation de Shakespeare se réfèrent constamment au cinéma et au théâtre, la musique qui les accompagne est souvent négligée. En fait, la musique de scène est un domaine sous-développé au sein de la musicologie. Les ouvrages sur les théories théâtrales ne la traitent que très partiellement, tandis que les ouvrages musicologiques sur ce thème sont négligeables. Les études musicologiques les plus proches sont celles sur la musique de film (Michel Chion), le théâtre musical ou éventuellement le ballet. Néanmoins, parmi les études dramatiques on peut nommer une thèse de doctorat31, un ouvrage récent qui est plutôt un guide pour les compositeurs s’intéressant à la musique de scène32, et enfin les ouvrages de David Roesner qui a enquêté sur ce qu’il appelle la « musicalisation » du théâtre33.

Pour Pavis, la musique de scène se compose de tous les messages sonores qui atteignent les oreilles des spectateurs ; il insiste sur l’influence de cette « musique » sur la perception globale du spectacle par le fait qu’elle crée une atmosphère qui rend le public particulièrement réceptif à l’événement théâtral. Roesner confirme cette fonction de la musique de scène : « étant donné que la musique est une langue abstraite et souvent non-référentielle, la musicalisation dans le théâtre se traduira également par des changements dans les attentes traditionnelles de l’auditoire de la communication théâtrale. » Mais se fondant sur une affinité entre la musique et le théâtre, Roesner développe davantage la notion de « musicalité » d’une mise en scène et soutient que la musicalisation considère le théâtre au-delà du texte. Ce processus se fonde sur la relation entre musique et théâtre, où la musique

devient l’un des déterminants de la structure du spectacle et entre dans une interaction avec le texte dramatique.

L’impact et les implications de la musicalisation, selon Roesner, pourraient être étudiés sur trois niveaux indissociables : au niveau du projet du spectacle, au niveau structurel, et au niveau perceptif.

Ces trois étapes s’appliquent aux deux spectacles du corpus de cette thèse. Pour le premier niveau, il faut prendre en compte les correspondances entre le metteur en scène et le compositeur, les exposés, les déclarations, et les comptes rendus des discussions internes, ainsi que les œuvres et les projets parallèles du compositeur et du metteur en scène ainsi que la place du spectacle dans l’ensemble de leurs œuvres. Le niveau structurel est examiné au travers des livrets de spectacles, des esquisses des metteurs en scène et des décorateurs, des photos et éventuellement des costumes ainsi que des partitions, des manuscrits, des parties d’orchestre, et les autres matériaux qui mettent en relation la musique, la mise en scène et le texte modifié du spectacle. Enfin, pour le troisième niveau, le plus discuté surtout dans les études sémantiques et sémiologiques, le point de départ se trouve dans les revues de presse, les articles spécialisés, le contexte politico-culturel et son évolution du projet jusqu’au moment de la création, et l’évaluation des attentes officielles et celles de public.

Une performance ne donne tout son sens que lorsqu’on l’analyse en relation avec la musique, et il n’y a guère de sens à commenter la musique d’un spectacle indépendamment de sa mise en scène. Étant donné qu’il n’y a pas d’enregistrements vidéo des deux spectacles, une étape essentielle dans la compréhension de cette phase de ‘Shakespearisme’ soviétique serait idéalement une reconstruction impliquant mise en scène et musique. Ouvrant cette possibilité, cette thèse vise non seulement à identifier et évacuer les idées reçues dans le domaine de la réception et de l’interprétation, mais également à souligner les éléments principaux que ces reconstructions auraient à prendre en compte. Il serait certainement absurde de tenter une telle entreprise sans incorporer les musiques de Chostakovitch et Prokofiev, qui sont si fondamentales pour les deux mises en scène d’Hamlet les plus significatives à l’époque de Staline. Toutefois, si cette possibilité doit être prise au sérieux, elle exige une connaissance raisonnable du contexte dans une interrelation avec la musique chez Shakespeare puis son influence dans les créations ultérieures, ce que la première partie de ce résumé démontre.
Plan détaillé de la thèse et contenus des chapitres

Il serait possible de passer directement de cet aperçu historique de la musique dans Hamlet et des préoccupations méthodologiques à la partie centrale de cette thèse, qui se concentre sur la conception, la réalisation et la réception des deux mises en scène les plus importantes d’Hamlet à l’époque de Staline. Cependant, ces mises en scène ont émergé au sein de leur propre tradition nationale dont leurs créateurs étaient au fait.


Les chapitres 2 et 3 se concentrent sur l’étude et l’analyse des Hamlet d’Akimov et de Radlov, respectivement.

Lorsqu’en 1932 le jeune artiste Nikolaï Akimov fit ses débuts comme metteur en scène en montant Hamlet au Théâtre Vakhtangov à Moscou, personne ne s’attendait à l’un des plus grands scandales de l’histoire du théâtre russe/soviétique. Sa réalisation avait pourtant tous les éléments typiques des œuvres de Vsevolod Meyerhold, y compris une musique de scène excentrique : celle du jeune Dimitri Chostakovitch. Toutefois, même Meyerhold critiqua

On a longtemps cherché à justifier les choix, controversés, d’Akimov pour sa mise en scène cynique, inattendue d’Hamlet. Les différentes théories s’étendent d’une simple parodie politique à une influence marquée de Meyerhold. Gerard McBurney, dans son article sur Chostakovitch et le théâtre suggère qu’ « Akimov avait l’intention de mettre Hamlet à l’envers. »

Pourtant les articles détaillés du metteur en scène révèlent des choix basés sur une lecture très attentive et intelligente de la pièce et une compréhension des tragédies élisabéthaines : « Les tragédies élisabéthaines, comme nous le savons, se développèrent toujours sur deux plans clairement parallèles : la comédie et la tragédie. »

Akimov décida donc d’insister sur le côté farce de la pièce, souvent négligé par les metteurs en scène. En effet, il voulait démontrer qu’Hamlet pourrait et devrait être interprété autrement que chez Craig/Stanislavski ou Mikhaïl Tchekhov, et il constate qu’ « en relisant Hamlet, le Prince danois, la pièce ne m’apparut pas du tout une œuvre symbolique comme c’était montré lors de la mise en scène du théâtre MKhAT II… »

C’est ainsi qu’Akimov décida d’éviter le symbolisme et le mysticisme à tout prix et de centrer l’action sur la lutte pour le trône. Ainsi Hamlet, à l’aide d’Horatio, simule l’apparition du spectre de son père pour trouver des adeptes. Cette interprétation pour la scène avec le spectre était inspirée par les écrits d’Erasme et surtout par un extrait du 4e volume des Colloques. En s’appuyant sur les deux identités sociales d’Hamlet, Prince et étudiant (à l’université de Wittenberg), Akimov insiste sur la notion d’un Hamlet-humaniste de la Renaissance. Il montre les parties du texte de Shakespeare qui ressemblent à celles des

36 Nikolai Akimov, « О постановке ‘Гамleta’ в театре им. Вакхтангова », 123.
37 Ibid., 131.
Colloques, surtout dans le fameux monologue « Être ou ne pas être »\(^{38}\), qui est mis en scène autour d'une couronne et sous forme d’un dialogue entre Hamlet et Horatio, où Horatio prononce les phrases qui contiennent les doutes, tandis qu’Hamlet déclame les affirmations.

Insistant sur sa vision d’*Hamlet* en tant que pièce d’intrigue pleine d’énergie, Akimov fait un rapprochement entre les scènes où Hamlet fait semblant d’être fou et les comédies *slapstick*. C’est aussi dans ces dernières scènes que nous apprenons la mission principale d’Ophélie : une espionne parmi les espions ! Le destin de la jeune fille est aussi modifié. Après l’assassinat de son père par Hamlet, durant un bal, elle se met à boire, et se noie accidentellement. L’*Hamlet* d’Akimov se voulait certainement provocateur pour ainsi rouvrir la question du traitement des Classiques… Une question qui occupe des académiciens et des artistes depuis très longtemps\(^{39}\).

Malgré l’enthousiasme du public, la réaction de la presse fut négative, avec des critiques acerbes, et le spectacle fut rapidement retiré du Vakhtangov. Cependant la musique de Chostakovitch, contrairement à la mise en scène, reçut des critiques très positives\(^{40}\). Certaines estimaient même que la mise en scène les empêchait d’entendre la magnifique musique de Chostakovitch\(^{41}\). C’est d’ailleurs cette musique qui nous aide à mieux comprendre l’évolution du langage musical du compositeur.

Bien qu’Akimov ait choisi de situer son *Hamlet* au XVI siècle, la musique de Chostakovitch n’a pas grand-chose à voir avec cette période. Ici les intonations de la musique de Chostakovitch sont très appropriées au langage musical populaire des années 20 et 30 : excentrique, avec beaucoup d’énergie et de tonus. Le compositeur fait appel aux genres comme le galop, le cancan et même le tango\(^{42}\).

La plus grande réussite de Chostakovitch ici est la musicalisation de l’ironie d’*Hamlet*. C’est également pour cette tâche que Tchaïkovski a dit : « la musique ne peut pas trouver de moyen pour révéler l’ironie qui est cachée dans les mots d’Hamlet. »\(^{43}\) En effet, la musique de Chostakovitch représente la mise en scène d’Akimov dans une certaine mesure, cependant,

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 129-131.


\(^{42}\) Marina Sabinina, *Simfonyi Shostakovicha*, Moscou, Muzyka, 1976, 75.

occasionnellement, elle va à l’encontre des solutions d’Akimov et se rapproche des idéaux shakespeariens. Par conséquent, il y a parfois une sorte de contradiction dans les personnages de la pièce. Le personnage d’Ophélie est un exemple représentatif de cette notion. D’une part, elle est associée aux épisodes musicaux comme « le galop de Polonius et d’Ophélie » qui est sarcastique et très tonique, où la musique de danse, un cancan, est en accord avec la femme légère imaginée par Akimov. Mais d’autre part, il y a des scènes avec une musique très délicate, comme la berceuse, ou encore tragique, comme le requiem.

Une caractéristique qui deviendra par la suite la marque de fabrique du langage musical de Chostakovitch, et qui est pleinement représentée ici, est l’utilisation de la musique quotidienne (en russe byt) pour décrire la corruption et le déclin, ici d’Elseneur, afin de révéler de façon plutôt paradoxale la vraie tragédie. En l’absence d’une véritable tragédie, comme c’est le cas dans la mise en scène d’Akimov, la parodie et la moquerie sont inévitables. Un très bon exemple de cette notion se trouve encore une fois dans le traitement d’Ophélie.

La chanson qu’elle interprète durant le bal qui suit la mort de son père et précède sa propre mort, ressemble aux chansons de cabaret, et ce n’est pas pour rien, car elle chante des paroles pleines de suggestions sexuelles (acte 4, scène 5). Chostakovitch composa la musique d’Hamlet parallèlement à son travail sur son deuxième opéra, Lady Macbeth, et les deux partitions ont plusieurs points communs. Comparons la scène ci-dessus avec la dernière scène de l’opéra, où Sergei, l’amoureux de Katerina (Lady Macbeth), essaie de séduire l’une des détenues, Sonietka. Pour cela il revient vers Katerina et lui demande ses bas. Désespérée, et sachant qu’elle a perdu l’affection de Sergei, elle les lui remet. Elle chante alors le même motif qu’Ophélie lors de sa chanson suggestive.

En m’appuyant sur les sources primaires et les matériaux des archives et en tenant compte du contexte politico-culturel du pays soviétique, je cherche, dans ce deuxième chapitre, à mieux comprendre les intentions artistiques d’Akimov pour son Hamlet et à souligner les points de convergences et de divergences avec la musique de Chostakovitch. Enfin, la question se pose de savoir si une musique, dont la fonction est d’accompagner un spectacle, peut le desservir par sa qualité même. Cette observation contribue certainement à une meilleure compréhension de la nature scandaleuse de cette « Shakespérie » d’Akimov et sa chute subséquente.

44 Elena Zinkevich, « Muzyka k pervomu Gamletu », 98.
Sept ans plus tard, en 1938, le succès de la mise en scène d’*Hamlet* au Théâtre de Radlov (plus tard Lensovet) à Léningrad par Sergei Radlov (metteur en scène), Sergei Prokofiev (compositeur) et Vladimir Dmitriev (artiste scénographe) coïncida avec la dernière phase des grandes purges staliniennes. Cette mise en scène semble à bien des égards être à l’opposé de celle d’Akimov. De plus, en mettant l’accent sur l’héroïsme et le positivisme, elle est apparentement en accord avec la doctrine réaliste socialiste. Il n’y a pourtant aucun doute, la carrière créative de Radlov est le résultat de négociations conscientes et inconscientes dans un climat politico-culturel tendu du pays. D’autre part, un grand nombre de tendances réalistes socialistes de Radlov, déjà considéré au milieu des années 1930 comme le metteur en scène par excellence du théâtre Shakespearien soviétique, se sont manifestées avant même l’introduction de la doctrine en 1934.

Tout au long de sa carrière shakespearienne, Radlov publia plusieurs articles dans lesquels il décrit sa méthodologie. Pour lui, il n’existait qu’une seule façon correcte d’aborder les œuvres de Shakespeare et de les mettre en scène : « une interprétation réaliste » (realisticheskaya traktovka)\(^45\). Ainsi c’est seulement en travaillant sur cette approche essentielle que le metteur en scène serait en mesure de présenter un Shakespeare « authentique ». La première étape de ce processus, selon Radlov, consiste à étudier le temps et la situation historique de l’Angleterre où Shakespeare a vécu et travaillé, ainsi que le profil social de l’auteur dans ce contexte. Par son principe, cette approche était similaire à celle d’Akimov avec sa lecture matérialiste et dialectique du contexte d’*Hamlet*.

Pour Radlov, *Hamlet* était un prolongement naturel de son travail sur les tragédies de Shakespeare, utilisant les nouvelles traductions de sa femme. Son théâtre s’était désormais installé dans des locaux plus grands et sa réputation en tant que « laboratoire de Shakespeare » signifiait que chacune de leurs mises en scène shakespeariennes était un événement très attendu par les critiques et la presse.

En ce qui concerne la musique de scène, la nature même du genre en général et celle de Prokofiev en particulier oblige à une étude à plusieurs niveaux : l’évolution du langage musical de Prokofiev, la pensée et l’approche du metteur en scène, l’essence de la pièce elle-même, et enfin le contexte politico-culturel. Prokofiev composa la musique des quatre spectacles entre 1934 et 1938, une période de transition à la fois pour le compositeur et pour

le pays. Préparant le retour à son pays natal et déjà âgé de plus de 40 ans, Prokofiev tenait à montrer son dévouement à son peuple et aurait utilisé toute occasion de faire connaître sa musique. Dans sa quête pour devenir un compositeur éminent, Prokofiev a profité des projets de collaboration avec les personnalités culturelles les plus connues de l’époque : Natal’ia Sats (Pierre et le loup), Meyerhold (Boris Godounov), Tairov (Nuits égyptiennes et Eugène Onéguine), Radlov (Roméo et Juliette et Hamlet) et Eisenstein. Malgré la simplification de son langage musical, Prokofiev a pris grand soin de se conformer aux exigences de ses collaborateurs. Selon les demandes des metteurs en scène, sa musique de scène devenait un mélodrame pour Nuits égyptiennes et Eugène Onéguine ou musique de scène traditionnelle pour Hamlet. Il est tentant d’expliquer cette tendance en se référant au contexte politico-cultural environnant chaque performance, l’élévation de l’esthétique stalinienne et le règne du réalisme socialiste. Cependant, une fois les instructions spécifiques de chaque metteur en scène, la nature de chaque pièce et son appropriation prises en compte, il devient clair que chaque œuvre est le produit d’une négociation entre les auteurs, les artistes et la société.

L’analyse approfondie de la mise en scène d’Hamlet, présentée dans le chapitre 3, est complétée par de nombreux documents d’archives, y compris les correspondances entre les créateurs du spectacle, ainsi que leurs exposés officiels, des articles et des croquis. Ce chapitre se veut une réévaluation plus objective des intentions du metteur en scène et de ses plans initiaux. Par exemple, la marche de Fortinbras est le mouvement musical le plus élaboré de l’ensemble de la musique Prokofiev pour ce spectacle. En effet, cette marche introduit plusieurs modulations, ce qui pourrait symboliser la liberté acquise avec l’arrivée de la figure rédemptrice de Fortinbras. Pour capturer la tension dramatique et l’évolution du spectacle, la marche ne retourne pas à la tonalité principale (si bémol majeur) et se détourne donc de la forme symphonique prévue et termine en un do majeur ensoleillé. Cette coda en do majeur est un moment de parfaite harmonie entre l’interprétation du metteur en scène et la musique de scène. L’apothéose édifiante est en accord avec la foi de Radlov dans l’optimisme de Shakespeare et son amour pour la vie. En même temps, elle correspond à la confession choisie par Prokofiev – « Christian Science ». Prokofiev, consciemment ou inconsciemment, conçut un bouquet final qui est comme un hymne à l’esprit humain, manifestation du divin. L’impression finale sur Hamlet est celle d’un héros positif, sans aucune ambiguïté, qui a combattu pour un but plus élevé et qui a permis l’évolution vers l’idéal politique et social en ouvrant le chemin pour le jeune Fortinbras. Cette interprétation optimiste est l’exact opposé de celle de Sergei Slonimsky dans son opéra de 1991 (chapitre 5). Pour Slonimsky, Fortinbras
serait encore un autre tyran semblable à Claudius, et la tragédie d’*Hamlet* n’aurait aucune notion d’optimisme, ni aucune lueur d’espoir.

L’étude d’*Hamlet* d’Akimov / Chostakovitch (1932) est basée sur une grande quantité de documents d’archives jusqu’alors inconnus ou négligés, qui servent à clarifier et à fournir de nombreux détails sur la mise en scène, ainsi que sa conception, sa réalisation et sa réception. Pour l’*Hamlet* de Radlov / Prokofiev (1938), les documents d’archives sont moins nombreux. En effet, le livret du metteur en scène et les rapports sténographiques des répétitions n’ont pas été découverts. Les détails du spectacle, sa genèse et son destin ont dû être travaillé sur les documents d’archives existants : les lettres et les écrits de Radlov et de Prokofiev, leur collaboration pour le ballet *Roméo et Juliette*, divers rapports et réminiscences de leurs contemporains à propos d’*Hamlet*, ainsi qu’à partir des revues de presse de l’époque, notamment le compte rendu détaillé d’*Hamlet* par Il’ia Brezark. Il y présente ce qu’il appelle un « portrait du spectacle » et décrit visuellement chaque scène perçue du point de vue du public. Par conséquent, les descriptions scène par scène de ces deux *Hamlet* s’appuient sur des documents de nature différente avec leur propre méthodologie, mais chacune contribue à la compréhension des destins de la mise en scène et de sa musique.

La seconde moitié de l’ère stalinienne (de 1938 jusqu’à la mort du dictateur en mars 1953) ne fut pas seulement une vitrine fascinante pour le statut culturel et politique en évolution du régime, mais a également été marquée par des événements internationaux sismiques, surtout la Seconde Guerre mondiale et les débuts de la Guerre froide. La place d’*Hamlet* dans l’Union Soviétique pendant cette période a été l’objet de beaucoup de spéculations et exige sa propre démythologisation prudente. Ceci est effectué au chapitre 4. Dans ce chapitre, je retrace le parcours extraordinaire de Radlov ainsi que de son *Hamlet* après le déclenchement de la Guerre mondiale. Cette thèse se termine par un chapitre qui contient un aperçu des mises en scène d’*Hamlet* sur les grandes scènes de Moscou et de Léningrad presque immédiatement après la mort de Staline, et d’un aperçu des adaptations diverses (y compris pour le cinéma) et des mises en musique et danse d’*Hamlet* par la suite (chapitre 5).

Ensemble, elles montrent comment le texte de Shakespeare et les esprits créatifs du théâtre, du ballet et de l’opéra ont continué à se diffuser en se confrontant dans un climat politico-cultural en pleine évolution. Ce processus de négociation et de réadaptation constante est la

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raison pour laquelle il serait difficile de suggérer des cas de figures parallèles dans le pays ou même à l’extérieur.

Il y a quelque chose de particulièrement attirant, même dangereux, à propos des sujets culturels liés à l’époque de Staline : ils exercent un appel au niveau de la *Schadenfreude* à laquelle il peut être difficile d’échapper. En même temps, ils se nourrissent de la tentation du culte du héros : découvrir ou réhabiliter des personnes qui peuvent vraisemblablement être reconnues comme résistants à la tyrannie, et qui nous font fantasmer sur ce que nous aurions fait.

Même si ces pulsions viles peuvent être repoussées, d’autres pièges intellectuels doivent être identifiés et traités comme tels. Le mythe de « l’interdiction » posée par Staline sur les mises en scène d’*Hamlet*, discuté au chapitre 4, en est un exemple révélateur. Gagner un peu de clarté sur le statut de ce mythe ouvre la voie à des études plus subtiles sur ce qui motiva les artistes engagés des périodes stalinienne et post-stalinienne. En outre, le fait qu’à l’époque, ce mythe/rumeur fut accepté comme une réalité plutôt que comme une fiction offre un témoignage de la société russe et de sa culture.

De manière plus abstraite, il y a quelque chose de séduisant à propos d’*Hamlet* : c’est un objectif et une quête reconnus pour des ambitions créatives/théâtrales en collision avec une culture de (auto-) censure et contraintes idéologiques. Les artistes impliqués dans les projets de mises en scène d’*Hamlet* avaient-ils assez de la liberté pour mettre leurs concepts en pratique ? Peut-on affirmer la sincérité des documents survivants ? Et si non, comment peut-on les comprendre et tisser des rapports entre eux et leur héritage ?

Répondre à ces questions est l’objet que je me suis fixé dans cette thèse et que j’espère continuer à développer dans des projets de recherche en découlant. Cependant cette recherche ne se fonde sur aucune méthodologie définitive existante, mais bien plus sur une combinaison de plusieurs d’entre elles. J’ai alors pris en compte principalement les théories de Patrice Pavis relatives à l’analyse et à la lecture interculturelle de la performance, les écrits d’Alexa Huang sur un « Shakespeare global », les études d’Aleksei Semenenko sur les traductions d’*Hamlet* en russe, des œuvres de Christopher Wilson sur la musique dans Shakespeare, ainsi que les analyses musicologiques des théories de l’intonation et des topos (Agawu et al.) et des concepts dramaturgiques tels que la pyramide de Freitag.
Concernant les études historiques et interprétatives existantes sur les *Hamlet* russes, l’ouvrage d’Eleanor Rowe (*Hamlet: A Window on Russia*) permet une bonne entrée dans le sujet. Ma recherche, cependant, nuance l’étude de Rowe en y ajoutant des sources d’archives et propose des matériaux complémentaires, et des détails sur les mises en scène et sur la musique inspirée par *Hamlet*, pour ainsi peindre une image plus précise et complète de l’assimilation d’*Hamlet* (et de son caractère) dans la culture russe.

D’ailleurs, le livre de Rowe (dont l’étude s’arrête dans les années 1970) ne montre pas vraiment comment chaque interprétation d’*Hamlet* en Russie offre un miroir des spécificités de la société au moment de la production. Bien sûr, l’idée d’*Hamlet* en tant qu’un « trope ou miroir culturel » à travers lequel l’âme humaine et la conscience peuvent être examinés est loin d’être exclusif à la Russie, et cette idée a été explorée par des chercheurs ainsi que par des artistes. La mise en scène de 2009 de Gregory Dornan au Royal Shakespeare Company pour la BBC, avec David Tennant dans le rôle principal, use de miroirs omniprésents, y compris des miroirs brisés, et élève cette métaphore à un nouveau niveau. Les miroirs disposés également dans les films de Kenneth Branagh et de Kozintsev sont comme des instruments d’auto-réflexion et de confession intime. Le présent projet a eu pour but de démontrer par une analyse détaillée et par la contextualisation des mises en scène d’*Hamlet* en Russie, en particulier à l’ére stalinienne, que l’image de la tragédie comme un miroir, même trompeur, d’un contexte social est pertinent.

Cependant, les artistes créateurs vont bien au-delà de la simple acceptation passive de telles notions. Ils ont leurs propres personnalités et projets ou desseins, qui à leur tour jouent un rôle important dans la définition et l’utilisation du « miroir ». Ce dernier, déjà façonné de manière significative par les conditions et le climat politique de l’époque de Staline, serait ensuite incliné et facetté par des artistes qui évidemment ont cherché des réflexions d’eux-mêmes et de leurs idéologies. Même si le *Hamlet* russe a toujours cherché à rester, dans les mots de Jan Kott, « notre contemporain », les deux notions de « notre » et « contemporain » sont elles-mêmes formées conjointement par la société et les artistes eux-mêmes. Par conséquent, les contextes culturels et les compositions créatives des metteurs en scène et des compositeurs sont étroitement mis en lien avec les œuvres étudiées dans cette thèse. C’est d’ailleurs ce que j’ai cherché à démontrer d’une manière plus complète que dans les études existantes.

On peut certainement apprendre beaucoup sur le tempérament russe à partir de ces aspects de la tragédie qui ont inspiré et résonné avec des artistes et des traducteurs russes, et à partir d’interprétations (ou si on utilise la terminologie de Gaydin, « Hamletisations ») qui ont été approuvées. Ce reflet du tempérament russe a perduré avec les adaptations multi-génériques d’*Hamlet* dans l’ère post-stalinienne, comme mon étude sélective du chapitre 4 l’a démontré.

**La place de Shakespeare dans les œuvres de Chostakovitch et Prokofiev**

Cette thèse contribue à une compréhension plus complète du développement créatif de deux grands compositeurs soviétiques. Comme dans toute rencontre entre une personnalité créative imposante – Chostakovitch – et une œuvre d’envergure – Hamlet – la musique n’a pu complètement se soumettre à la forme du texte pour évoluer vers une interprétation propre.

La tradition d’*Hamlet* russe ne fut plus tout à fait la même après la rencontre créative de Chostakovitch avec la tragédie, et de même, Chostakovitch resta marqué par son travail sur cette œuvre. Comme je l’ai dit au chapitre 2, le compositeur, en collaboration sur le projet d’*Hamlet* avec de grandes personnalités du monde théâtral de l’Union soviétique, se forma d’une manière qui doit encore être pleinement appréciée. En tant que jeune compositeur prodigieusement talentueux, mais encore sans objectif éthique défini, Chostakovitch était loin d’être complètement formé. Bien qu’il allait par la suite être victime de dénonciations officielles liées à son opéra *Lady Macbeth*, il était d’ors et déjà secoué par des pressions culturelles. La nature multi-facette d’*Hamlet*, accentuée par la fusion tragi-comique qu’en fit Akimov, a donné à la musique de Chostakovitch une sorte de dualité. Alors que le déroulement chronologique de son non moins tragi-comique deuxième opéra, *Lady Macbeth*

du district de Mtsensk, reste désespérément obscur, il est clair que cet engagement double a été un marqueur dans sa production créative. La double-voix deviendra un élément fondamental de son profil créatif, et une stratégie d’adaptation créative de choix dans les années à venir. Comme le montre le chapitre 4, le compositeur retourna aux dualités hamlétiennes non seulement dans sa musique de film célèbre pour Kozintsev mais aussi dans ses œuvres ultérieures (les cycles de chansons de Blok et Tsvetaeva), en explorant davantage les aspects de la tragédie qui ont résonné avec sa croissante obsession de la mort. On pourrait donc faire valoir que, parallèlement à Gogol, Shakespeare fut l’une des figures littéraires les plus importantes pour Chostakovitch. Comme les études de Zhitomirskii et Orlov l’indiquent, le thème de ‘Chostakovitch et Shakespeare’ apparaît dans les études sur Chostakovitch, mais ces études ne font guère justice à la signification de ce thème, et elles sont remarquablement rares.

Par rapport à Chostakovitch, la rencontre de Prokofiev avec Hamlet eut lieu à un stade plus avancé de sa carrière, avec une identité créative depuis longtemps établie, et, comme indiqué dans le chapitre 3, après avoir travaillé avec de grandes personnalités théâtrales telles que Tairov et Meyerhold. Malgré cela, son travail sur Hamlet coïncide avec une période où il essayait de trouver ses marques dans l’Union Soviétique, ce qu’il était autorisé à faire. Il était également préoccupé à arracher la place de compositeur soviétique le plus éminent à Chostakovitch. Toujours blessé par l’expérience de l’annulation de Roméo et Juliette, et malgré le renouvellement de sa collaboration avec Sergei Radlov, la nature du travail sur Hamlet était très différente de leur ballet, et son effet sur la production, en termes de sujets philosophiques, fut presque immédiat. Son travail sur Hamlet était certainement déjà orienté vers son prochain opus – la collaboration avec Eisenstein sur le film héroïque et patriotique Alexander Nevsky.

En effet, à partir de 1939, Prokofiev écrit ses œuvres instrumentales les plus épiques : les Sonates pour le piano n°s 6, 7, 8 (1939 à 1944) différent radicalement des précédentes en termes de but moral tout comme ses Symphonies n°s 5 (1944) et 6 (1945-1947) se démarquent des pièces antérieures dans leur épopée, leurs qualités héroïques et beethoveniennes, tandis que sa première Sonate pour violon (1938-1946) a été l’une de ses œuvres les plus profondes. Son travail sur Hamlet s’érigé alors en précurseur de sujets philosophiques, et l’encouragea à créer dans ce genre, territoire connu de Chostakovitch, et donc à rivaliser pour le statut de leader parmi les compositeurs soviétiques. Ainsi, bien qu’Hamlet ne semble pas avoir le même rôle dans le développement de Prokofiev que pour
Chostakovitch, cette étude a été alimentée en partie par la conviction que ce rôle fut en réalité plus important que ce qui en est rapporté. La collaboration avec un shakspearologue et un metteur en scène shakespearien du calibre de Radlov était une partie importante du processus de recherche, pour Prokofiev, d’une plus grande profondeur de son langage et d’une image plus sérieuse de lui-même en tant qu’un artiste purgeant progressivement sa personnalité exhibitionniste.

Reconstruction d’*Hamlet* d’Akimov: un projet utopique ou réaliste?

On pourrait faire valoir qu’*Hamlet* d’Akimov fut la mise en scène la plus fondamentale de la tragédie au cours de l’ère stalinienne. Elle fut certainement la plus discutée. Malgré ses défauts supposés, qui, comme le chapitre 2 le démontre, furent le résultat de nombreux facteurs différents, cette mise en scène consolida la réputation d’Akimov, diffusa ses idées, et contribua au retour d’*Hamlet* sur la scène soviétique, ainsi qu’à l’ouverture d’une porte sur la possibilité des futures mises en scène iconoclastes. Cette porte a rapidement été fermée durant les terreaurs stalinianes mais jamais définitivement verrouillée et boulonnée. La mise en scène, qui a vu la collaboration de plusieurs personnalités théâtrales et musicales importantes, fut un épícentre autour duquel plusieurs mouvements artistiques de l’époque se sont réunis.

L’un des objectifs secondaires de ce projet a été de fournir des matériaux dérivés et de travailler à partir de sources d’archives, de critiques de presse et de témoignages ainsi que d’autres sources secondaires qui pourraient contribuer à une reconstruction partielle ou totale de cette mise en scène. Il va de soi que toute tentative de reconstruction est compliquée par des rapports contradictoires qui sont apparus à l’époque, et par les mythes associés avec les personnes concernées. Toutefois, dans le cas de l’*Hamlet* d’Akimov/Chostakovitch, ces rapports, vus à la lumière des sources disponibles, décrivent les idées originales du metteur en scène, et ne font que renforcer l’importance d’une telle reconstruction.

Compte tenu de la résonance de cette mise en scène avec de nombreuses interprétations tragi-comiques post-soviétiques de Shakespeare en général et d’*Hamlet* en particulier, le but d’un tel projet, apparemment utopique, va au-delà d’un simple exercice historique ou d’une restauration d’antiquaire. Cela pourrait être une expérience théâtrale viable.

Cette étude a donc pour but de fournir un compte rendu détaillé des processus de pensée de ses principaux protagonistes (Akimov et Chostakovitch, Prokofiev et Radlov) dans le

Quant à Radlov et son Hamlet, un résultat important de cette étude a été d’en montrer la genèse de sa double casquette et de sa figure hybride de shakespearologue et metteur en scène shakespearien. C’est avec une telle combinaison de théorie et de pratique que Kozintsev y a été associé à partir des années 1960. Retracer les origines de la carrière shakespearienne de Radlov et la suivre de ses premières mises en scène à l’éclatement de la guerre, renforce l’importance que le théâtre russe / soviétique a accordé à Hamlet ainsi qu’à d’autres œuvres de Shakespeare. Pour Radlov comme pour tant d’autres, Hamlet ressort comme le point culminant d’une carrière artistique, et pour lequel des années de préparation furent nécessaires.

En mettant ces deux mises en scène en lien avec les appropriations de Shakespeare / Hamlet avant et après l’ère stalinienne, cette étude démontre que, malgré les doctrines les plus strictes et les plus répressives de cette période et de l’histoire culturelle soviétique, les (re)productions d’Hamlet n’étaient pas moins créatives, « contemporaines », et tout autant représentatives des problèmes et des caractéristiques de leur temps.

La notion d’Hamlet comme pièce politique est davantage considérée comme une caractéristique d’Europe de l’Est que d’Occident. Une comparaison des adaptations cinématographiques d’Olivier et de Kozintsev, par exemple, révèle le contraste fondamental.
entre les préoccupations psychologiques d’Olivier et politico-sociales de Kozintsev. Il est difficile de trouver des équivalents occidentaux pour Akimov et Radlov en ce que leurs mises en scène ont délibérément infléchi la tragédie afin de l’adapter à un programme spécifique. En effet, l’influence des *Hamlet* russes / soviétiques dans l’Ouest et la conscience occidentale a été quelque peu inégale et ténue. En comparaison avec l’influence et la diffusion de certaines mises en scène de l’époque pré- et post-stalinienne (telles que celles de Craig et Stanislavski en 1911, ou Lyubimov et Vysotsky en 1971), le caractère fermé de la société stalinienne et le rideau de fer qui a persisté après la mort de Staline ont restreint l’impact international de la Shakespearologie de l’Europe Centrale et de l’Est en général et des mises en scène russes d’*Hamlet* en particulier. Les adaptations asiatiques, par exemple, se sont plus exportées.

Cela représente une des plus grandes occasions manquées du théâtre et du monde Shakespeareien. Le fait qu’il n’y ait actuellement aucune étude faisant autorité sur Shakespeare en Europe Centrale et de l’Est sous-entend que nous ne sommes qu’au début d’une nouvelle phase des activités académiques à cet égard. Si les études académiques et leurs implications pratiques pouvaient aller de pair pour combler cet écart, il y aurait un réel potentiel pour des redécouvertes dramatiques.
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements** 5

**Note on Transliteration, Abbreviations and Sources** 7

**Résumé substantiel** 9

La musique dans Shakespeare et notamment *Hamlet* 10

Shakespeare en musique 12

*Hamlet* en musique 14

*Hamlet* et la Russie 17

Choix du corpus et problématique (l’époque de Staline) 20

La méthodologie 22

Plan détaillé de la thèse et contenus des chapitres 27

La place de Shakespeare dans les œuvres de Chostakovitch et Prokofiev 36

Reconstruction d’*Hamlet* d’Akimov: un projet utopique ou réaliste? 38

**Table of Contents** 41

**List of Musical Examples** 45

**List of Illustrations** 47

**List of Tables** 49

**Introduction and Literature Review** 51

Mirrors and appropriations 51

Methodology 57

Music and/in Shakespeare 64

Music in *Hamlet* 69

*Hamlet* in music 72

Structure of the dissertation 78

**Chapter 1 *Hamlet* in Russia and the Soviet Union: an overview** 81

1.1 Origins 81

41
1.2 Hamlet, Hamletisation and Hamletism in 19th-century Russia 83
1.3 Russian Hamlets in the second half of the 19th century 89
1.4 Hamlet in pre-revolutionary Russian music 92
1.5 Hamlet under the Bolsheviks 95
1.6 Towards Hamlet under Stalin – Nikolai Akimov and Sergei Radlov 97

Chapter 2 Conception and Realisation, or How Akimov and Shostakovich’s ‘Shakesperiment’ Blew Up 123

2.1 Introduction 123
2.2 Anatomy of a scandal 124
2.3 Immediate background 127
2.4 Text, translation and adaptation 131
2.5 Meyerhold versus Akimov 133
2.6 Internal debates 135
2.7 Aftermath and reception 143
2.8 Page vs Stage vs Age 151
2.9 Music and reception 154
2.10 Akimov and Shostakovich’s Hamlet: Act-by-act description and analysis 162
2.11 The relationship of Shostakovich’s music to Akimov’s staging 197

Chapter 3 Sergei Radlov’s Shakespearealism 203

3.1 The year 1932: A tale of two productions 204
3.2 Radlov’s Shakespearean productions before Hamlet 206
3.3 ‘How I stage Shakespeare’ 212
3.4 Sergei Prokofiev and the theatre 217
3.5 Hamlet (1938): The production as reported 231
3.6 Radlov’s Hamlet: Conclusion 274

Chapter 4 Hamlet in Crisis 275

4.1 Introduction: Hamlet and Stalin 275
4.2 Radlov’s Hamlet and the Shakespeare celebrations of 1939 276
4.3 Pre-war and wartime Hamlets: Radlov’s unfulfilled plans, evacuation and fall 282
4.4 *Hamlet* in crisis: MKhAT and the Stalin ‘ban’  

4.5 Post-war *Hamlet*: The Zhdanov affair and Soviet Shakespearology  

**Chapter 5 Critical *Hamlets***  

5.1 *Hamlet* fever during the Thaw: A tale of three productions  
5.2 Kozintsev’s concept and Shostakovich’s music (theatre and film)  
5.3 The Shakespeare celebrations of 1964  
5.4 *Hamlet* after the Thaw: a multi-generic affair  

**Conclusion**  

The place of Shakespeare in the works of Shostakovich and Prokofiev  
Reconstruction of Akimov’s *Hamlet*: Quixotic or realistic?  

**Bibliography**  

Scores  
Discography and filmography  
Webography  

**Appendices**  

Appendix Table 1: Sergei Radlov’s theatre career: An overview  
Appendix Table 2: Akimov and Shostakovich’s *Hamlet* – musical numbers  

**Abstracts**
List of Musical Examples

Ex. 2.1: Shostakovich, *Hamlet* Act 1, ‘Night Patrol’, opening; b) Symphony No. 10, second movement, opening

Ex. 2.2: Shostakovich, *Hamlet*, Act 1, ‘Funeral March’, bars 16-19

Ex. 2.3: Shostakovich, *Hamlet*, Act 1, ‘Exit of the King and Queen’ (complete)

Ex. 2.4: Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 1, ‘Dance Music’


Ex. 2.6: a) Davidenko, ‘Nas pobit’ khoteli’; b) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 2, [Scene with Hamlet and Rosencrantz], adapted from Sheinberg, *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque*, 104

Ex. 2.7: Shostakovich a) *Hamlet*, Act 2, [Arrival of the Actors]; b) Symphony No. 3, bars 262-71

Ex. 2.8: Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 2, ‘Dialogue of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’


Ex. 2.11: a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 3, ‘Exit of the Poisoner’; b) *Lady Macbeth*, Act 2

Ex. 2.12: Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 3, Flute scene

Ex. 2.13: Shostakovich *Hamlet*, King’s monologue


Ex. 2.16: a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 4, ‘Lullaby’; b) Shostakovich String Quartet No. 1, first movement
Ex. 2.17: a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 4, ‘Joust’; b) Shostakovich *King Lear* (1941), Songs of the Fool, No.1 196

Ex. 3.1: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Claudius’s March 238


Ex. 3.3: a) Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 4 (Pantomime); b) Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 4 (Pantomime), R15 250

Ex. 3.4: Prokofiev *Hamlet*, No. 5 (Ophelia’s first song), opening 261

Ex. 3.5: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 6 (Ophelia’s second song) 262

Ex. 3.6: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 7 (Ophelia’s third song), opening 263

Ex. 3.7: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 8 (Ophelia’s fourth song), opening 264

Ex. 3.8: Prokofiev *Hamlet*, No. 9 (Gravedigger’s song) complete 266

Ex. 3.9: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 10 (Fortinbras’s March) R8-11 273


Ex. 5.3: ‘How should I your true love know?’ (traditional) 311

Ex. 5.4: a) and b): Shostakovich, *Blok cycle*, No. 1 ‘Ophelia’s Song’ 318


Ex. 5.6: ‘Thematic system’ in Sergei Slonimsky, *Hamlet* 329

Ex. 5.7: Slonimsky, *Hamlet* Act II, Prologue 334
List of Illustrations

Plate 2.1: Official Poster for Akimov’s *Hamlet* 141

Plate 2.2: Akimov’s Horatio played by Aleksandr Kozlovskii (with the clay pot used for the ‘Ghost’ scene) 165

Plate 2.3: *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre (1932), first appearance of the Ghost (I/I) 167

Plate 2.4: *Hamlet*, Vakhtangov Theatre (1932), second appearance of the Ghost (I/5) 173

Plate 2.5: *Hamlet*, Vakhtangov Theatre (1932), ‘To be or not to be’ 186

Plate 2.6: *Hamlet*, Vakhtangov Theatre (1932), Act 3, after ‘Murder of Gonzago’ 187

Plate 2.7: *Hamlet*, Vakhtangov Theatre (1932), design for Graveyard Scene 194

Plate 3.1: Stage design for Act 1 Scene 2 239

Plate 3.2: Polonius 245

Plate 3.3: Hamlet welcomes actors 247

Plate 3.4: The spectators of ‘The Mousetrap’ 252

Plate 3.5: Claudius’ prayer scene 253

Plate 3.6: Hamlet confronting his mother 254

Plate 3.7: Actors of Ophelia (from left) T. Pevtsova (1), Y. Iakobson (3) and N. Vladimirova (2) 258

Plate 3.8: The first gravedigger with Hamlet and Horatio 267

Plate 3.9: The scene of the final fight 269

Plate 3.10: Death of Hamlet 270

Plate 5.1: Mikhail Vrubel’, *Hamlet and Ophelia*, 1888 320
List of Tables

Table 1: Principal Archive and Library Collections used in this Dissertation ..................59

Table 2.1: Shostakovich’s Shakespearean works ..........................................................157

Table 3.1: Prokofiev’s music for stage and screen (1934-1938) ....................................218

Table 3.2: Sergei Radlov’s Hamlet – Musical Numbers ..................................................229

Table 3.3: Hypothetical Musical-dramatic Scenario of Radlov/Prokofiev Hamlet .............233
Introduction and Literature Review

Shakespeare has become our flesh and blood … Is not the picture of Hamlet closer and more understandable to us than to the French, let us say more than to the English?48

Mirrors and appropriations

Notwithstanding the recurrent mutual suspicion between Russia and the West, Shakespeare has been almost as sacrosanct to Russians as their own canonical authors, to the extent that, as Irena Makaryk has put it: ‘Shakespeare offers a window on Russian culture and its love-hate relationship with the West.’49 Inspired, perhaps, by the famous description of St Petersburg as a ‘Window on Europe’,50 this image has also been applied in a narrower Shakespearean context in the title of Eleanor Rowe’s influential book on Russian Hamlets.51 In fact, when it comes to considerations of this play in the Russian socio-political context, there is no shortage of alternative metaphors: for example mask, container and - based on Hamlet’s advice to the actors in the play within the play - mirror.52 Although each of these images helps to suggest the importance of Hamlet and its afterlife in Russia, clearly none is sufficient on its own. Indeed their usefulness rather depends on what meaning commentators ascribe to them. For Marvin Rosenberg the idea of ‘mask’ implies that Hamlet as a character is not a fixed entity, and only the individual performer and even reader can determine his specific design or mask. Semenenko’s ‘container’ implies that as a canonised text, Hamlet becomes a framework to be filled with a new content every single time it is interpreted. And the widely used image of the ‘mirror’ suggests that Russian or Soviet audiences could at any given moment read features of their own society into the action on stage, as could

50 The phrase is said to have been coined in 1739 by an Italian traveller, Francesco Algarotti, though it owes its popularity to Pushkin’s use of it in his 1833 poem, ‘The Bronze Horseman’ - see Robert Geraci, Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001, 5, n.1.
51 Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia.
52 See, respectively, Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Hamlet, London, Associated University Press, 1992; Aleksei Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign: Russian Translations of Hamlet and Literary Canon Formation, Stockholm, Stockholm University, 2007, 141; Hamlet, III/2/17-24: ‘… playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as ‘were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure’.
commentators after the fact. Such concepts underlie some of the interpretative content of this dissertation and will be refined and nuanced according to its detailed findings.

Recent scholarly trends in the fields of Global/Local Shakespeare and trans-cultural appropriation have argued that the Bard’s oeuvre not only reflects the social, political and cultural discourses of any given society but also has a role in forming them. Such ‘Boomerang Shakespeare’, as Alexa Huang observes, is symptomatic of global economics and international cultural developments. Notions of ‘Global’ and ‘Local’ are not exactly new entries in the field of Shakespeare scholarship. Already in his dedicatory poem in the Folio edition of 1623, Ben Jonson staked Shakespeare’s claim to universality (‘Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show/ To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe./ He was not of an age, but for all time’). As early as this time, ‘universal’ Shakespeare was held up in resistance to localised performances of the Bard. However, the wave of new scholarship since the 1990s has moved away from the binary opposition between Global and Local Shakespeare, concluding that Shakespearean appropriations ‘present a view of Shakespeare embedded not only in his own culture but in ours, forcing us to consider both the impact we have on the plays and the impact they have on us.’ Dennis Kennedy even argues that, relying solely on translation, and stripped of Shakespeare’s language, ‘some foreign performances [of

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53 Of course, the idea of Hamlet as, in Harold Bloom’s words, a ‘cultural trope or mirror’ – see Lingui Yang, ‘Cognition and Recognition: Hamlet’s Power of Knowledge’, in Harold Bloom (ed.), William Shakespeare’s Hamlet – New Edition, New York, Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009, 73-84, here 74 - through which the human soul and consciousness may be examined, is far from exclusive to Russia and has been explored by scholars and creative artists alike. Gregory Doran’s 2009 RSC production for the BBC, with David Tennant in the title role and with its omnipresent mirrors, including shattered ones, took this imagery to a new level. Mirrors also feature in Kenneth Branagh’s and Kozintsev’s films as instruments of self-reflection and intimate confessions. The source of this metaphor is indeed to be found in the tragedy itself. Apart from Shakespeare’s own mirror characterizations (Laertes as a mirror-image of Hamlet; Claudius as that of King Hamlet), there are direct references in the text, including the famous advice of Hamlet to the actors to ‘hold a mirror up to nature’ (III/2/17-24) and Hamlet’s confrontation with his mother (‘You go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you’ – III/4/20) when Gertrude sees, through Hamlet’s mirror, into her own soul: ‘And there I see such black and grained spots/ As will not leave their tinct. – III/4/90-93).


56 Leah Marcus, Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988, 44.

Shakespeare] may have a more direct access to the power of the plays.’

It is widely acknowledged that Eastern Europe offers a particularly intense case in point. According to Constantine Bida, for example, ‘the question of Shakespeare’s impact on the Slavic world looms in importance above all others dealing with Western influence on the cultural and artistic life of these nations.’ This influence, as Kennedy again points out, feeds back into the Western understanding of the Bard. As such, Hamlet, for example, which ‘to the liberal west’ is ‘an expression of individual spirit, to a censor in a more repressive land… is a threat.’ Jan Kott’s Shakespeare our Contemporary (published in Polish and French in 1962 and in English in 1964), is revealing in this respect. As Peter Brook has put it, Kott wrote assuming ‘that every one of his readers will at some point or other have been woken by the police in the middle of the night’, his highly anti-Stalinist study became ‘the most widely read book of Shakespearean criticism since A.C. Bradley’s Shakespearean Tragedy [first published in 1904]’. Whether local or global, appropriation of Shakespeare unarguably helps to keep his texts alive and their spheres of meaning expanding. Thus, for example, Salman Rushdie’s postmodern, meta-fictive palimpsests ironically reveal how Shakespeare’s literary endurance and global iconic status depend upon the revisions, adaptations, and appropriations of his work.

The Globe to Globe festival of 2012 ushered in a new wave of debates and studies around the phenomenon of Shakespeare’s influence and appropriation, and around the definition of these terms in modern practice. On this occasion Dennis Kennedy wisely reminded us that it is the flexibility rather than the universality of Shakespeare’s texts that has been the main contributing factor to his global popularity. Even more than the universal values they may be taken to represent, it is the flexibility of the text and structure of the plays that has resulted in their adaptations in various media and cultures. A particularly significant offspring of the

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59 Ibid., 4.
62 Jan Kott (1914–2001) was a leading Marxist and literary critic in Poland but later emigrated to the West and became a major dissident.
festival came in the form of the ‘Globe to Globe Hamlet’, a project that took the production of Hamlet by the Globe Theatre (directed by Dominic Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst) in English to (so the festival claimed) ‘every country’ in the space of two years.66

Of all Shakespeare’s plays, Hamlet is surely the most deeply engrained to the Russian psyche and national identity, to the point that it has been suggested that ‘to conceive the essence of any period of Russian history [since the arrival of Hamlet] you should just find out how people of that time interpreted [the] tragedy of Hamlet: then you’ll touch the nerve of the moment.’67 Nor is it only positive reactions to the play that are revealing: anti-Hamlet arguments and creative responses were just as significant in ‘mirroring with extraordinary precision the evolution of Russian society and culture.’68 Curiously, despite Lev Tolstoy’s documented hostile attitude towards Shakespeare and Hamlet,69 it was after reading War and Peace that William Morris, inspirer of the Arts and Crafts movement, wrote in a letter to Georgiana Burne-Jones on 1 March 1888 that ‘Hamlet … should have been a Russian, not a Dane,’70 confirming that the affinity between Russians and the Danish prince was recognised beyond the country’s border.

The specific appropriation of Shakespeare and Hamlet in Russia has been examined to a certain extent, most research being in Russian and/or by Russian scholars. In addition there are English-language studies such as Aleksei Semenenko’s Hamlet the Sign that deal with translations of the tragedy into Russian, and Eleanor Rowe’s aforementioned Hamlet: A Window on Russia, which draws mainly on secondary sources and offers an overview of different stages of the presence of Hamlet in Russian literature, from the tragedy’s arrival in Russia to the 1970s. Forty years on, Rowe’s book is still a useful reference-point for anyone interested in the history of Russian Hamlets. However, when it comes to the arts other than literature, her descriptions are limited to a few fleeting remarks on selected well-known productions (those of Mochalov in 1837, Chekhov in 1924, Akimov in 1932, Radlov in 1938 and Okhlopkov in 1954) and Kozintsev’s screen version of 1964. She does not venture into

68 Ibid.
69 Tolstoy’s comments on Shakespeare and Hamlet have been widely quoted and discussed - see for example, Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 95-105.
detailed analysis of these and other stagings, or into the realm of Hamlet-inspired Russian music. In pursuing the journey of Hamlet from Shakespeare’s text to Russian text, Rowe finds little or no room for exploring the next level of appropriation, which is from Russian text to Russian stage and music. In fact maintaining a broad historical approach and staying within the confines of literature involves not only side-lining entire art-forms but also devaluing the importance of individual creative artists. Rowe’s work is thus essentially a companion to Hamlet in Russian literature. Thus, while it was a powerful early inspiration for my research, understanding its limitations helped to motivate the more detailed archival research and analysis of dramatic and musical structures that underpin the central chapters of this dissertation. As for specialised studies of Russian/Soviet Hamlet productions, the existing literature, Western or Russian, is sparse and little known.\textsuperscript{71} Hence a critical re-examination and contextualisation of all the above will be carried out at appropriate points of this dissertation.

The grand issues flagged so far supply the context and, in part, the motivation for this dissertation, but they are not exclusively or even primarily its subject matter, which is equally about setting the historical record straight. Early in the course of research, as the topic narrowed down to Hamlet in the Stalin era, it became apparent that the factual, documentary basis on which views of the play as a kind of barometer for Russian political developments might be challenged and refined was itself less stable than is generally assumed. The necessity for careful archival study became ever clearer, and the central chapters of this dissertation, devoted to the two most famous Russian productions of the time are largely informed by this work.

Did Hamlet - a tragedy whose history of production and reception in Russia had long been intertwined with notions of doubt, reflection and the accursed question of ‘To be or not to be?’ - survive the terrors of the Stalin era? The short answer is ‘yes’. The long answer, however, makes up the body of the present study, along with considerations of what form that survival took.

In approaching the answer, this project investigates the tension between individual creative activity and a closely monitored politico-cultural climate. Of course it is folly to regard the Stalin era (1928-1953) in any of its artistic manifestations as a monolithic entity. For one

thing, it encompassed several phases, starting with the tail-end of artistic pluralism of the 1920s, and going through various shades of Cultural Revolution, Terror, and (relative) relaxation. Any instance of the appropriation and interpretation of Hamlet during this period was inevitably the outcome of negotiation at various levels. First of all there was the long-standing pre-Bolshevik tradition of Hamlet staging and its offspring concept of Hamletism, which had long since become embedded in Russian national identity, at least as understood by the intelligentsia. Every new attempt at interpretation had to deal with images already imprinted by that tradition in the minds of audiences, performers and commentators. At times, as most notably with Nikolai Akimov’s 1932 production, such images played at least as decisive a role as official doctrines in determining the reception, and hence the survival (or otherwise) of the production. The problem here for present-day scholarship is that there is no authoritative, source-based study of Akimov, or of his Hamlet, that adequately explains the context, his motivations and their realisation. The collection of essays in the recent volume, Akimov – eto Akimov is an attempt to fill this gap. However, it only provides a patchy account of Akimov’s multi-faceted theatrical life. My archive-based study attempts to rectify this shortcoming at least so far as his Hamlet is concerned.

The collaborative nature of the work involved in Soviet Shakespeare projects of this era - whether in the theatre, cinema, opera or ballet – entailed additional tensions between the approaches of individual creative artists. Once again Akimov’s revisionist Hamlet, with Dmitry Shostakovich’s vivid incidental music, provides a fine example for how semantic layers added by a partly autonomous score could lead to complexities in reception. At the opposite pole, Sergei Radlov’s 1938 Hamlet stayed true to the image of Hamlet as a ‘People’s prince’ and by taking care to ensure close coordination between individual components of the production - in particular the translation by the producer’s wife, Anna Radlova, and the striking music composed by Sergei Prokofiev – the prospects for a secure place in the repertoire were far brighter, only being aborted by the outbreak of the War and the Radlovs’ complicated fate thereafter (see chapter 4.3). These two productions, each conceived at turning-points in socio-cultural policy under Stalin and had the greatest impact of all Hamlets of this era, and they accordingly occupy a central position in this dissertation. Compared to Akimov, Sergei Radlov’s creative output has been more closely investigated, by David Zolotnitsky in his book Sergei Radlov: The

Shakespearian Fate of a Soviet Director. However, here the problems, apart from the book’s journalist presentation, are the hagiographical tone arising from Zolotnitsky’s determination to rehabilitate Radlov’s reputation and the lack of detailed analysis of any individual production, including Hamlet (see Chapters 3 and 4). Here, too, I have attempted a properly source-based account, again giving full due to the role of the incidental music. However, by contrast with the case of Akimov, for whom Hamlet was his directorial debut, the trajectory of Radlov’s theatrical and creative output and in particular his previous Shakespearean productions, is clearly germane, and I have tried to do it proper justice.

The Soviet Hamlet landscape as it has been passed down to us features several items of received wisdom that reflect reductionist views on the cultural climate of the Stalin era in general. The general syndrome has long since been recognised. However, neither Akimov’s nor Radlov’s Hamlet has yet been reclaimed from its distorted afterlife in the secondary literature. A significant portion of the chapters devoted to their productions in this dissertation is therefore given over to a re-examination of these distortions. An especially egregious case is the persistent myth regarding Stalin’s supposed ban on Hamlet productions. The lack of any official document supporting this notion has already led some scholars to nuance it as ‘unofficial’, ‘practical’ or ‘tacit’. However, a more thorough examination of the existing evidence, carried out in Chapter 4, should help to set the record straight – or at least as straight as it can be at this moment.

Methodology

It may or may not be true that ‘There have been more books alone written about Hamlet than have been written about the Bible’. What is certain that there is a vast quantity of information about productions of the play held in Russian theatre, state and family archives that has not been sifted or incorporated into the secondary literature, not even by Russian scholars themselves. The present study has undertaken a thorough examination and

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evaluation of materials that run to several thousands of pages, in the service of an historical study in the spirit of cultural revisionism (as spearheaded by Katerina Clark, Sheila Fitzpatrick et al.).

In broader terms, the dissertation is a cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural study of a kind not to my knowledge previously attempted in this field. It incorporates music, theatre, cinema, dance, literature, translation studies, and cultural politics, as well as associated theories where appropriate. In particular the musical element, which provided the initial stimulus for the research, is given more prominence than in any existing study of Shakespeare in Russia. Throughout the country’s musical-cultural history, Hamlet has been repeatedly re-invented, whether in the form of incidental music, self-standing symphonic/orchestral works, film scores, operas, ballets, or songs to poems inspired by Hamlet and its main characters. It is valuable to assess all these in their own music-generic contexts and as part of their respective composer’s oeuvres, as has been done, albeit briefly, in the most authoritative life-and-works surveys of Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Prokofiev. However, these works also need to be considered within their evolving ideological contexts.

For the Soviet period, essential to the understanding of the processes of Shakespeare appropriation and reception are the debates that took place at the highest levels of the Party, among creative artists and representatives of the Party, as well as in the press, as reported in secondary literature. Here too, thorough archival research is indispensable (see below).

Hence the methodology for this dissertation consists principally of:

- Contextual historical study of the Stalin era through documentary and secondary sources, especially the writings of Katerina Clark and Marina Frolova-Walker, and including as recent publications such as Laurence Senelick and Sergei Ostrovsky’s The Soviet Theatre: a Documentary History (2014), and Clark, Evgeny Dobrenko et al., Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents 1917-1953 (2007).

- Archival research covering presentations (doklady), stenographic accounts of discussions and rehearsals, production books, manuscripts and sketches, and correspondence (see Table 1 for a list of institutions and their relevant contents)

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76 For example, David Brown, Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study: The Years of Fame (1878-1893), London, Gollancz, 1992, 156-161.

77 For example, Laurel Fay, Shostakovich: A Life, Oxford University Press, 2000, esp. 64, 71, 241, 348-350.

78 For example, Simon Morrison, The People’s Artist: Prokofiev’s Soviet Years, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2009, 82-86.
- Overview and assessment of secondary literature in English and Russian.
- Analysis of selected productions, focusing on the inter-relationship of music and drama.

Table 1: Principal Archive and Library Collections used in this Dissertation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Section and/or general contents</th>
<th>Specific materials</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandrinsky Theatre Archive</td>
<td>St Petersburg</td>
<td>Literature department</td>
<td>Kozintsev’s staged <em>Hamlet</em> (1954): orchestral parts of Shostakovich’s score, production book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakhushin State Theatre Museum</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Archive (manuscripts, autographs, private collections)</td>
<td>Photos and sketches (Kozintsev’s <em>Hamlet</em>) from collection of Innokenty Smoktunovsky; documents from various unrealised <em>Hamlet</em> projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dmitry Shostakovich Family Archive</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Archive and library</td>
<td>Sketches and (copies of) material for incidental music for Akimov’s <em>Hamlet</em>, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTsMMK (Glinka State Central Museum of Musical Culture)</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Archive</td>
<td>Photos from costumes and productions of <em>Hamlet</em> ballets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow Art Theatre (MKhAT) Museum</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Research department</td>
<td>Documents regarding unrealised 1940 production (Meyerhold)</td>
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<tr>
<td>RGALI (Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts)</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Manuscripts, autographs, private collections</td>
<td>Akimov/Shostakovich <em>Hamlet</em>: Production book, pre-production presentations by Akimov, two letters from Shostakovich to Akimov (autographs).</td>
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<td>Radlov/Prokofiev <em>Hamlet</em>: Prokofiev’s incidental music (autographs); letters to Radlov from various individuals; working materials of Dmitri Dudnikov (actor of title role); Radlov’s speeches and presentations, discussions of the production (stenographic reports); official documents.</td>
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<td>Other: Programme booklets of Okhlopkov’s <em>Hamlet</em> (1954); private collections of actors of Okhlopkov’s <em>Hamlet</em>; libretto of Slonimsky’s</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Manuscripts and rare books department</td>
<td>Dissertations; early Shakespeare studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLR (National Library of Russia)</td>
<td>St Petersburg</td>
<td>Manuscripts Department</td>
<td>Sergei Radlov collection (including detailed letter to Prokofiev about music to <em>Hamlet</em>, speeches, stenographic reports from rehearsals of <em>Hamlet</em> and other productions; photos, postcard and chess commentaries from Prokofiev; personal copy of translation of <em>Hamlet</em> by Pasternak; Anna Radlova’s translation of <em>Hamlet</em>; personal copy of contemporary Shakespeare studies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Petersburg State Theatre Library</td>
<td></td>
<td>Manuscripts and rare books department</td>
<td>Newspaper cuttings and reviews of Radlov’s <em>Hamlet</em>; materials on Radlov’s other works; David Zolotnitsky collection (uncatalogued) containing materials for his book on Radlov and drafts of the same; diaries of actors of Radlov’s Theatre; photos</td>
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<tr>
<td>TsGALI (Central State Museum of Literature and Arts)</td>
<td>St Petersburg</td>
<td>Archive</td>
<td>Grigory Kozintsev collection (materials on <em>Hamlet</em> and <em>King Lear</em> films and theatre productions, letters, photos, sketches, diary entries); contracts, discussions and official documents related to various productions; private collections of actors and other personalities containing material related to various productions of <em>Hamlet</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>TsNB STD RF/VTO (Central Library of the Union of Theatre Workers of the Russian Federation / All-Russian Theatre Society)</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Library and archive</td>
<td>Materials (reviews and analyses) on various productions of Shakespeare’s plays, in particular <em>Hamlet</em> – especially useful thanks to extensive analytical catalogue</td>
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The literature concerning the theory of dramatic production in Russia is copious, comprising overviews by scholars such as Laurence Senelick, Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, Nicholas Rzhevsky and Anatolii Al’tshuller⁷⁹ and detailed studies of or by principal protagonists such as...

as Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Nikolai Evreinov. These writings do not figure directly or prominently in this dissertation, which concentrates instead on adjusting the historical record and on striking a balance between different interpretative points of view. Much rarer and more germane are studies dealing with the analysis of live theatrical performance.

Furthermore, since it is my conviction that the role of music in such productions is more important that it has been given credit for, it seems important at this point to bolster this aspect with an overview of the very few theoretical contributions in the field of music/sound for the stage, notably the writings of Patrice Pavis and David Roesner. While analyses of production and music in this dissertation were initially carried out independently, subsequent reading of Pavis’s *L’Analyse des spectacles (1996/2012)* has confirmed, and in some respects nuanced, the general approach.

Pavis identifies two types of analysis of performances: analysis-reportage and analysis-reconstitution. The former has the characteristics of sports commentaries, describing events as they unfold on the stage. Such analysis is carried out at the moment of the performance or immediately afterwards. The second type is rooted in the tradition of conservation of cultural/historical monuments and is by its very nature done *post festum*. Such analysis, which is clearly the appropriate type for the current project, consists of collecting and evaluating material and documents about the productions, including presentations of the artists’ intentions, their correspondence, reports, critiques, and, where available, any recording media, including photographs.

As Pavis affirms, a major component of such analysis is the contextualisation of the production. Even though the ‘analysis-reconstitution’ may not facilitate ‘an objective aesthetic assessment’ of the performance, it offers the means for an evaluation of the artists’ concept and the effect of the final product on people of the time. Insisting on the nature of a performance as a ‘representation’ of dramatic text, Pavis opposes the frequently adopted

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segmentation of a production in terms of the original text and suggests that the process of segmentation should be ‘in accordance with the temporal organisation of [the production’s] rhythmic framework’. Adapted for the productions studied here, such ‘découpage’ is based on observable and audible (including musical) units, following the rhythm of performance, and the movements and musical composition of the mise-en-scène, paying special attention to moments where Shakespeare’s text has been modified by the translator and/or director and is hence ‘out of sync’ with the dramatic structure of the original.\(^{83}\)

Among components of the two main productions analysed here are such features as the acting, the actor’s voice, lighting and colours and stage movement, which can be partially reconstructed using reported testimonies and critics’ accounts. However, the ephemeral nature of theatrical performance also means that certain elements would have come across differently on different nights of the run. Such non-measurable elements of performance will therefore be referred to with caution and only when of special interest.

Although studies of past and present trends in Shakespeare appropriation, especially in non-Anglophone cultures, continually refer to film and theatre, there is rarely any mention of music. In fact incidental music for the theatre is an underdeveloped area within musicology, and apart from one recent book (which is a practical guide rather than an academic study\(^ {84}\)), individual chapters and part of one PhD dissertation\(^ {85}\) little has been done that could serve as a model methodology. Nevertheless several studies in the realm of drama theory touch on the subject, among them the works of David Roesner, who has investigated what he terms the ‘musicalisation’ of theatre.\(^ {86}\) In addition, there are possibilities here for borrowing from film studies, notably those by Michel Chion,\(^ {87}\) and for adapting Pavis’s theories.

For Pavis, incidental music consists of all the audible messages that reach the viewers’ ears; he insists on the influence of this ‘music’ on the global perception of the production through its creation of atmosphere, what makes the audience particularly receptive to the theatrical event. Roesner confirms this function of incidental music: ‘As music is an abstract, mostly

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83 Ibid.
non-referential “language”, it is to be expected that musicalisation in theatre will also result in changes in the audience’s traditional expectations of theatrical communication.’

Drawing on the affinity between music and theatre, Roesner further develops the notion of the ‘musicality’ of a production and argues that: ‘Musicalisation takes theatre beyond the text as a primary guarantor of structure, narrative and sense and beyond the spoken word as the dominant materiality’.

The impact and implications of musicalisation, according to Roesner, could be studied on three inter-connected levels:

- in the devising or rehearsal process.
- as an organisational principle of performance.
- in the process of perception.

These three levels may be applied to the principal productions that are the subject of this project, as follows:

- The correspondence between the director and composer reveals the role of music at the preparatory stages, while their parallel works and projects may offer clues to semantics at the conceptual level.
- The place of music in the structure of the production may be largely traceable through a combined examination of scores, manuscripts, production books, and orchestral parts.
- The perception and reception of the production and its legacy are partially traceable in critics’ reports, in relation to the politico-cultural context of the time, and in the evolution from the conception of the performance to its realisation.

Given that there is, unsurprisingly, no video record of the central productions examined in this dissertation, that (following Pavis) the production only makes full sense when seen in conjunction with the music, and that it makes little sense to comment on the music independently of the production, it follows that a vital step forward in the understanding of this phase of Soviet encounters with Shakespeare would ideally be some kind of performed

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reconstruction involving both elements. In the hope that this may be feasible at some future point, this dissertation seeks to clear the ground from mis-conceptions and to point towards the main elements such reconstructions would have to take into account.

It would surely be folly to attempt any such thing without incorporating the music of Shostakovich and Prokofiev, which was so fundamental a part of these productions. Nor, I would contend, can the productions themselves profitably be studied without full recognition of the role played by their musical scores. However, if this warning is to be taken seriously, it demands reasonable knowledge of the broad context of music’s role in Shakespeare’s dramas, and of ways in which those dramas have in turn inspired independent musical works. It is to these contexts that the remainder of this Introduction is devoted.

**Music and/in Shakespeare**

Despite the fact that at least some Shakespeare-inspired music constitutes an important part of the concert repertoire, scholarship specifically dealing with Shakespeare and music is surprisingly under-developed. Studies in this area are certainly far less numerous than, for example, those dealing with Shakespeare and film; nor is there any overview of existing scholarship.

Existing studies could be divided into two distinct categories: first, those on music in Shakespeare’s time or on various aspects of music in Shakespeare’s works (including his musical imaging and imagination); and secondly, those dealing with music inspired by Shakespeare’s works or composed either to Shakespearean themes or directly for Shakespeare plays: in short, Music in Shakespeare or Shakespeare in Music. It is not always easy to judge the principal thrust of such studies simply from their titles, however, since many offer merely a variant of ‘Shakespeare and/in Music’. Those that venture to comment on music and its role in Shakespeare’s plays outnumber those dealing with their musical afterlife and adaptations of and references to the Bard’s works and themes/characters. Despite the intrinsic value and historical importance of the latter group, studies here are often conducted by non-musicologists and rarely venture much beyond listing (as is the case of the

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voluminous but sadly not up-dated five-volume *A Shakespeare Music Catalogue* compiled by Bryan Gooch and David Thatcher). Nor, if they do offer commentary and interpretation, do they cast their net wider than a few celebrated scores, which, in the case of incidental and film music, are generally studied in isolation from the productions or films they were composed for.

Julie Sanders’ 2008 book is still the only available study to offer an overview of the range of musical responses to Shakespeare, from film music and concert repertoire to jazz and musicals. She argues, for instance, that jazz’s ‘complex relationship with the source material that it readily quotes but also improves and innovates upon provides a rich template for the multiple ways in which Shakespeare and the Shakespearean canon have signified … across periods and cultures as well as across different disciplines, including music.’ Despite Sanders’ attempt to apply her own acknowledged ground-breaking theories of appropriation and adaptation to the realm of Shakespeare’s musical afterlife, her coverage of such a wide range of works within the limits of a compact 197-page study precludes any analysis or interpretation beyond surface description and recycled common assumptions. In a more recent article Sanders has moved to a more detailed application of methodologies from literary criticism in her interpretations and selection of repertoire, providing still brief but penetrating readings of certain aspects of symphonic poems by Strauss and Liszt, and of Hans Werner Henze’s ‘Sonata on Shakespearean Characters’. She seeks to explore the set of negotiations ‘between poetics and music’, unpacking the ‘cross-cultural and cross-historical contacts between Shakespeare and classical music.’ However, the section on incidental and film music is disappointingly cursory, and her passing remark on Grigory Kozintsev’s 1964 film and Shostakovich’s music for it commits the cardinal error of assuming that Shostakovich’s previous score for a ‘controversial’ production of *Hamlet* – which can only mean his 1932 collaboration with Akimov - was also made for Kozintsev. Nevertheless
Sanders’s article and book contain many useful concepts and terms derived from literary criticism, together with the penetrating observation that not only ‘our Shakespearean source-text’, but also the ‘classical music pieces that respond to those texts’ enjoy multiple, plural lives.99

Whereas Sanders ventures to examine the ways in which a piece of music ‘attempts to adhere to or even suggest a form of the “dramatic”’, 100 Adrian Streete’s study of ‘Shakespeare and Opera’ in the same collection confines itself mainly to the well-trodden path of Shakespearean operas by Verdi, Berlioz and Britten. Although he lists, in passing, 101 a few lesser-known operas, such as Ernest Bloch’s Macbeth (1904-6), Reynaldo Hahn’s Le Marchant de Venise (1935), and Franco Faccio’s Amletto (1865), the main subject of his study remains Verdi’s Otello and its performance history.

For more penetrating studies of the subject of ‘Shakespeare and opera’, we have to turn to Winton Dean’s essay for Phyllis Hartnoll’s 1964 book, Shakespeare in Music, 102 Daniel Albright’s Musicking Shakespeare (which studies Shakespeare-inspired works of Purcell, Britten, Verdi and Berlioz), 103 and the recent volume in the Great Shakespeareans series: Berlioz. Verdi. Wagner. Britten. 104 Although this latter again deals with familiar names and canonic works, each study, through analysis as well as biographical and historical evidence, explores the double impact of Shakespeare on the composer and of the composer on the understanding, interpretation and appreciation of Shakespeare. Thus, for example, David Trippett examines Wagner’s writings about, and his changing attitude towards, Shakespeare throughout his life, as well as particularities of his only Shakespeare-themed opera Das Liebesverbot (1836). 105 But while the examples of Wagner and Verdi suggest, according to the editor of this volume, that ‘the imitation of Shakespeare led composers to reach for bold effects, amplitude and a certain sprawl’, studying Berlioz’s Shakespearean encounters reveals that the Bard also inspired in this composer ‘a fierce concentration of the affect, a paring down to the essential’. 106

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99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 173.
101 Adrian Streete, ‘Shakespeare and Opera’, 144.
103 Albright, Musicking Shakespeare.
The choices that composers and librettists have made in order to accommodate Shakespeare’s dramatic structure and complex characters into a new medium, and indeed into new eras and cultures, in turn contribute to a richer, more nuanced reading and understanding of Shakespeare’s genius. Shakespeare’s texts (as in Othello), through their creator’s craftsmanship in employing such devices as complex multi-layered plots and double-time schemes, have understandably caused many problems for those attempting musical translation. Their solutions, including such drastic measures as omitting substantial sections of the plays, have themselves resulted in works, which, regardless of their musical value or success, provide gateways into understanding the operatic tradition and aesthetics of the time of their creation.

Musicologist and critic Winton Dean, best known for his work on Handel, explored the composer-librettist relationship in a range of operas from lesser-known and forgotten ones to Verdi’s, arguing how the required distillation and concentration of Shakespeare’s texts has played a determining role in the success of each respective opera.107 Published for Shakespeare’s anniversary year of 1964, the collection of essays edited by theatre historian Phyllis Hartnoll, to which Dean’s contribution belongs, is a rare example of a book trying to cover both ‘music in Shakespeare’ and ‘Shakespeare in music’, but with a clear leaning towards the latter. Apart from the introductory chapter by early music specialist John Stevens, which argues that Shakespeare ‘inherited and enhanced a tradition of theatre music used not only for embellishment but in the delineation of character and with accepted symbolic associations’,108 the book examines Shakespeare’s afterlife in songs, concert hall works, ballet, cinema, incidental music and opera. Each section offers a different approach, ranging from a critical history of songs written to Shakespeare’s words, via Dean’s aesthetics and practicalities of turning a Shakespeare play into an opera, to detailed analysis of Berlioz’s Romeo and Juliet in order to trace its source to Garrick’s reworking of the tragedy as opposed to Shakespeare’s original text. Notwithstanding Hartnoll’s observation that ‘it is one of the paradoxes of Shakespearean music that some of its finest examples have no connection with the theatre, and were written by composers who knew no English’,109 apart from obvious names there are no ventures into studying Shakespeare in music even within Europe, and

108 Ibid., viii-ix.
109 Ibid., vii.
analysis of Russian Shakespeare-themed repertoire is almost entirely absent. Indeed Russian/Soviet musical responses to Shakespeare (apart from Tchaikovsky’s and Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliets) are generally conspicuous by their absence from studies on Shakespeare in music. While this may be partly a simple reflection of their failure to break through into the international concert repertoire, it is surely also to do with the language barrier and other practical difficulties involved in researching this repertoire, even after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the opening up of the archives.

The sizable repertoire of major composers engaging with Shakespeare – to which Shostakovich and Prokofiev would soon contribute – can be traced back in principle to the importance attached to music (and sound) in Shakespeare’s own time.

When it comes to studies on music in Shakespeare’s time and in his plays, these are mainly conducted by Early Modern music specialists, and historians are more elaborate in their findings as well as offering a wide range of approaches. Such studies include dictionaries, catalogues and songbooks, and a database that attempts to identify every musical reference in the plays and sonnets themselves (stage-directions, songs and part-songs, musical instruments, dance, as well as music theory and emotions derived from experiencing music), as well as critical histories, in-depth analysis of the Shakespeare’s musical imagery, and use of music in specific plays or genres, and finally studies related to

110 The book does, however, contain a useful catalogue of Shakespeare-inspired music, including some Russian/Soviet repertoire.


sound in Shakespeare theatre, which explores the idea that ‘Shakespeare created worlds with sounds, worlds that in turn contain whole soundscapes within them.’

For Shakespeare, music ‘meant performed songs and instrumental cues, and musical terms used as symbolic reference and metaphor.’ Wes Folkerth argues that for Shakespeare’s audiences, hearing was not merely a supplementary source of information to vision; rather it was a different and even superior dimension, in that it provided access to the inner truth of things: psychological processes, motivations, the invisible realm of spirit. Vision was merely the conduit to the material world. In the same vein, Bruce Johnson suggests that as an actor, Shakespeare wrote for sound rather than for print, and ‘for an audience habituated to finely nuanced auditory semiotics.’

As Stevens observes, ‘Shakespeare lived at a fortunate time when the traditional medieval view of music was held in imaginative equipose with another – a Renaissance view’; hence, although music was still considered ‘a speculum of the divine Order’ and ‘God-centred, symbolic’, it was increasingly becoming ‘man-centred…, a rhetoric of emotions’ and a language that contained and communicated man’s innermost human feelings. The genius of Shakespeare was in drawing strength from both philosophies. Stevens concludes that ‘it is the fascination of the Elizabethan drama that the two elements are for the most part well balanced; and it is the achievement of Shakespeare to weave them both into the dramatic structure and to make them inseparable from it.’

**Music in Hamlet**

Whatever in the above is true for Shakespeare in general is arguably especially pertinent to *Hamlet*. Referring to Shakespeare’s writing for a society that was in transition and experiencing ‘a tension, between two modes of knowing: visual and aural’, Johnson contends that *Hamlet*’s soundscape is ‘a major bearer of meanings’. Stevens similarly observes that Shakespeare’s tragedies more than any other group of plays show his ‘intensely dramatic use’ of musical sources and his ‘mastery of the mirror of sound’. In *Hamlet* there are several

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122 Johnson, ‘Hamlet: Voice, Music, Sound’, 257
moments of instrumental music, sound effects and pomp: Claudius uses cannons excessively for his drinking bouts (I/4); in addition to their routine regal function, trumpets introduce the arrival of the travelling actors, recorders appear in a scene (and discourse) featuring Hamlet,\textsuperscript{124} which Kozintsev regarded as the culmination and highest point of the tragedy (see Chapter 5.2).\textsuperscript{125}

Sternfeld’s 1959 study of song in Shakespeare’s Tragedies remains unsurpassed in its authority. He reminds us that ‘Shakespeare’s use of instrumental music was not exceptional in terms of an Elizabethan playwright’s aesthetics and practice’, and although in his case it may have been ‘more poignant or more effective,… neither the details of his stage directions nor the amount of instrumental music called for differs from the major English tradition.’\textsuperscript{126} By contrast, given that Elizabethan tragedies, following Senecan traditions, were void of songs, it was Shakespeare’s inclusion of them in his tragedies, notably Hamlet, Othello and Troilus, that was exceptional. Sternfeld specifies Shakespeare’s innovative methods: ‘he assigns songs to major characters; he prints the text of these songs; and he makes specific references to single lines from that text in the surrounding dialogue, using the songs as component parts of his tragic design.’\textsuperscript{127} Shakespeare not only used tragic songs \textit{per se} but also featured seemingly incongruent comic songs as an integral part of the tragedy. A conspicuous example is the Gravedigger’s Song in Hamlet, whose crude dance-of-death flavour and unrefined language reinforce the contrast between the gravediggers’ ‘prosaic acceptance of, and Hamlet’s sophisticated, hyper-sensitive playing with the idea of Death.’\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{124} Stevens questions whether the recorders were actually played during the scene. ‘Hamlet, in his exultation at having unmasked the King, calls for music (“Come the Recorders”) and some texts have, later, “Enter the Players with Recorders” (Quarto II); the Folio stage directions “Enter one with a Recorder” (from whom Hamlet may have taken the recorder) perhaps shows how the scene was presented when the “players” could not all manage to bear their parts’, see Stevens, ‘Music of the Elizabethan Stage’, 38. The texts of both Hamlet and Othello were transmitted in unauthorized Quartos (1603, 1604) as well as in an authoritative Folio (1623). For example, the ‘bad Quarto’ stage-direction ‘Enter Ofelia playing on a Lute, and her haire downe singing’ does not appear in the Folio. Nevertheless this detail probably represents faithfully the facts of some early performances.


\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{128} The Clown’s song is a distorted version of the old song, ‘I loathe that I did love’ (words attributed to Lord Vaux) - see Stevens, ‘Music of the Elizabethan Stage’, 39.
Sternfeld notes Shakespeare’s mastery in making Ophelia and Desdemona ‘integral parts of the plot in a dramatic sense and of the surrounding dialogue’; here song creates ‘a subtle concordance of plot and character’.129 Both Ophelia and Desdemona start by singing old familiar songs, but their anxieties and forebodings multiply as they proceed from one lyrical fragment to another. And despite the dissimilarity of the circumstances of their fates, each heroine’s death and transfiguration is associated with the image of a willow.130 Sternfeld’s observation regarding similarities between Ophelia and Desdemona points towards Sergei Radlov’s reading of the two heroines (see Chapter 3.5.4) when working on his production of *Hamlet* in 1938. Referring to Elizabethan etiquette books and their restrictions regarding musical performance in drawing rooms, Sternfeld argues that ‘it is a symptom of Ophelia’s derangement that she sings before an assembly of the Court without being encouraged to do so’.131 Apart from the impropriety of the act of singing in domestic circumstances, Shakespeare’s delineation of the pathetic state of Ophelia’s mind may be read in his abrupt ‘alternation between prose and verse, speaking and singing, and the lack of continuity and congruity’.132 These observations are consonant with the view taken up by Sergei Radlov in his 1938 productions, when he discouraged Prokofiev from using any musical device, such as ‘wrong’ notes, for evoking Ophelia’s mental state (see Chapter 3.5.4).

When quoting familiar songs, Shakespeare exploited the audience’s memory and introduces sudden departures from their original texts, pointing towards Ophelia’s fluctuating thoughts between her lost love for Hamlet and her dead father. As Sternfeld demonstrates, this is best shown in the case of her first song, ‘How should I your true love know?’, where the first stanza is a variant on the old song, ‘Walsingham’ (the second stanza of which starts with the exact same words), while the second and third stanzas seemingly turn to her dead father but still contain words and allusions that betray her anxiety for Hamlet’s love.133

Sternfeld follows up by a study of these songs and their music, which reveals much about the complexity involved in tracing Shakespearean songs to their sources and matching surviving tunes to popular lyrics whilst taking into account the actual historic evidence. Since the original Elizabethan music for most of Ophelia’s songs is unknown, scholars have opted for

130 ‘Your sister’s d’own’d, Laertes… There’s a willow grows aslant a brook…’, *Hamlet*, IV/7/160-176.
131 Sternfeld, ‘The Use of Song in Shakespeare’s Tragedies’, 55.
132 Ibid., 58.
133 See also Edward Naylor, *Shakespeare Music (Music of the Period)*, London, Curwen, 1913, revised 1928, 35-36, with musical example.
various compromises, including reliance on oral tradition, for instance in the case of Ophelia’s ‘How should I your true love know?’ and ‘Tomorrow is St Valentine’s Day’. This tradition is invoked by Charles Knight in his Pictorial Editions of Shakespeare (1839-42), which draws largely on the reminiscences of Drury Lane Theatre manager, Samuel James Arnold, who had reportedly noted down Ophelia’s airs from an actress’s recollection of them after the Theatre’s destruction in the fire of 1812.

Ophelia’s penultimate song/snatch, ‘Bonny sweet Robin’, is an example of a different complication: namely, when the music (melody) appears in several printed and manuscript contemporary sources, but only in instrumental form and without actual text, with the result that it is not clear which fragment of the tune Ophelia’s one-liner might have been sung to. According to Sternfeld, ‘in Shakespeare’s age the popularity of this simple ditty excelled by far that of “Greensleeves”’, and this was not only because of the attraction of the melody but also thanks to the ‘punning’ potential of the word ‘Robin’. It seems likely that Shakespeare was taking advantage of these qualities, in yet another attempt at juxtaposing Ophelia’s grief and sexuality.

**Hamlet in music**

When it comes to Hamlet’s afterlife in music, Ophelia, and in particular her mad songs and muddy death, again make up the main musical attraction of the tragedy, featuring both in general Shakespeare surveys and in more specialised scholarship. Several studies deal with the relationship between madness, music and women in Shakespeare, arguing that ‘Ophelia’s singing, perhaps the most famous example of the relationship between madness and song, reflects the broader discourse of madness in early modern English culture, with its persistent associations between music, excess, and the feminine.’ Accordingly scholarship concerned


135 See Sternfeld, ‘The Use of Song in Shakespeare’s Tragedies’, 60.


137 Sternfeld, 69; Robin was a colloquial term for penis - see Morris, Harry, ‘Ophelia’s “Bonny Sweet Robin”’, PMLA [Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America], 73, 1958, 601-603.

with Ophelia’s afterlife and its musical properties in screen adaptations of *Hamlet* includes several feminist studies.139

Shakespeare’s art of juxtaposing music, words, movement and landscape has tempted creative artists of different disciplines to respond to this short but semantically charged episode of the tragedy. It could be argued that, given the restricted resources of his theatre, by setting Ophelia’s death off-stage and only including Gertrude’s pictorial description, Shakespeare was calling on the creative imagination of his audience (and later artists) to visualise this most tragic moment. The famous depiction of Ophelia’s death, by John Everett Millais (painted 1851-2), has itself acquired symbolic signification and a rich afterlife in both Shakespeare- and non-Shakespeare-related studies and works, including films and popular music.140 Musicians have also responded to Shakespeare’s creative call, mainly but not exclusively by songs: Ophelia’s madness and death is depicted musically by many composers, such as Berlioz (‘La Mort d’Ophélie’, 1848), Frank Bridge (‘There is a willow’: Impression for symphonic orchestra, 1928), and Hans Werner Henze (‘First Sonata on Shakespearean Characters’, Ophelia, 1975-6),141 as well as in songs of Brahms and Strauss, among others.

Apart from Ophelia, as with most Shakespeare plays, *Hamlet* has generated a wide range of musical responses. Some of these references resist any attempt at categorising, as they are mainly subjective associations between *Hamlet* and music. Such is the case with B.H. Haggin’s curious book, *Music for the Man who Enjoys ‘Hamlet’*,142 which is in fact a guidebook of music appreciation for ‘the reader who understands and enjoys literature but not music’. The author chooses *Hamlet* as his imagined addressee’s favourite book and suggests that ‘similar insights [to those in *Hamlet*] are conveyed in Schubert’s B flat Sonata and Beethoven’s Op. 111, but through a different artistic medium.’ A reverse pedagogical method has also been suggested, wherein popular culture and associated music would be used for

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140 For instance, Laurence Olivier and Kozintsev’s *Hamlets* both allude to this painting for their scene of Ophelia’s death; the poster for Lars Von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011) is a reworking of it; and the publicity clip for Nick Cave’s song ‘Where the Wild Roses Grow’ (1995) depicts Kylie Minogue imitating Ophelia’s pose.


teaching Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{143} This idea takes its inspiration, among other things, from 19\textsuperscript{th}-century burlesqued \textit{Hamlets}, which were at one time all the rage in music halls.\textsuperscript{144} Studying the published texts of such \textit{Hamlets} reveals how the musical performances, while retaining the main protagonists and their Shakespearean names, combined popular songs and parodied text and actions derived from the plot, in conjunction with some satire aimed at a known figure of the time.\textsuperscript{145} By these means, the plotlines and characters of Shakespeare’s plays were made accessible and widely known. It could be argued that in their notorious 1932 production, Akimov and Shostakovich’s re-interpretation of scenes such the ‘the recorder scene’ and ‘dialogue of Hamlet and Rosencrantz’ were in line with the tradition of such burlesqued \textit{Hamlets}, as well as with similar theatrical experiments in pre-Revolutionary Russia (for example, \textit{Daesh Gamleta [Give us Hamlet]} in 1923 at Petrograd’s Krivoe Zerkalo Theatre). The question of whether Russian theatre activists had any direct contact with the 19\textsuperscript{th}-century Western parodic tradition, however, remains to be answered.

As will be seen in Chapter 1, the 19\textsuperscript{th} century saw a new level of Bardolatory and a cult of \textit{Hamlet} and Hamletism among Romantic composers in Europe and Russia. However, as Shakespeare’s longest play, \textit{Hamlet} forced tough choices on composers intending to respond to or draw a musical portrait of the tragedy or its hero (in the same way as with theatre producers, and later, film-makers). When it came to opera, for example, as Albright observes, ‘Shakespearean and operatic conventions tend to place the accent on quite different moments of the drama; the awesome strangeness of Shakespeare’s patterns and dismemberings of patterns, his figures of speech that tilt the universe of discourse – all may vanish into smooth familiar opera.’\textsuperscript{146} This was certainly the case with Ambroise Thomas’s \textit{Hamlet} (1868).\textsuperscript{147} Apart from famously including a happy ending, Thomas reduced Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy to the bare minimum, whilst making the Hamlet-Ophelia romance the central focus and extending Ophelia’s mad scene to make it ‘one of the longest and most elaborate in

\textsuperscript{143} Kendra Preston Leonard, “‘Cheer Up Hamlet!’: Using Shakespearean Burlesque to Teach the Bard’, \textit{This Rough Magic}, 4/1 (June 2013), 1-20, also available at \url{http://www.thisroughmagic.org/leonard%20essay.html}, accessed 11 August 2016.


\textsuperscript{145} See, for example, Charles Carroll Soule, \textit{A Travesty without a Pun!: Hamlet revamped, modernized, and set to music}, St. Louis, G.I. Jones, 1880.

\textsuperscript{146} Albright, \textit{Berlioz, Verdi, Wagner, Britten}, 1.

\textsuperscript{147} The librettists for Thomas’s \textit{Hamlet} were Michel Carré and Jules Barbier, who based their work on a French adaptation by Alexandre Dumas, père, and Paul Meurice.
all French opera'. Among other operatic adaptations of *Hamlet*, Dean refers to Antonio Buzzolla’s, composed in the same year as Verdi’s *Macbeth* (1847) and Franco Faccio’s *Amleto* (1865) based on a libretto by Arigo Boito and Aristide Hignard’s *Hamlet* (1888).

These distortions, which caused Tchaikovsky to pen his sharply negative review of this opera (see also Chapter 5.4.3, below) are seen by Julie Sanders more neutrally as marks of the ‘female-focused’ quality of this opera. Despite all its arguable shortcomings, Thomas’s work is still the most often mentioned, performed and referenced operatic rendition of *Hamlet*, overshadowing later attempts by the Latvian Jānis Kalniņš (1936), the Georgian-Soviet Alexi Machavariani (1964) and the Russian Sergei Slonimsky (1991) (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of Machavariani’s and Slonimsky’s operas). In his overview of Shakespeare-inspired operas (which predates Slonimsky’s work and would not have known of Machavariani’s) and their libretti, when it comes to *Hamlet* as an opera Dean remarks that it has ‘tempted the angels, but only lesser beings have rushed in’. These ‘angels’ include the likes of Schumann, Berlioz, Shostakovitch and (reportedly) Prokofiev, who together constitute significant additions to other might-have-been *Hamlets* such as Andrei Tarkovsky’s film, the aborted Moscow Art Theatre production in the 1940s (see Chapter 4.4) and Meyerhold’s many interpretations, including an envisaged production with Picasso’s design and Shostakovich’s music (see Chapter 1.6.3).

If for Meyerhold staging *Hamlet* was a lifetime dream, destined to remain unfulfilled, for Berlioz its text, performance and music became an almost obsessional leitmotif. Peter Bloom’s moving account of Berlioz’s Shakespearean encounters demonstrates how despite the composer’s various large-scale works on other Shakespeare plays (*Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear* and *Béatrice et Bénédict*), it was *Hamlet* (and only later *Romeo and Juliet*) that

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149 A big fuss was made in May 2016 over Anthony Barrese’s supposed ‘discovery and reconstruction’ of Faccio’s opera (see: http://www.operade.org/amleto-project, accessed 16 August 2016), evidently in ignorance of its status in the scholarly world.
149 Dean, ‘Shakespeare and Opera’, 165-166.
154 Tarkovsky’s plans for a film version of *Hamlet* (in addition to his theatre production of 1977) are documented in his diaries and interviews – see, for example, his diary entry for 15 December 1986, quoted in Neia Zorkaia and A. Sandler (eds.), *Mir i fil’ my Andreia Tarkovskogo: razmyshtenia, issledovaniia, vpominaniiia, pis’ma*, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1991, 176.
occupied a personal and central place in his life and work. Like Alexander Blok, Berlioz first met his wife-to-be as Ophelia. In the Frenchman’s case it was the Anglo-Irish actress Harriet Smithson in a performance of *Hamlet* at the Odéon Theatre in 1827. Apart from being an active crusader for Shakespeare’s cause, Berlioz regularly cited from the Bard, and from *Hamlet* in particular, in his letters, articles and diary entries. Quotes from *Hamlet* (and *Romeo and Juliet*) even appeared as epitaths for the composer’s non-Shakespearean works, such as the *Huit Scènes de Faust* (1829). Further musings on *Hamlet* include his sequel to the *Symphonie fantastique*, initially titled *Le Retour à la vie* (1831-2), then revised as *Lélio, ou le Retour à la vie* (1855-7), and the two preserved movements of *Tristia* (*‘La Mort d’Ophélie’*, which first appeared in 1848, and ‘Marche funèbre pour la dernière scène d’*Hamlet’*, completed in 1844). These, however, never came close in scale to his other better-known and more widely studied Shakespeare-inspired works, and Berlioz never attempted a comprehensive musical portrait of the tragedy in the way that some other Romantic composers did - such as Joseph Joachim (overture Op. 4, 1853), Niels Gade (overture, Op. 37, 1861) and Liszt (symphonic poem of 1858, first performed in 1876).

As Jonathan Kregor observes, while ‘Joachim sought to fit a traditional musical structure to Shakespeare’s play’ and ‘Gade’s *Hamlet* was formally innovative in order to reinforce a view of *Hamlet* that was wholly traditional’, Liszt attempted to capture ‘a specific approach to its performance on stage.’ For its high level of character study, theatricality and descriptiveness Liszt’s symphonic poem has received a good deal of scholarly attention. The composer’s work on this last of his symphonic poems overlapped with his friendship with the Polish-born German actor, Bogumil Dawison, who was known for his melodramatic style of acting Shakespeare and for portraying a Hamlet that was in marked contradiction to the Goethe-inspired weak prince: not a dreamer but ‘a clever man of action awaiting the right moment’. It was this new Hamlet that attracted Liszt and fed his musical imagination. Liszt’s comments following a meeting with the actor could be used as a description for the depiction of Hamlet in Akimov’s 1932 Moscow production. Liszt was captivated by Dawison’s Hamlet, who was ‘an intelligent, enterprising prince, with high political aims, who

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156 Ibid., 49-50.
158 Ibid., 55.
waits for the propitious moment to avenge himself and to reach at the same time the goal of his ambition, by having himself crowned in his uncle’s place."\(^1\)

For Tchaikovsky, too, an actor that was the catalyst for his first engagement with *Hamlet: the Fantasia-Overture*, Op. 67, composed in 1888. By comparison with Liszt’s, Tchaikovsky engages less with character study and more with specific images, with that of Ophelia proving the most memorable. When Tchaikovsky was later asked to compose incidental music for an actual performance, he found the task more challenging and less fulfilling (see Chapter 1.4). Tchaikovsky’s *Hamlet* scores have received much less attention than his *Romeo and Juliet* overture; however, they have enjoyed a rich afterlife of their own, since they have been repeatedly used for adaptations of *Hamlet* as a ballet (see Chapter 5.4.2) as well as in the soundtrack for Michael Almereyda’s modern retelling of the tragedy in his filmed *Hamlet* (2000).

As Sanders has noted, one significant connecting thread between the diverse musical responses to Shakespeare is the fact that ‘the majority of these works found their inspiration in some way within a theatrical context.’\(^2\) Many of the composers mentioned above were commissioned at some point to write incidental music for a Shakespeare performance, and this in turn had an impact on their subsequent encounters with Shakespeare. When not directly commissioned, they were inspired, as in the cases of Berlioz and Liszt, by particular performances and actors.

As will be seen in Chapter 2, Shostakovich’s first creative encounter with *Hamlet* was also through the world of theatre, and despite the composer’s previous avowed dislike for Shakespeare, his creative work on Akimov’s 1932 staging proved to be a turning-point, as he would return to the tragedy throughout his life. Shostakovich’s music for theatre and film adaptations of *Hamlet* has enjoyed a rich independent afterlife, not only as part of standard concert-hall repertoire in the form of suites but also, as with Tchaikovsky, as music for independent ballet adaptations. This constitutes a fascinating case study for how some incidental music, despite its context-specific nature, may live on in altered forms, divorced from the practical and pragmatic needs of their original contexts and from ‘the aesthetic and


creative impulses”¹⁶² of the director or company for whom the music was composed. While not featured directly in this dissertation, attention is drawn to this phenomenon here because it is probably the most complex level of appropriation and transformation of Shakespeare’s text, being subject to several successive stages of translation, appropriation and adaptation. Yet a further stage is the audience’s reception, which again is subject to the context of the time of performance. This is traceable – albeit partially – in reviews and academic studies, and is an aspect the dissertation seek to do full justice to.

**Structure of the dissertation**

It would be possible to move directly from the historical/methodological concerns outlined above into the central area of this dissertation, which is the conception, realisation and reception of the two most important productions of Hamlet in the Stalin era. However, those productions emerged in part from their own national tradition, of which everyone involved was more or less aware, and against which they fashioned their various contributions to a greater or lesser extent. Accordingly, chapter 1 is devoted to the specific history of Hamlet in Russia prior to 1932. This Chapter also provides an overview of the creative background of the directors of the central Stalin-era Hamlets, namely Nikolai Akimov (1901-68) and Sergei Radlov (1892-1958). These two pursued very different paths prior to their Hamlets, but each reflected and responded to the changing cultural climate and theatre trends of the liminal years before and after the Bolshevik Revolution. Furthermore, any study of Russian and Soviet theatre would be incomplete without mentioning, however briefly, its major trend-setter, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), for whom, Hamlet was also a constant presence in his work as theatre director, theorist and pedagogue.

Chapters 2 and 3 move to detailed study and analysis of Akimov’s and Radlov’s Hamlets, respectively. The innovative and highly controversial 1932 production of Hamlet by Nikolai Akimov at Moscow’s Vakhtangov Theatre, which included the young Shostakovich’s eccentric music, was premiered at a turning point in the country’s cultural history, in the aftermath of the disbanding of rival artistic factions, and coinciding with the advent of Socialist Realism and tighter control from above. Predictable though the latter developments may seem with hindsight, at the time of the production’s initial conception in 1931, it would have been hard to foresee them. This observation certainly helps to account for the scandalous nature of Akimov’s staging and its subsequent downfall. However, the closer

¹⁶² Ibid., 33.
examination undertaken in Chapter 2 reveals a myriad of fascinating and still poorly understood strands within this broad narrative.

Seven years on, the successful staging production of *Hamlet* by Sergei Radlov (director), Sergei Prokofiev (composer) and Vladimir Dmitriev (stage designer) fell during the last phase of Stalin’s great purges. Even though this production seems in many ways to be at the opposite pole from Akimov’s, since it stresses heroism and positivism seemingly in accordance with Socialist Realist doctrine, the in-depth analysis presented in Chapter 3, supports a more objective reassessment of its intentions, realisations and legacy.

The study of Akimov/Shostakovich *Hamlet* (1932) is supported by a large quantity of previously unknown or neglected archive materials. When it comes to the Radlov/Prokofiev *Hamlet* (1938) the archival material, though substantial, is patchier. In particular the production book and stenographic reports of rehearsals have not been uncovered, and an authoritative account of the production, its genesis and fate has had to be patched together using the letters and writings of Radlov and Prokofiev, miscellaneous reports and reminiscences, as well as the press coverage of the time. Hence the scene-by-scene accounts of these *Hamlets* here presented are distinct in nature and methodology from anything previously attempted.

The second half of the Stalin era, from 1938 until the death of the dictator in March 1953, is fascinating not only for the evolving cultural and political status of the regime, but also for the seismic international events that shook it, above all, of course, the Second World War and the beginnings of the Cold War. The place of *Hamlet* in the Soviet Union during this time has been the object of much speculation and requires its own careful demythologising. This is undertaken in Chapter 4. The complementing final chapter continues with an overview of productions of *Hamlet* on the major stages of Moscow and Leningrad almost immediately after Stalin’s death, and of a sample of productions and musical renderings of *Hamlet* thereafter. Together these phenomena show how Shakespeare’s text and Russian creative spirits in the arenas of theatre, ballet and opera continued to rub up against one another and against changing ideological climates. The resulting process of constant negotiation is one for which it would be hard to suggest parallels within the country, or indeed outside it.

The goals of this dissertation may accordingly be summed up as follows:
• To set the historical record straight regarding the conception, realisation and reception of the two most important Hamlet productions of the Stalin era, and to prepare the ground for their possible future reconstructions

• To offer nuanced interpretations of these productions, first and foremost through consideration of previously unresearched archival materials, but also through revised accounts of the careers of their respective directors

• To set these productions in the context of previous and subsequent Hamlet stagings in Russia, taking into account ideological pressures such as Stalin’s supposed ban (whose problematic status is separately considered in chapter 4)

• To do fuller justice than hitherto to the role of music both in these productions and in independent compositional engagements with Hamlet, particularly in Russia

• To offer a critical consideration of the secondary literature, mainly in English and Russian
Chapter 1

Hamlet in Russia and the Soviet Union: an overview

1.1 Origins

Notwithstanding individual Russian diplomats visiting the English court, and continental theatre troupes touring Shakespeare adaptations to Russia, it is generally accepted that Alexander Sumarokov (1718-77), sometimes called the ‘founder of Russian Classical tragedy’, was ‘responsible for introducing both Shakespeare and a version of Hamlet into Russia in 1748.’ This is regardless of the fact that Shakespeare’s name appears nowhere in Sumarokov’s Gamlet-Tragediia, and that in replying to his arch-rival, Vasilii Trediakovskii, Sumarokov described his Hamlet as ‘ha[ving] very, very little in common with Shakespeare’s tragedy.’ Even so, Sumarokov’s play did, at least reportedly, enjoy successful staging, its first documented performance taking place on 1 July 1757 in St Petersburg, with Ivan Dmitrevskii in the title role.

Sumarokov’s concept of Shakespeare was in fact shaped by the dominating French Neoclassicist model of the time and was particularly close to that of Voltaire. Acknowledging Shakespeare’s ‘good qualities’, despite his ‘vulgarity’, Sumarokov regarded him as an ‘unenlightened’ genius, ‘subject to [i.e. in need of] numerous corrections’. Hence, when in 1932 critics of Nikolai Akimov’s Hamlet accused the latter – an avowed champion of Shakespeare’s real intentions - of returning to ‘Sumarokovshchina’, they were ignoring crucial differences between their respective approaches (see 2.7). Such reductionist generalisations could admittedly have been a result of the then under-developed nature of Sumarokov scholarship. Even today, most books assume that Sumarokov’s adaptation of Hamlet was worked up from an equally distorted French translation of the tragedy by Pierre Rowe.

Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 1.
Simon, marquis de Laplace. However, documents from the archives reveal that around the time he was working on his Hamlet, he borrowed, among other books, the fourth folio edition Shakespeare of 1685, in English, from the library of the Academy of Science. In this connection, Marcus Levitt derives examples from Sumarokov’s Hamlet, which suggest that he might have referred to Shakespeare’s own text, at least on occasion. However, it is only by putting Sumarokov’s Hamlet into the context of later Russian Hamlets that its full significance emerges. For one thing, since the ‘common Russian view of Sumarokov’s tragedies stresses their political message, and sees the plays as allegories on good and bad monarchs’, it could be argued that his Hamlet set the trend for the association of this tragedy with Aesopian political messages. In this light the play’s disappearance from Russian stages after 1762, despite its previous successful productions, has been plausibly ascribed to political reasons, namely the parallels between the Hamlet plot and Catherine II’s coming to power.

In another parallel with the late Stalin era, lack of performance apparently did not affect Shakespeare’s status. In fact he found an advocate in none other than Empress Catherine II herself. Her engagement with the works of Shakespeare, albeit via German translations, came in the form of her quasi-translation and reworking of The Merry Wives of Windsor (1786), which she called This is what it means to have a basket and linen and described as ‘A free but weak adaptation of Shakespeare’. The Spendthrift, written five months later as a free adaptation of Timon of Athens, and between them two historical dramas: The Life of Rurik and The Beginning of the Rule of Oleg, each of which she described as, ‘An imitation of Shakespeare, without observing the usual rules of the theatre’. However, it was Nikolai Karamzin, who, with his translation of Julius Cesar from the original in 1787, took the first steps away from Voltaire-dominated Shakespeare criticism in

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170 Ibid., 334.
171 See, for example, Mikhail Alekseev, Shekspir i russkaia kal’tura, Moscow and Leningrad, Nauka, 1965, 7-30; Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 13; Levitt, ‘Sumarokov’s Russianized “Hamlet”’, 334; and Alexei Bardovskii, who draws specific parallels between the political figures and the characters of the tragedy, in his ‘Russkii Gamlet’, in Sergei Platonov, A. Presniakov and Iu. Gessen (eds.), Russkoe proshloe: istoricheskii sbornik, No. 4, Moscow, Petrograd, 1923, 138.
172 The title is a free interpretation of Ford’s exclamation ‘this ’tis to have linen and buck-baskets!’ (III/5).
173 ‘...vol’noe no slaboe perelozhenie iz Shekspira’, Catherine the Great, Sochinenie, Vol. 2, 354, quoted in Ernest Simmons, ‘Catherine the Great and Shakespeare’, PMLA, 47/3, (September 1932), 790-806, here 794.
Russia. Karamzin’s fascination with Hamlet and with ‘To be or not to be’ as a formula depicting the ultimate ‘accursed question’ has been examined by James Billington, according to whom Karamzin’s story, Poor Liza (1792), depicted an ‘Ophelia-like’ heroine who ‘solved the riddle of being by ending her own life.’

Billington argues further that: ‘The principal reason for the sustained interest of the aristocracy lay in the romantic fascination with the character of Hamlet himself. Russian aristocrats felt a strange kinship with this privileged court figure torn between the mission he was called on to perform and his own private world.’ The choice between the higher ‘mission’ and the personal ‘private world’ points to Pasternak’s reading of the tragedy, attributing Christ-like qualities to the Danish prince. On the other hand, from the late 18th century, ‘To be or not to be’ increasingly represented the ‘accursed question’ of ‘to live or not to live’, which, according to Billington, came to be known as ‘the Hamlet question’.

1.2 Hamlet, Hamletisation and Hamletism in 19th-century Russia

However, the next important staging of Hamlet, which took place in 1810 at Imperial Theatre of St Petersburg with Aleksei Yakovlev in the title role, used Stepan Vyskovatov’s adaptation from Jean François Ducis (1769). In some quarters this Hamlet was understood as an effort to rehabilitate Alexander I and in line with patriotic feelings of its time. However, it was the arrival of Romanticism and Pushkin’s fascination for Shakespeare and Byron, as well as the development of native Russian theatre, that marked the turning point for the popularity of Shakespeare in Russia.

The German Romantic legacy brought with it Goethe’s reading of Hamlet in his Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship [Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre] (1796) as ‘A beautiful, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which makes the hero, [a nature that] sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off.’ This, as Boris Eikhenbaum observed, changes the Russian attitude towards Hamlet from primarily a political drama to a

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176 Ibid., 353-354.
177 The theme of Christ in Pasternak’s interpretation of Hamlet and his translation(s) of the tragedy has been widely discussed; see for example: Anna K. France, ‘Boris Pasternak’s Interpretation of Hamlet’, Russian Literature Triquarterly 7(1973), 202; Douglas Clayton, ‘The Hamlets of Turgenev and Pasternak: On the Role of Poetic Myth in Literature’, Germano-Slavica, 2/6 (1978), 460; Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign, 97-98.
178 Billington, Icon and Axe, 354.
181 See Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign, 54-64; Alekseev, Shekspir i russkaiia kul’tura, 201-315.
philosophical-historical tragedy. The development of Russian Hamletiada meant that not only *Hamlet* the play and its plot were evoked in literature, but also its separate motifs and characters, including such iconic images as Ophelia’s death, Yorick’s skull and the graveyard scene. Pushkin’s encounters with Shakespeare, however, took Russian Bardolatory to new levels, not only in allusions to individual works but also in incorporating Shakespeare’s dramatic structure, characterizations and use of irony. Indeed, notwithstanding Karamzin’s chronological precedence in *Poor Liza* (1792), the role of ‘the most original, sophisticated, and controlled use of Shakespeare’ in Russia has been credited to Pushkin. According to George Gibian, Pushkin’s versatile references to Shakespeare included partial translation in his poem ‘Angelo’ (1833), a parody remake in *Count Nullin* (1825), and application of Shakespearean themes, methods of construction and characterisation in *Boris Godunov* (1825). Yet Pushkin was unique in dissociating himself from what he saw as the over-interpreted German Romantic view of Shakespeare and Hamlet. As he put it, ‘The Germans see in Shakespeare the devil knows what, when in reality he simply said what was on his mind, without any ratiocination and not limited by any theory.’

The 1830s also saw new trends in translation, including working from the original Shakespeare text, a task attempted by Mikhail Vronchenko between 1828 and 1833. If Vronchenko’s efforts achieved limited circulation, Nikolai Polevoi’s translation, which appeared in 1837, would prove pivotal for the stage history of *Hamlet* in Russia. Polevoi’s *Hamlet* offers several points of comparison with the translation made by Pasternak more than a century later. Both men were repressed creative writers, using translation of *Hamlet* as a temporary refuge. They both identified with Hamlet and had a clear and determined, albeit subjective, understanding of who Hamlet was and how Shakespeare’s tragedy unfolded. If for Pasternak Hamlet was a Christ-like figure, who had to sacrifice his own needs for the mission assigned to him by a greater power, Polevoi, in line with the transitional nature of the time from Neoclassicism to Romanticism, insisted that the cornerstone of the drama was the

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185 Rowe, *Hamlet: A Window on Russia*, 30.
tragedy of weakness when facing duty, which he castigated by such means as ‘the epithet nichtozhni, meaning “worthless”, “contemptible”, “vain”, “naught”, etc’. In a similar way to Pasternak, Polevoi turned to the task of translation of *Hamlet* as an instrument of ‘self-reflection’, and accordingly the ‘connotations of humiliation and existential fear’ that he introduced to his interpretation of Shakespeare’s tragedy in some measure reflected his own self-image as a repressed author. To convey their personal attitude, each translator modified Shakespeare’s text in different ways: Pasternak, for instance, took out all hints of Ophelia’s sexuality, hence creating the image of purity *par excellence*. Polevoi, on the other hand, did not shy away from freely editing Shakespeare’s text and at the same time ‘Russifying’ it by eliminating foreign elements. The most famous words that emerged from Polevoi’s translation and its staging did not belong to Shakespeare: ‘Fearful, I am fearful for man!’ (*Strashno, Za cheloveka strashno mne!*), which Polevoi inserted as a substitute for Shakespeare’s ‘Rebellious hell,/ If thou canst mutine in a matron’s bones,/ To flaming youth let virtue be as wax/ And melt in her own fire…’ (III/4), addressed to Gertrude by Hamlet.

Polevoi’s translation was put on both in Moscow and in St Petersburg, with Pavel Mochalov and Vasili Karatygin respectively in the title role. It was the former staging, which opened on 22 January 1837 in the Maly Theatre, that has attracted the most attention, since it ‘brought home to the Russian public the universality of Shakespeare’s appeal’. The date has come to be known as ‘a great day’ in ‘the annals of Russian stage’, comparable in importance to the premiere of Glinka’s opera *A Life for the Tsar/Ivan Susanin* on 27 November 1836 in St Petersburg. Apart from the nature of the play, the context and the location of the production, Mochalov’s *Hamlet* owed its success to seminal articles in 1838 by the literary and theatre critic, Vissarion Belinsky: ‘Mochalov as Hamlet’ and ‘Hamlet, Prince of Denmark’. All this contributed to Mochalov’s status as ‘the most powerful

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188 Rowe, *Hamlet: A Window on Russia*, 43.
189 Semenenko, *Hamlet the Sign*, 79.
190 In 1834 Polevoi was banned from continuing his editorial practice for the *Moscow Telegraph*, which was closed down by the authorities.
192 In St Petersburg *Hamlet* was performed at the Alexandrinsky Theatre. Powerful in his own right, Karatygin’s neoclassical and decorative style of acting appealed more to the noble class, in contrast to the admiration for Mochalov among the intelligentsia.
signifier’ of Russian interwar (i.e. between 1812 and the Crimean War) culture.\textsuperscript{196} Placed by critics, and above all Belinsky, in opposition to Karatygin, the ‘actor-aristocrat’ and his refined technique,\textsuperscript{197} Mochalov represented for the intelligentsia and the new Romantic generation the ‘actor-plebian’\textsuperscript{198} and ‘an abstract ideal of primal Russianness’.\textsuperscript{199}

For Mochalov’s revival as ultimate Russian romantic tragedian to happen through his interpretation of a foreign play, the translation had to be appropriate. By its ‘adequate nationalization’ of the English play as well as by paying special attention to the scenic aspect of the text, Polevoi’s translation has been seen as successful in the ‘transplantation’ of Shakespeare to the Russian soil and its literary/theatrical system.\textsuperscript{200} His inclination for Romantic acting aesthetics and the associated spoken delivery, as opposed to the Neoclassical tradition of theatrical declamation, was apparently fully realised by Mochalov, whose melodramatic performance was described by Belinsky as ‘tempestuous inspiration, ardent, scorching passions, deeply emotional feelings, a wonderful face, a voice either resonant or low but always harmonious and melodious.’\textsuperscript{201} All this was complemented by the incidental music of Alexander Varlamov (1801-1848), whose trumpet fanfare was later used by conductor Gennady Rozhdestvensky in his \textit{Concert Scenario Hamlet}, ‘a 32-minute suite of sixteen items culled from Shostakovich’s film and stage scores’.\textsuperscript{202} Although the writings of Belinsky on this production and its Goethe-inspired translation have been partly examined by Russian and Western scholars, Varlamov’s accompanying music has received little or no scholarly attention. His songs for Ophelia, which were later conflated and published separately as a single ballad, are the only numbers to have entered the concert repertoire. With their operatic style and developed orchestral accompaniment, Ophelia’s songs suggest that Varlamov’s score was in line with the production’s style, being highly Romantic, yet conforming to Russian taste.

Having attended eight out of Mochalov’s ten performances, Belinsky formulated, perhaps for the first time, ‘the essence of Hamletism and its universal applicability: “everyone is

\textsuperscript{196} Schuler, \textit{Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia}, 115. For a study of Belinsky’s articles see ibid., 115-163.
\textsuperscript{197} Belinsky uses thinly veiled references to Karatygin without mentioning his name directly – see ibid.; 163.
\textsuperscript{198} Anatolii Al’tshuller categorises the actors in this way in his \textit{Teatr proslavlennykh masterov: ocherki istorii Aleksandriinskoy stseny}, Leningrad, Iskusstvo, 1968, 64.
\textsuperscript{199} Schuler, \textit{Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia}, 156.
\textsuperscript{200} Semenenko, \textit{Hamlet the Sign}, 81.
Russian Shakespeare scholars, inspired by Pushkin’s encounter with Shakespeare and his methods of appropriation of Shakespearean themes and dramatic structures, have inferred two subsequent historical directions: Shakespearianism or Shakespearism (dialogue with Shakespeare) and Shakespearisation (appropriation of Shakespeare).\(^{204}\) Nikolai Zakharov describes Shakespearisation [Shekspirizatsia] as: ‘a process emerging in Russian and global culture, which characterizes, on the one hand, an increasing interest in the heritage of Shakespeare (particularly intense in the second half of the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) century), and on the other hand, the strong influence of the playwright’s creative work on the subsequent development of literature, music, visual arts, theatre and cinema.’\(^{205}\) Parallel to this process is the more complex notion of Shakespearianism [Shekspirizm] which implies ‘an ideological and aesthetic trend characterized by a dialogue between cultures of Russia and Europe through the prism of Shakespeare studies and Shakespeare appropriations.'\(^{206}\)

Applying the same approach to Hamlet and its afterlife in Russian culture, Boris Gaydin has recognised the concept of Hamletisation, which is quite different from the more familiar notion of Hamletism (the former being principally associated with the play, the latter principally with the title character). According to Gaydin, Hamletisation is ‘a principle-process implying incorporation of separate reminiscences, characters, motifs, as well as a part of or the whole plot of Shakespeare’s Hamlet in a cultural context, i.e. poetics (theatrical production, cinematic version or adaptation).’\(^{207}\) Although it is generally argued that Hamlet in his 19\(^{\text{th}}\)-century Romantic guise was not Pushkin’s favourite Shakespearean character,\(^{208}\) some of the most original instances of Hamletisation can nevertheless be detected in the poet’s works. In Hamlet it was not philosophy or melancholy but irony and Shakespeare’s ability to express terror in laughter that attracted Pushkin. As he commented, ‘Hamlet’s jokes make one’s hair stand on end.’\(^{209}\) Furthermore, Eleanor Rowe argues that many of Pushkin’s

\(^{203}\) Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign, 80.


\(^{205}\) Zakharov, Shekspirizm russkoi klassicheskoi literaturey, 2008, 29.

\(^{206}\) Ibid., 35.


\(^{208}\) Izrail’ Vertsman, Gamlet Shekspira, Moscow, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1964, 122, quoted in Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 34.

uses of *Hamlet*, including the explicit evocation of Yorick in *Eugene Onegin*, are ‘at least faintly tinged with ironic playfulness.’

As Semenenko observes, the phenomenon of the separation of Hamlet the man from *Hamlet* the play – in other words Hamletism - has been extensively addressed, described and commented upon. According to Reginald Foakes, the term Hamletism seems to have been established by the 1840s, but neither he nor any other scholar has ventured to identify its origins more closely. Moreover, there appear to be significantly different nuances in the definition of Hamletism and its implications. In scholarly terms, the problem of Hamletism could be described *in nuce* as ‘a tendency to interpret Hamlet the character as a symbol (a proper name turns into a common noun) which embodies certain philosophical, social, psychological, or political characteristics and represents a certain type, or behavior’. In other words, according to time and place, new symbolic meanings are assigned to Hamlet the character, which in turn influence the interpretation of *Hamlet* the play and thus keep the text alive for the appropriating nation/era. However, some of these meanings have proven persistent (globally or locally) throughout history, provoking oppositions or even at times ‘anti-Hamlets’. Accordingly, Hamlet as a ‘metaphoric referent’, by common consent includes ‘semantic fields of alienation, opposition, doubt, melancholy, oppression’, and this is certainly the meaning Akimov, Radlov and other directors had in mind when they referred to Hamletism.

The particular implication of Hamletism that gained currency in the 19th century and proved tenacious thereafter is well described by Foakes: ‘Hamlet, reconstructed as a reflection of a modern consciousness, was thus identified with the problem of the age, and politicized as mirroring those who from weakness of will endlessly vacillate… . Hamlet was further abstracted from the play into an embodiment of what came to be known as Hamletism.’

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210 See examples in Rowe, *Hamlet: A Window on Russia*, 31-34.
211 Semenenko, *Hamlet the Sign*, 139.
213 Ibid.
214 Gaydin uses this term in his PhD dissertation to describe such negative views as Tolstoy’s and Turgenev’s – Boris Gaidin, *Vechnye obrazy kak konstanty kul’tury (Interpretatsiya ‘Gamletovskogo voprosa’)*, PhD Dissertation, Moscow, 2009, 149-170.
215 Semenenko, *Hamlet the Sign*, 140.
1.3 Russian *Hamlets* in the second half of the 19th century

In the nineteenth-century European view of Hamlet in general and the Russian view in particular, melancholy and struggle with the accursed question of ‘to be or not to be’ became the thematic core of the play and its interpretations. For Russia, Polevoi’s translation and Mochalov’s performance were the most influential pioneering acts. These aspects of Hamletism fuelled a polemic, particularly after Turgenev’s 1860 speech, ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’. One of the first to react negatively to the Romantic depiction of Hamlet was none other than Belinsky, who by the 1840s was changing tack, seeking ‘to demand that literature make a deliberate and definable social intervention, that it be seen to foreground its political position in relation to contemporary social life’.  

Having previously highly praised Polevoi’s translation, Belinsky in 1844 favoured Andrey Kronberg’s new translation of *Hamlet*, which compared to Polevoi’s had a clear orientation towards written rather than theatrical culture. Towards the end of the 1840s a different landscape dominated Russian culture and society. With the deaths of Mochalov in 1848 and Karatygin in 1853, passionate delivery and emotional virtuosity gradually gave way to more natural and restrained style of acting. The transition from romanticism to the heyday of Russian realism and a corresponding increasing psychological need to affirm men of action led to the melancholic and mourning prince becoming associated with the notion of the ‘superfluous man’ (*lishnyi chelovek*), popularized by, among others, Ivan Turgenev’s *Dnevnik lichnega chelovaka* (*The Diary of a Superfluous Man*) (1850). Following this and his *Gamlet Shchigrovskogo uezda* (*Hamlet of Shchigrovsky District*) (1849 a thumb-nail character portrait of the Hamlet-like roommate of the narrator, included in the collection *Zapiski okhotnika* (*A Huntsman’s Sketches*) 1847–1852), in 1860 Turgenev delivered his renowned lecture ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’, wherein he argued that these two figures represented ‘two basic opposite peculiarities of man’s nature – the two ends of the axis on which it turns’. For Turgenev, Don Quixotes embodied total faith in and devotion to an ideal and an existing truth outside oneself, whereas Hamlets represented ‘analysis above all and egoism, and therefore non-belief’. Most accounts of Turgenev’s lecture fall short of exploring its particularities and

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218 Semenenko, *Hamlet the Sign*, 84; for more details on Kronberg’s translation, see ibid., 83-85.

219 Interpretation of Hamlet as a weak man had already featured in writings of other influential authors such as Apollon Grigor’ev in his essay ‘Gamlet na odnom provintsial’nom teatre’, *Repertuar i panteon*, 1(1846), 37-48 (published under the pseudonym A. Trisimechistov). For more on Grigor’ev and other prominent critics of the time, see Schuler, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*, 179-193.

nuances, which reveal much both about Turgenev himself and about the politico-cultural context of his lecture. Further in the essay derived from the lecture, Turgenev grants that Hamlets may have ‘a bent towards beauty’ but by setting ‘Don Quixote’s centrifugal devotion and self-sacrifice’ against ‘Hamlet’s self-regard and self-interest’, he invokes more socio-political connotations, turning the two archetypes into ‘forces of inertia and motion, of conservatism and progress’. Later he relativizes these binary oppositions, admitting that in Nature there are ‘neither thorough Hamlets nor complete Don Quixotes’, just as in life purely tragic and comical are rarely encountered. By this denial of the absolutism of literary archetypes, ‘Hamlet, character and play… comes to stand for the limits of tragedy in relation to social existence and the desired model of political engagement. Hamlet’s social uselessness is, for Turgenev, socially useful, a means of charting what social responsibility should be by identifying its opposite.’

The second half of the 19th century saw the burgeoning influence of Shakespeare in general and of Hamlet/Hamlet in particular, in all branches of Russian arts and culture. The period between 1861 and 1907 saw at least ten more translations of Hamlet, all reacting to and resisting the dual canon (theatre and literature) of Polevoi and Kronberg’s translations. None of these, however, not even the 1899-1901 translation by ‘K.R.’ (i.e. Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov), lavishly published in three volumes with parallel texts in English and Russian, could compete with Polevoi’s, which received 262 performances between 1837 and 1897, or with Kronberg’s (eight performances in 1867-8 and then used in Craig-Stanislavsky’s and Mikhail Chekhov’s Hamlets of 1911/12 and 1924, respectively, both of which also incorporated passages from Polevoi’s translation).

In literature, and notably for Dostoevsky, Shakespeare was both ‘a prophet sent by God in order to reveal to us the secret of man, of man’s soul’, and ‘the poet of despair’. Based on analysis of Dostoevsky’s texts as well as his sketches and diaries, Zakharov traces the ‘Shakespearianism’ of Dostoevsky in terms of the influence of the author’s interpretation of Shakespearean heroes on his own protagonists. In this vein, Hamlet - or rather, as Foakes

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221 Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 66.
222 Holland, ‘More Russian than a Dane’, 325.
223 Ibid., 327.
224 Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign, 85-88.
225 Ibid., 90.
227 Zakharov, Shekspirizm russkoi klassicheskoi literature, 270.
suggests, the problem of ‘contemporary Hamletism’ - lies behind ‘the image\(^{228}\) of the central characters of Dostoevsky’s works, such as in *Notes from the Underground* (1864) as an embodiment of mental anguish, despair and noble suffering.\(^{229}\)

Dostoevsky died in 1881, the same year as the coming to power of the reactionary Tsar Alexander III following the assassination of his more liberal father, Alexander II. Writing during the following *fin de siècle* period, Anton Chekhov’s references to Shakespeare and Hamlet are extensive and highly diverse, their topics ranging from irony to fascination at the nature of mankind.\(^{230}\) If it was Chekhov’s characters (such as Ivanov and Layevsky\(^{231}\)) who identified themselves with Hamlet, in Alexander Blok’s case it was the poet himself who wore masks - not only of Hamlet but also of Ophelia. Indeed for the symbolist poets and artists in general, it was the Hamlet and Ophelia sub-plot that appeared most attractive, with Ophelia representing the eternal feminine (see Chapter 5.4.1) for a discussion of Blok and Vrubel’s ‘Hamlet and Ophelia’). The theme of Ophelia’s tragic death and Hamlet’s guilt continued to animate Russian poetry well into the twentieth century.

From the 1860s, productions of *Hamlet* seem to have been overshadowed by increasing interest in Russian dramatists such as Ostrovskii and Turgenev. Lucien Guitry’s farewell show in 1891 as Hamlet at the Mikhailovskii Theatre of St Petersburg retains historical significance only thanks to Tchaikovsky’s incidental music, thus overshadowing a contemporary Russian production of the tragedy at the Maly Theatre (Moscow) with Vasilii Dalmatov (real name Luchich) in the title role and a colourful setting provided by Fyodor Sologub.\(^{232}\)

By the end of the nineteenth century, Russian stages had already started to welcome active and strong Hamlets. For instance, in 1891 the Alexandrinsky Theatre presented Hamlet (played by Dalmatov) ‘naturalistically, as a rough sarcastically ironic’ man.\(^{233}\) Then came the famous collaboration of Gordon Craig and Konstantin Stanislavsky, resulting in the 1911/12

\(^{228}\) Foakes, *Hamlet versus Lear*, 22.

\(^{229}\) See Eleanor Rowe, *Hamlet: A Window on Russia*, 83-93.


\(^{231}\) Central characters from *Ivanov* (1887-9) and *The Duel* (1891), respectively.

\(^{232}\) For a reproduction of Sologub’s design, see Liudmila Guzovskaya, *Russkii teatr: illustrirovanniaa khronika rossiskoi teatral’noi zhizni*, Moscow, Interros, 2006, 74-79.

\(^{233}\) Semenenko, *Hamlet the Sign*, 126-127.
Moscow Art Theatre’s *Hamlet*. Considered as one of the most important productions of *Hamlet* in the twentieth century, the Craig/Stanislavsky *Hamlet* was the first ‘to activate the motif of self-sacrifice’ for Russian Hamletiada.\(^{234}\) The production, its genesis, each director’s concept and the realisation of that concept have been studied by Laurence Senelick, who, however, omits the incidental music from his attempt at reconstruction. The three published excerpts from Il’ia Sats’s score (‘Hamlet’s loneliness’, ‘Fortinbras’s march’ and ‘Fanfares’) suggest an overall Tchaikovskian and Griegian style and that the composer provided the production with a functional, albeit generic, musical accompaniment, with hints of archaism through the incorporation of parallel fifths in the harmony.\(^{235}\) The theme of a Christ-like Hamlet and Hamlet as Messiah evoked in this production was to be revived in Pasternak’s translations and overall reading of *Hamlet* (see 4.4 and 4.5 below).

### 1.4 *Hamlet* in pre-revolutionary Russian music

Just as it is odd to comment on Shakespeare’s plays as literary texts divorced from their theatrical realisation, so it is unfortunate to discuss the latter without reference to the music that went with them, where this is available, as it is with many of the most notable productions in the 20th century. Moreover, since Berlioz in the 1830s, composers had responded to Shakespeare with self-standing works, generally orchestral, to which tradition Russians made a distinctive contribution in the field of symphonic poems and overtures, sometimes provoking eloquent eulogies to their historic significance.

The celebrations of the 300\(^{th}\) anniversary of Shakespeare in 1864 included an independent musical event in the shape of a concert on the birthday itself - 23 April. César Cui, a member of the Slavophile-inclined *Moguchaia Kuchka* (‘Mighty Handful’), as the group consisting of himself, Musorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin and Balakirev would be dubbed by Vladimir Stasov three years later, reported and commented on this concert. Its programme included the March from Mendelssohn’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Schumann’s *Julius Caesar* overture, the ‘Queen Mab’ scherzo from Berlioz’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Mily Balakirev’s overture and entr’actes to *King Lear*.\(^{236}\) Cui highly praised Balakirev’s contributions, noting their initiative in ‘seeking inspiration in profound works of genius…

\(^{234}\) Ibid., 127.
\(^{235}\) The excerpts are published in Natal’ia Sats (ed.), *Il’ia Sats: Iz zapisnykh knizhek, vospominaniia sovremennnikov*, Moscow, Sovetskii kompozitor, 1968, 229-232. The manuscripts of the incidental music and musical instructions are kept at the Museum of the Moscow Art Theatre.
Are this seriousness and artistry of their direction not one of the guarantees that our hopes for an immediate and great future for music in Russia will be realized?\textsuperscript{237} Cui also used this article to mock Western operatic composers’ ‘caricature’ of Shakespearean subjects, particularly the attempts by Italian composers such as Bellini and Rossini: ‘Can a superficial Italian for whom the subject is merely a pretext for his music, which is also superficial, can he be joined to Shakespeare…?’\textsuperscript{238}

The leaders of the heated Slavophile-versus-Westerner disputes, which in music at least were more a case of opposing views regarding professionalization,\textsuperscript{239} seem to have found common ground in Shakespeare. In the summer of 1869 Balakirev suggested to Tchaikovsky (who was never as strident an ideologue, but whose extraordinary gifts inevitably gave him a position as figurehead) the idea of a musical treatment of Fantasy-overture \textit{Romeo and Juliet}.\textsuperscript{240} The idea for Tchaikovsky’s next Shakespeare-themed work, the Symphonic Fantasia \textit{The Tempest}, belonged to the critic and mentor of the Mighty Handful, Vladimir Stasov, this being one of three subjects he suggested to the composer in a letter of 30 December 1872/11 January 1873 (the other two being \textit{Taras Bulba} and \textit{Ivanhoe}).\textsuperscript{241}

In July 1876, the composer’s brother, Modest, included \textit{Hamlet} among his suggestions for a new symphonic work, to which Tchaikovsky replied positively but cautiously, as he considered the task ‘devilishly difficult’.\textsuperscript{242} Although he did not begin composition until 1888, his diary entries and letters indicate that his thoughts regularly returned to the subject. It was, in fact, the French actor, Lucien Guitry, who acted as a catalyst in 1885. So impressed was Tchaikovsky by Guitry’s acting that he wrote to him urging him to take on a Shakespearean theme, promising that in the event that Guitry played Hamlet or Romeo, he would compose an overture and entr’actes tailored to the resources of Moscow’s Mikhailovsky Theatre. In 1888 Guitry reminded Tchaikovsky of this promise, informing him that Grand Duchess Mariia Pavlovna (sister-in-law of Alexander III) was organising a gala charity at the Mariinsky Theatre, where she wanted Act III of \textit{Hamlet} to be staged, with

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 180.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 179.
\textsuperscript{240} Composed in October and November 1869, and extensively revised between July and September 1870. The final, definitive version of the score dates from August 1880 – see the Tchaikovsky research database: \url{http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Romeo_and_Juliet}, accessed 12 August 2016.
\textsuperscript{241} See \url{http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/The_Tempest#cite_ref-note1_1-0}, accessed 12 August 2016.
Guitry in the title role and with an overture composed by Tchaikovsky. Although Guitry later wrote to Tchaikovsky informing him that the production was cancelled, the composer was already captivated with the composition and proceeded to write his overture-fantasia in the course of the summer, after drafting his Fifth symphony.

Two years later, at Guitry’s request, Tchaikovsky developed the overture-fantasia into incidental music for the actor’s farewell performance in Russia at the Mikhailovsky Theatre on 9/21 February 1891. For this Guitry had chosen Hamlet in the French translation by Alexander Dumas père and Paul Meurice. Guitry enclosed a copy of the play with detailed instructions for incidental music. Tchaikovsky agreed and fulfilled the task, but with little enthusiasm. The incidental music makes extensive use of material from the overture-fantasia, as well as material from other earlier works of the composer, including the Alla tedesca movement from his Third Symphony, used for an entr’acte (Act II, No. 5); the Melodrama (Act II, No. 10) which was taken from his incidental music to The Snow Maiden and used for another entr’acte (Act III, No. 7); and the Entr’acte (Act IV, No. 9) which was a reworking of the Elegy for string orchestra from 1884.

The overture-fantasia was, however, an autonomous work, which aspired not to narrate Shakespeare’s plot but to focus on a few key images: Ophelia and her tragic fate, the troubled but noble Hamlet, and the decisive and triumphant Fortinbras. Framed between passages of funeral music at either end, these three images and their respective musical themes make up the core of Tchaikovsky’s work. Of these, the melancholic Ophelia theme in B minor on the oboe is the most memorable. Contrasting it with Hamlet’s theme in F minor, Tchaikovsky thereby creates a tritonal opposition, suggesting by tonal means the greatest possible distance between the lovers and symbolically alluding to the impossibility of a harmonious future for them. The fact that Tchaikovsky introduces the theme of Fortinbras in the middle of the score rather than saving it for the end suggests that he had his own personal and subjective reading of Shakespeare’s play in mind, and that his music went beyond a simple musical parallel to the drama. In addition, by ensuring that Fortinbras’s theme has points in common with that of Hamlet, Tchaikovsky suggests that the character of Fortinbras might be interpreted as an alter ego or mirror image of Hamlet.

When performed together with Tchaikovsky’s *Manfred* Symphony on 11 August 1893, *Hamlet* was rated the higher achievement by Hermann Laroche, a critic generally sympathetic to the composer’s cause: ‘Tchaikovsky’s *Hamlet* is to a significant extent more free than his *Manfred* from the ballast of the commonplaces of “programme music”’. Be that as it may, Tchaikovsky’s overture-fantasia and incidental score have enjoyed a rich afterlife both within and outside Russia, having featured in several ballets (such as Robert Helpmann’s 1942 choreography for Sadler’s Wells Ballet, London), productions such as Nikolai Okhlopkov’s for the Mayakovsky Theatre in Moscow (1954), and even films, such as Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000).

### 1.5 *Hamlet* under the Bolsheviks

The appropriation of Shakespeare, and especially his tragedies, posed a sharp dilemma for Soviet artists. Theatre directors searched initially for solutions in experimentation and radical re-interpretation, and Shakespearean productions of the immediate post-Revolutionary years mirrored the ‘characteristic diversity of direction in explorations of the early Soviet theatre’. Unlike in the late Stalinist years, it was *Macbeth* that was staged more often than any other Shakespeare play, arguably since it lent itself so readily to interpretation in the spirit of anti-monarchical Revolution. Most notably, the 1924 production by the Ukrainian, Les Kurbas, presented an austere cubist-expressionist staging, incorporating elements of Grand Guignol and pre-Brechtian alienation. The same year saw the premiere of Mikhail Chekhov’s *Hamlet* at the Second Moscow Art Theatre, a highly stylised production that was largely an acting vehicle for Chekhov. This *Hamlet* has been much described in Western scholarly literature, with opinions ranging from its supposedly ‘distorted’ interpretation to reductionist speculation regarding its supposed dissident nature which apparently ‘infuriated’ the communist press. Although Semenenko argues, more level-headedly,

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246 Ibid., 110.


248 Mikhail Chekhov was the actor of the title role, and the production was directed by a team of three directors, a strategy which, according to Rudnitsky, resulted in a lack of coordination among the actors – see Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre*, 113.


that this production marked ‘the beginning of the humanistic interpretation’ of Hamlet in Russia,\textsuperscript{252} in the following years, and particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, Chekhov’s Hamlet became a negative benchmark for mysticism and distortion (see Akimov’s remarks, quoted in 2.3). The fact that there is little mention of the music for this production composed by Nikolai Rakhmanov may perhaps be attributed to the traditions of the Second Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre (henceforth MAT II), which placed the musicians behind the main stage and hence reduced the role of incidental music so drastically.\textsuperscript{253} The composer’s name appears on posters (albeit sometimes spelled wrongly and confused with Sergei Rachmaninoff) for a reading/mono-spectacle based on Hamlet in the 1950s, which would also be the first reading of Pasternak’s translation of the tragedy in Moscow (see Chapter 4.5).

A further production, today largely overlooked by Western scholars, was directed in 1925 by Kote Mardzhanishvili (Konstantin Mardzhanov) at the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi.

Mardzhanishvili, who in 1911 had served as Craig’s assistant for the Moscow Art Theatre Hamlet, moved away from the theme of the Christ-like Hamlet as portrayed in that production and instead centred on ‘the romantic play of contrasts between dark and light, lofty spirituality and base sensuality, heroism and villainy’.\textsuperscript{254} To realise his conception, Mardzhanishvili succeeded in creating a harmonious co-ordination between individual components. The simplified visual imagery of Iraklii Gamrekeli’s sets provided a frame for the noble acts of Hamlet, portrayed by Georgia’s greatest actor of the time, Ushang Chkheidze, to the accompaniment of Tchaikovsky’s music. According to Rudnitsky, the overall result, was much more consistent than that MAT II’s Hamlet and remained accessible to the Georgian public.\textsuperscript{255}

Meanwhile the Russian Hamlet was now taking on local colours of other Soviet republic, as was the case in probably the most radical experiment in these years, which took place at the Azerbaijan State Theatre in Baku in 1926. For the first ever production of Hamlet on the Azerbaijani stage, Aleksandr Tuganov transferred the tragedy to an unnamed oriental country


\textsuperscript{252} Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign, 125.

\textsuperscript{253} This tradition is reported by Iurii Elagin see: Juri Jelagin, The Taming of the Arts, New York, Dutton, 1951, 22-23.

\textsuperscript{254} Rudnitsky, Russian and Soviet Theatre, 114.

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid., 114-115.
and dressed everyone in oriental costumes against a set designed in Turkish/Persian style. Apart from Hamlet, acted by the legendary Abbas Mirza Sharifzade, and Ophelia, the other characters were given oriental names with familiar connotations for the Azerbaijani audience; Claudius was Shah, Gertrude became Goharshad, Polonius was called Logman, and Laertes became Sohrab, a name associated with the brave hero of Abu ’l-Qasim Ferdowsi’s epic poem, *Shahnameh*, who is accidentally killed by his own father. Tuganov’s production enjoyed a long repertoire life, and in 1930 it even toured to Moscow and Leningrad. Armenia continued its love-affair with Shakespeare and particularly with *Hamlet* and *Othello* (which had started in the 19th century) thanks to the international status of Vahram Papazian.

1.6 Towards *Hamlet* under Stalin – Nikolai Akimov and Sergei Radlov

As in the other arts, the Stalin era (1928-1953) marked the end of a period of daring theatrical experimentations. Akimov’s production of *Hamlet* in 1932 – a year that marked a crucial turning point in the Soviet cultural climate with the Central Committee’s 23 April 1932 Resolution ‘On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organisations’, dethroning RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and instituting artistic unions – and Radlov’s in 1938, just as the Stalinist terror was subsiding, stand out as the most prominent Stalin-era productions of the tragedy and as case studies for cultural trends of their time. Each of these productions needs to be understood not only in its own immediate context and that of the overall Russian and Soviet theatrical and cultural landscape, but also in terms of the creative path of the artists involved. The following overview of Akimov’s and Radlov’s artistic lives in the context of shifting cultural trends of the time is intended to set this scene.

1.6.1 Akimov (1901-1968): A theatre director despite himself

‘From early childhood I had chosen my profession irrevocably’, wrote Akimov, in what he called ‘Sketches from an Unwritten Autobiography’. ‘I was to become a [visual] artist. I never had any intention of working in theatre. Later everything turned out the other way round.’

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256 Ibid., 115, and Mikhail Morozov, *Shakespeare on the Soviet Stage*, 41. According to Rudnitsky no archival materials, apart from a few photos of actors, exist for this production.
Nikolai Pavlovich Akimov was born in 1901 in Kharkov (in present-day Ukraine) into a family of railroad workers. In 1910 his father moved with his family to Tsarskoe Selo and then to St Petersburg, where from 1914 the young Akimov started taking drawing lessons from various masters, including artists of the World of Art (Mir Iskusstva) circle: Mstislav Dobuzhinskii, Aleksandr Iakovlev and Vasilii Shukhaev. So far as Akimov’s ‘systematic’ artistic qualification goes, the two years spent with these miriskussniki are all he could claim. Even so, as Aleksandr Bartoshevich has put it, ‘If one cannot really speak of pedagogical influence on Akimov, there is no denial of his professional experience’, since from the first independent work in the Kharkov Children’s Theatre in 1922, ‘he functioned not just as an artist in the theatre but as a theatre artist’. The first instance of working with the giant figure of Vsevolod Meyerhold came with the second play Akimov worked on in Kharkov: Alinur, a dramatization of Oscar Wilde’s 1892 short story The Star-Child. Even in his drawings, whether book illustrations or portraits, Akimov showed great theatrical awareness. As an early biographer put it: ‘Akimov directs (rezhissiruyet) his pictures’. Describing theatricality (teatral’nost) as ‘the expressive transfer with utmost clarity of the ideological essence of the dramatic work’, the same author claims that ‘Akimov’s paintings are structured with the idea that the viewer would not look at them for long. Hence the artist rushes to communicate the most important things in the fastest and shortest way.’ Indeed Akimov is particularly efficient in his early caricature/portraits and in his theatre posters.

In 1923 Akimov joined Vkhutemas (Vysshie Khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskie Masterskie - Higher Art and Technical Studios) which was founded in 1920 in Moscow following a decree from Lenin ‘to prepare master artists of highest qualifications for industry, as well as builders and managers for professional-technical education’. Often compared to the German Bauhaus in its organisation and pioneering role in training modern artist-designers, Vkhutemas was a centre for three major movements in avant-garde art and architecture: constructivism, rationalism, and suprematism. In the workshops, the faculty and students aimed to transform attitudes to art and reality through the use of precise geometry, with an

260 Aleksandr Bartoshevich, Akimov, Leningrad, Teakluba, 1933, 23.
261 Ibid.
262 Bartoshevich, Akimov, 25.
emphasis on space.\textsuperscript{265} The influence of Vkhutemas on Akimov’s work is undeniable, particularly in his use of certain notions of ‘constructivism’,\textsuperscript{266} as opposed to decorative style (\textit{dekorativnost’}), and in his special attention to space and objects.

Among other collaborators of Akimov in the 1920s was Nikolai Evreinov, who at this time was collaborating with the Theatre of the ‘Krivoe zerkalo’ (‘Crooked Mirror’). This was one of the so called ‘cabaret-theatres’ of Saint-Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad which specialized in parodies and small forms. Krivoe zerkalo was founded in 1908 - at the same time as Meyerhold’s similar establishment of \textit{Lukomor’e} (The Strand, a Theatre-Cabaret Club) - by editor and publisher of \textit{Teatr i iskusstvo}, Aleksandr Kugel, and his wife Zinaida Khol’mskaia. Considering themselves opposed to, or at least distinct from, Meyerhold’s theatre, the members of the ‘Distorted Mirror’, especially after Evreinov joined them, did not hesitate to produce plays aiming to mock their rivals. One of these parody plays was a production entitled \textit{Give us Hamlet!} (\textit{Daesh’ Gamleta}), whose dating is somewhat problematic. According to some sources, including the memories of the wife of the founder of the Krivoe Zerkalo, Zinaida Khol’mskaia\textsuperscript{267} and Akimov scholar Marina Zabolutniaia\textsuperscript{268}, it was meant to be a reply to Meyerhold’s successful 1924-25 show \textit{Daesh’ Evropu (Give us Europe!)}. However, the chronology is problematic, since, apart from illustrating a collection of Evreinov’s plays for this Theatre, there exists a sketch by Akimov for this production’s set dated 1923, which may be seen in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.\textsuperscript{269}

The pre-\textit{Hamlet} theatre career of Akimov can be divided into three chronological periods:

1) 1922-1924: First works at the Kharkov Children’s Theatre and arrival in Petrograd theatres. This was the period of working on small stages and mainly dealing with small genres (\textit{malye formy}). The influence of leftist artists such as Evreinov was most evident, as is Akimov’s talent and limitless imagination, even if his personal characteristics and style were yet to be revealed. At this time Akimov collaborated mainly with two directors: Georgi Kryzhitski and Nikolai Petrov.\textsuperscript{270}

\begin{itemize}
\item[265] See Paul Wood, \textit{The Challenge of the Avant-Garde}, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999, 244
\item[266] For a close study of constructivism in Akimov’s early works, see Bartoshevich, \textit{Akimov}, 71-73.
\item[270] Bartoshevich, \textit{Akimov}, 64.
\end{itemize}
2) 1924-1926: During this period Akimov went from theatre to theatre, combining small theatrical forms (satire, improvisation, sketch) with more traditional ones, staging dramatic shows, even trying opera (Verdi’s *Falstaff* at the Maly Opera Theatre) and operetta. However, an important part of his work of this time was for the major theatres of Leningrad, such as Gosdram (*Gosudarstvenyi Teatr Dramy*), the Bolshoi Dramaticheskii and Bolshoi Mikhailovskii. Aleksandr Bartoshevich frames this period between two productions: *Devstvenyi les*’ (*Virgin Forest*) by Ernst Toller, which premiered on 15 November 1924 at the Bolshoi Dramaticheski Teatr, and the apotheosis of Akimov’s early work, *Konets Krivorylska* (*The End of Krivorylsk*), premiered on 2 December 1926 at Gosdram. This second period is characterised by Bartoshevich as one of formation (*stanovlenia*).

3) 1927-1932: Thanks to *Konets Kryvorylska* whose model (*maketa*) was sent to an international theatre exhibition in Monza, Milan, Akimov had now become recognised as a major theatre artist. It was at this point that the Vakhtangov Theatre in Moscow invited him to work for them. From the beginning of the 1927-8 season it became clear that theatres saw much more in him than merely a stage designer; Akimov not only became artist-designer of productions but also exerted great influence on all elements of productions, practically becoming a co-director, until *Hamlet*, which marked his directorial debut in 1932 (see Chapter 2).

Around the time of *Hamlet* there were already several books dedicated to the life and works of the talented young artist and director, including Bartoshevich’s, which divides Akimov’s theatrical works into four categories: grotesque; variety of techniques, technical complications and surprises; cinematographic approach; and illusionism. All of these features are applicable in one way or another to Akimov’s *Hamlet*, at the same time as overlapping with Meyerhold’s theatrical principles. Perhaps that is one reason why many, including Konstantin Rudnitsky, have compared Akimov’s *Hamlet* to the output of Meyerhold, despite the latter’s negative reaction to this particular staging (for more on the Meyerhold/Akimov connection, see Chapter 2.5).

The venue for Akimov’s *Hamlet* was itself at the crossroads of theatrical trends and traditions. Moscow’s Vakhtangov Theatre had started off as a student studio in 1913, led by Konstantin Stanislavsky’s most outstanding pupil, Evgeny Vakhtangov, then an actor and director at the Moscow Art Theatre. But it was not until 13 September 1920 that the studio
was accepted into the family of Art Theatres as its Third Studio,\(^\text{271}\) and on 29 January 1921 its first major production, Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Miracle of St Anthony*, was staged.\(^\text{272}\) Despite being loyal to Stanislavsky’s psychological approach, Vakhtangov, who had accepted the Revolution quickly and without reservation, was greatly influenced by Meyerhold’s theatricality and anti-realism. Impressed by Roman Rolland’s book (and its derived concept), *Le Théâtre du people* (1903), Vakhtangov, like many others at the time, set himself the task of giving his art a sharper outline, without falsifying its truthfulness to life.\(^\text{273}\) A few months after the opening of the Third Studio in its current location on the Arbat came what Rudnitsky describes as ‘a genuine theatrical miracle’, whose name ‘would be recorded for all time in the chronicles of the Russian theatre’.\(^\text{274}\) Premiered on 28 February 1922 in Vakhtangov’s production, Carlo Gozzi’s *Princess Turandot* was to outlive its creator, who was too ill to attend the opening night, by many decades. In 1926, four years after Vakhtangov’s death from cancer, the Third Studio was renamed after him. What came next was a series of his pupils and assistants each trying their hand at directing this young theatre and making an effort to keep Vakhtangov’s tradition alive, at the same time as following the main theatrical trends and the required objectives of the time. Hence, while by the early 1930s Stanislavsky’s theatre had become known for its attempts at ‘sovietisation’, and MAT II was accused of traditionalism and Western bourgeois tendencies, the reputation of the Vakhtangov Theatre seems to have been a fluctuating one, with such risky plays in their repertoire as Bulgakov’s *Zoikina Kvartira* (1926) and Yuri Olesha’s *Zagavor Chuvstv* (A Conspiracy of Feelings) – Olesha’s dramatization of his novel *Zavist’* (Envy).\(^\text{275}\) And finally in 1932, the year of the ‘scandalous’ *Hamlet* also saw one of the most successful productions of the Theatre, in the first ‘Soviet’ play by Maksim Gorky, *Egor Bulyshev i drugie* (Egor Bulishev and others); this was especially hailed for the performance of its leading actor, Boris Shchukin, who had just played Polonius in Akimov’s *Hamlet*.\(^\text{276}\)

\(^\text{271}\) In 1919 under a recognition plan, the Moscow Art Theatre was designated an official State Academic Theatre and hence qualified for governmental subsidises. For this and subsequent changes to the finance of the Theatre, see Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus*, Newark, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, 39. For more on the studios of the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavsky’s role and attitude, see Rebecca B. Gauss, *Lear’s Daughters: The Studios of the Moscow Art Theatre 1905-1927*, American University Studies, Vol. 29, New York, Peter Lang, 1999.


\(^\text{274}\) Ibid., 54.


\(^\text{276}\) Ibid., 305.
Apart from *Hamlet*, the year 1932 saw another Shakespearean production in the shape of Sergei Radlov’s *Othello* at his own Theatre Studio (see Chapter 3.1). This was not Radlov’s first staging of this particular tragedy. On his way to being recognised as the Russian Shakespeare director *par excellence*, he had already staged *Othello* in 1927 at the Leningrad Academic Theatre (i.e. the Alexandrinsky Theatre, also known as the Pushkin Theatre). An overview of Radlov’s theatrical life preceding this production will help to draw a fuller picture of the evolution of his career and aesthetics, leading to his better-known Shakespeare productions in the 1930s. Nine years older than Akimov, Radlov had been involved with Soviet Theatre from the start; of necessity, then, the following overview will be more extensive.

1.6.2 Sergei Radlov (1892-1958): A mirror of Soviet culture

It is difficult to present a linear description of Radlov’s theatre life. As a director, he often had several projects in several different genres on the go simultaneously, some of which appear only tenuously related to one another. However, what can be said is that his gigantic output prior to his most celebrated Shakespearean projects in the 1930s was very much in tune with both popular and official demands of the 1920s, and for all the simultaneously layers of his activity there was a perceptible overall shift from experimental, circus and mass spectacles to the classics. Between these two phases, from 1925 to 1934 Radlov was at the head of GATOB, as it was then known (Gosudarstvenny Akademicheskii Teatr [Opery i Baleta] - from 1924-35 the Leningrad State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre, from 1935-92 the Kirov, and since 1992 reverted to its pre-Bolshevik name, the Mariinsky) where he was responsible for the introduction of such important recent operas as Franz Schreker’s *Der ferne Klang* (1925), Prokofiev’s *The Love for Three Oranges* (1926) and Berg’s *Wozzeck* (1927), as well as the premiere of one of the first attempts at a truly Soviet opera – Vladimir Deshevov’s *Ice and Steel* (1930). Each of these productions features in academic studies as a historic moment for Soviet culture. However, Radlov’s name and work seldom receives more than a token mention. With the exception of his collaboration with Prokofiev on the ballet version of *Romeo and Juliet* (see below), his career remains relatively obscure.

To this day David Zolotnitsky’s book, which first appeared in a rather poor English translation in 1995, is the only study of Radlov’s long theatrical career, which spanned from around 1917 to his death in 1958. As interesting and valuable as Zolotnitsky’s work is, its primary goal seems to have been a rehabilitation of its subject; hence it tries to present him in the most favourable light possible. This means that the first part of the book, which deals with
Radlov’s early career in the 1920s leading to the foundation of his own Studio Theatre and his most important Shakespeare productions, avoids any political context, thus ignoring Radlov’s interest and active participation in the making of the Bolshevik cultural landscape. By contrast, the second part of the book, which moves to the wartime tragedies and Radlov’s eventual fall and virtual eradication from Soviet theatrical history uses every possible excuse to present the director as a political victim, avoiding any rumours or facts that might endanger this image, including those concerning the nature of his relationship with the Nazis (see chapter 4.3 below). On the other hand, the complexity of Radlov’s career and the diversity of his output do seem to have troubled Zolotnitsky, since his account of Radlov’s life and work at times resembles a labyrinth. Table 1 in the Appendix uses the information provided in Zolotnitsky’s book and Radlov’s own writings as well as contemporary reviews and reports in order to provide an overview of Radlov’s theatre career, with only representative productions and theatres included. Diverse though the emergent picture may be, it is evident that Radlov gradually focused his style and interests, progressively devoting his time and energy to his own theatre troupe, which he created in 1928. Originally known as The Youth Theatre (Molodoi teatr), this was renamed in 1934 as the Theatre Studio Headed by Radlov, and again in 1939 as Lensovet (Teatr Leningradskogo soveta). Similarly, his repertoire demonstrates increasing attention to the classics, particularly Shakespeare, and from the early 1930s to the end of his career, his theatre was considered in effect a Shakespeare laboratory.

A full picture of Radlov’s theatrical career can only be gained by placing him within the ever-changing socio-political and cultural climate of the USSR, for which there is no better place to turn than the classic study by Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution*. Clark provides a panoramic account of Soviet culture in the decade or so following the Revolution, when all cultural workers, regardless of their political affiliation, ‘sought to realize a revolutionary culture that might transform the society’. Presenting a non-partisan overview of the nature of what she calls ‘a particular cultural ecosystem’, Clark seeks to suggest possible answers to the ‘accursed question’ of ‘who made “Stalinist” culture? The intellectuals? Particular groups? Popular taste? Or even Western predictable trajectories through the 1920s and 1930s for individual actors in its “making”? Apart from Meyerhold, the usual focus of cultural studies concerning this period of time, Clark chooses

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278 Ibid., 23.
279 Ibid., 297.
280 Ibid., 296.
as her “‘heroes’”, among others, two lesser-known (at least in the West) figures: Adrian Piotrovsky (1898-1938) and Radlov. With a career that repeatedly brought him into prominence, Radlov provides a perfect case study for the twists and turns in the formation of Soviet culture, illustrating Clark’s general point that its evolution was far from unilinear. Hence, applying Clark’s revisionist study and its challenges to common assumptions regarding the provenance of Soviet culture to Zolotnitsky’s account of Radlov’s productions presents a more realistic picture of his prolific and extremely varied career. This in turn should contribute to a richer understanding of his later Shakespearean period, including his 1938 Hamlet.

1.6.2.1 The Young Sergei Radlov and the ‘Theatricalisation of Life’

In a similar manner to Akimov, Radlov’s path to the theatre was rather unconventional. Where Akimov started as a visual artist, Radlov’s career stemmed from his academic background and his literary work. It was as a poet that he joined first Nikolai Evreinov at The Ancient Theatre and then Meyerhold, after the latter opened his studio at Borodinskaya Street in 1913, which in 1914 generated a new journal, The Love for Three Oranges (Liubov’ k trem apel’synam), subtitled The Journal of Doctor Dapertutto. The encounter with Meyerhold, eighteen years his senior, would play a key role in the further development of Radlov’s career. Despite their future mutual hostility, Radlov’s career in certain ways echoed that of his famous older colleague. In the summer of 1918, for instance, following in Meyerhold’s footsteps, Radlov became a member of the repertoire section of the Petrograd Theatre Department (TEO) of the People’s Commissariat of Education and Enlightenment (Narkompros). Artistically, with the question of the relationship between word and music in the air, and given the ‘Wagnerian frame of reference that dominated the theoretical explorations and practical work of the theatre activists in the 1910s’, it is not surprising that the philologist Radlov should have become interested and involved in the theatrical activities of Meyerhold’s studio and its further reincarnations (from 1913-1918), including teaching and then managing the Classes for Mastership of Scenic Production (Kursy masterstva stsenicheskikh postanovok, or Kurmastsep). This latter was also where in 1918/1919 Biomechanics was first presented and taught as gymnastic exercises for actors; later in the 1920s, Meyerhold would develop this into a ‘system’ at the opposite end to

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281 Ibid., 24.
282 Ibid., 88.
283 For Meyerhold’s own writings on biomechanics see his Stat’i, Pis’ma, Rechi, Besedy. Vol. 2, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1968.
Stanislavsky’s naturalistic method as practised at the Moscow Art Theatre, which insisted on emotional memory. However, Radlov appears to have had no part in this project.

This and other experimentations of the post-revolutionary years, including those by Radlov himself, represented further steps in the direction of ‘theatricality’ (teatral’nost’) and ‘conventionality’ (uslovnost’) of Russian theatre. But such attempts were not new: as early as 1902, Valerii Briusov had argued against traditional realism and the mirroring of life on the stage, and in 1908 he explicitly invoked the term uslovnost’ as a desirable feature of the new Russian theatre. Nor were such pronouncements exclusive to Russia. Although it took a particular shape in the Russian context, the renewal of theatre along these lines was part of an international trend that had begun with the ideas of Wagner and Nietzsche in the 1860s and had continued in the writings of such theoreticians as Gordon Craig, George Fuchs and Adolph Appia. ‘Theatricality’ and ‘conventionality’, which Clark calls ‘banner terms under which a massive overhaul of the theatre was undertaken’, were deeply rooted in early 20th-century European movements.

In any case, being born into an elite St Petersburg family with a tradition of education and high-ranked posts running through several generations, Radlov presents an example of those Clark dubs ‘dynastic intellectuals’, in his case scholars and academics of German descent. His father, Ernest Leopoldovich (Lvovich) (1854-1928) was a Russian idealist philosopher, director of the Imperial Public Library and a classics scholar who had a close friendship with the philosopher and poet, Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900). Among Radlov senior’s publications was the monograph, Vladimir Solovyov: Life and Teaching. He also...
translated Aristotle’s *Ethics* into Russian (1908) and edited the first Russian translation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Mind* (1913) becoming, after the Revolution, a member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1920). Similarly to his father, Sergei Radlov studied at the philological faculty of St Petersburg State University, where he and Adrian Piotrovsky were disciples of Tadeusz Zieliński (1859-1944), a prominent Polish classical philologist, historian, translator of Sophocles, Euripides and other classical authors into Russian.  

Despite Zolotnitsky’s downplaying of this background, Radlov’s education could explain many aspects of his career, particularly his interest in antiquity, which resulted in his organising of several mass spectacles in the spirit of Greek antique theatre in the 1920s.

As Clark observes, the pattern of the son of a professor moving in high circles of the intelligentsia, who was himself a scholar, but who worked both for the revolutionary experimental theatre and as official cultural bureaucrat, can be detected in several prominent cultural figures of the 1910s and the 1920s, including Konstantin Derzhavin and Piotrovsky. Representing ‘an Enlightenment’, these people acted as ‘cultural ecologists’ and brought their ‘baggage of the cultural elite’ into the machinery of Soviet culture.  

Falling into the same pitfall as certain Western commentators in trying to keep Radlov’s reputation ‘pure’, Zolotnitsky virtually avoids any mention of his administrative and official activities for the Soviet regime, not recognising that in so doing he is glossing over an important catalyst for Radlov’s creative career, namely his commitment to a transformative, even revolutionary, approach to theatre.

During the Cold War, and even into the early post-Soviet era, it was common for Western studies to polarize the Russian intelligentsia into those who categorically rejected the Revolution and either emigrated or joined the White Russian resistance, and those who remained but tried to avoid any political commitment. However, the likes of Radlov prove that there was also a category for whom the main driving force was negotiation, and even active involvement, with the direction of the regime. Paradoxically to modern perceptions, many of these intellectuals ‘demanded a cultural dictatorship’ and ‘urged total intolerance for cultural approaches other than their own.’ Such trends are perhaps best revealed in the writings of Adrian Piotrovsky, including his short but trenchant article, ‘Dictatorship’ (*Diktatura*) of 1920, in which he advocated ‘a policy of artistic enforcement’ (*politi决策*).

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292 Piotrovsky was the illegitimate son of Zieliński as well as his disciple.
293 Clark, *Petersburg*, 25.
Ironically, Piotrovsky himself would fall victim to such ‘enforcements’, when in 1938 he was purged following attacks for his involvement in the doomed ballet, The Limpid Stream, in collaboration with Shostakovich.296 Admittedly in the early 1920s, prior to Stalinism and Fascism, ‘dictatorship’ did not hold such negative connotations as it does today.

Clark argues that the theatre activists of post-revolutionary Petrograd had a vision ‘uncannily comparable’ to Plato’s, in that ‘Evreinov, Piotrovsky and others began to talk of instituting a theatrocracy.’297 While Clark’s use of this term is essentially positive in connotation, it may be worth adding that Plato considered theatrocracy to be a source of societal degeneration and held a highly negative opinion of it. As Samuel Weber suggests, while democracy was ‘not the political form of choice for the Athenian (Plato’s pseudonym in his Laws)’, it was still preferable to ‘theatrocracy’, which was Plato’s pejorative term for a ‘sovereignty of the audience’ or absolute rule by the people. Indeed Plato reportedly stated: ‘Our once silent audiences have found a voice, in the persuasion that they understand what is good and bad in art; the old sovereignty of the best, aristocracy, has given way to an evil “sovereignty of the audience”, a theatrocracy (theatrokratia).’298

On the other hand, Evreinov’s idea of ‘theatrocracy as pantheism’ (Teatrokratia – panteizm), which he had advocated in pre-revolutionary years, implied something quite different.299 Already then he had talked about the ‘theatralisation of life’ (Teatralizatsia zhiz’i).300 Hence, despite sharing the term, Evreinov’s theatrocracy, or at least his view of it, bears no more resemblance to that of Plato than does the modern understanding of ‘democracy’ to the ancient Greek definition of the concept. Clark’s argument, however, does contribute to her main point: that the Soviet post-revolutionary so-called avant-garde and Stalinist culture both had their origins in the past. Acting in many respects as traditionalists, the ‘avant-gardists’ were indeed arguably turning the clock back rather than forward.

297 Clark, Petersburg, 120.
300 For instance in his Teatr kak takovoi, St Petersburg, Butkovskaja, 1912.
In practice many theatre activists ended up in a paradoxical situation: on the one hand they were trying to bring the theatre back to the masses; on the other they wanted to educate as yet unenlightened audiences. Richard Stites considers the ‘collision and collusion’ between different utopian visions as one of the most distinctive features of the post-Revolutionary period. Solutions that emerged in response to this situation included Mass Spectacles (or mass festivals) and People’s Theatre (narodniy teatr). Both of these had their roots in past forms and trends. Mass spectacles go back as far as the medieval carnivals and mystery plays and were adopted by the French Revolution and later by Tsarist Russia, while the People’s Theatre had its roots in commedia dell’arte and its revival in Russia by the symbolists of the Silver Age, including Alexander Blok in his 1906 play, Balaganchik. During the early 1920s, Sergei Radlov played an active role in both forms, with the latter represented in his Theatre of Popular Comedy (Teatr Narodnoi Komedii) (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

Evreinov’s utopian idea of theatocracy could only be accomplished if led by such scholar-bureaucrats as Piotrovsky, Radlov and even Anatoly Lunacharsky (the relatively tolerant People’s Commissar of Enlightenment from October 1917 to September 1929), because such figures would take responsibility for directing and determining the cultural taste of the country on behalf of the masses and in the name of the Revolution. Together with Meyerhold, such figures stood, as Clark puts it, at the centre of a host of dialogues: the Party/intellectuals, intellectuals/the masses, Western European cultural trends/ native traditions and dialogue between would-be-avant-gardists and traditionalists. Dual affiliation, encompassing avant-garde experiment and tradition (and ultimately socialist realism), could explain Radlov’s seemingly contradictory, or at least generically highly varied output, which ranged from Theatre of Popular Comedy to highly realist Shakespeare productions, via mass spectacles to productions for Academic theatres and opera productions.

1.6.2.2 Radlov and People’s Theatre

The evolution of the Soviet theatre scene on either side of the Bolshevik revolution is varied and complex. Lars Kleberg provides a simple yet efficient semiotic scheme for Russian theatre from the turn of the century to the early 1920s. He describes this period as ‘a quick

303 Clark, Petersburg, 26.
successive shift from the dominance of semantics (the relation sign/reality) through the dominance of syntactics (the relation sign/sign) to the dominance of pragmatics (the relation sign/recipient). These trends are represented in respectively Stanislavsky’s naturalist productions at Moscow Art Theatre, Meyerhold’s and Evreinov’s theatricality of the 1910s and mass spectacles and People’s Theatre such as Radlov’s Theatre of Popular Comedy in the early 1920s. There were, of course, instances of overlapping between these trends. For instance, already in the 1910s both Meyerhold and Stanislavsky accorded great importance to the stage/audience relationship. But what made the dominance of pragmatics in the early 1920s more prominent was that it was closely related to socio-political changes and brought forth conscious practical as well as theoretical solutions. Most of these were based largely on utopian hypotheses rather than scientific knowledge, among the former being the theatrical programme of the ‘People’s Theatre’.

The concept of ‘People’s Theatre’ as a meeting place for the entire population had already manifested itself in different forms in many European countries from the end of the 19th century. It had its roots in German Romanticism and particularly in the revolutionary ideas of Richard Wagner as expressed in his 1849 manifesto Art and Revolution. Despite its paradoxes and contradictions, which go beyond the limits of this study, Wagner’s utopian programme inspired the movement for ‘a theatre that would regain its moral and political authority by addressing the entire collective – the nation, the people – which was gathered, or at least represented, in the audience, as it once had been in ancient Greece.’

In early post-revolutionary years, the utopian concept of People’s Theatre became highly influential in Russia and manifested itself in two distinct directions of mass festivals, pageants and professional revolutionary theatre, including those employing circus in the spirit of fairground booth (balagan). This duality could be explained by the multiple meanings of narodnyi teatr. Gary Thurston argues that although in the 1890s the term implied both literary theatre to educate the public and folk theatre (balagan), by the early twentieth century the lines between them had begun to blur. However, the dual implications of the concept of

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People’s Theatre in post-revolutionary Russia seem to have been in line with ideas of another important Western advocate of the movement, Romain Rolland. In his 1903 book *Théâtre du peuple*, Rolland promoted both the artistic People’s Theatre in a so-called Wagnerian spirit and the mass fêtes as had been held up by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and practised during and after the French Revolution. Rolland’s book proved highly influential in Russia; it appeared in translation first in 1910 and again in a new edition in connection with the new so-called ‘theatre epidemic’ during the years of the Civil War. Later Rolland would win dubious renowned for his sympathies with the Soviet Union and Stalin himself (at least during the latter’s early years in power).

In any case, the concept of *narodnyi teatr* provided a common ground for all those ‘who agitated for cultural change, Party, government, and intellectual’. ³⁰⁹ The ambiguity of the term *narodnyi* – which may be translated as ‘mass’, ‘people’, ‘folk’ or even ‘state’ – meant that it could lend itself to different interpretations by various active groups. As Clark observes, ‘in those heady and confused years of War Communism, all manner of interpretations of the term were de facto accepted’. ³¹⁰ Thus Radlov’s diverse theatre activities of these years (1920-1922) could all be embraced under the umbrella term of *narodnyi teatr*, whether it was open-air mass spectacles or productions at his ‘Theatre of Popular Comedy’, where he used circus acrobats alongside actors or directed mass spectacles in the Petrograd/Leningrad city streets.

### 1.6.2.3 Radlov and the Mass Spectacles of 1920

Apart from his famous collaboration with Prokofiev on the *Romeo and Juliet* ballet, Radlov’s name features in almost all studies of the post-Revolutionary mass spectacles. And although it is hard to detect their traces in his Shakespearean activities, the mass spectacles (*massovye deistva*) were an important component of the director’s theatrical aesthetics and technique. These festivities of War Communism, also called mass festivals (*massovye prazdniki*) since they mainly coincided with Bolshevik public holidays, represented ‘the culmination of the movement for a truly mass theatre’. ³¹¹ As Robert Leach puts it, they were the apotheosis of the kind of drama created during the Civil War with unpredictable combinations of mystery and buffoonery. ³¹² By providing a meeting place for the iconoclastic and the monumental,

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³⁰⁸ The term used by Robert Leach in his *Revolutionary Theatre*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, 36.
³⁰⁹ Clark, *Petersburg*, 108.
³¹⁰ Ibid.
³¹¹ Ibid., 123.
³¹² Leach, *Revolutionary Theatre*, 42.
they offered a channel of communication between seemingly opposed cultural activists, as well as presenting crucial references for the historical myth of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{313} Despite Lenin’s favouring of cinema as the best instrument of propaganda, the shortage of film and projectors in the years of War Communism meant that theatre offered a cheaper option. This was all in accordance with those Revolutionary agendas for ‘transforming man via theatre’, and bringing art back to the people, which resulted in theatre becoming ‘the cradle of Soviet culture’.\textsuperscript{314}

There have been several studies regarding the true nature, origins and impact of this short-lived but extraordinary phenomenon. Theories are almost as numerous as the performers participating at these spectacles, but they are not directly relevant to the present study.\textsuperscript{315} However, it is worth emphasising that the urban mass spectacles - huge performances outdoors with thousands of spectator-participants, which grew out of grassroots experimentation in Red Army and Proletkult theatre workshops in 1919\textsuperscript{316} and which reached their culmination in 1920 in Petrograd - belonged to a transitional phase in the history of the country. The contradictory reports regarding these events in the context of the ongoing Civil War and nationwide shortages could be explained by the liminal nature of these early revolutionary years.

There is no doubt that the Bolsheviks invested heavily in these festivals ‘for the purpose of indoctrinating the population with new ideas and legitimizing the October Revolution.’\textsuperscript{317} But many commentators, including Rudnitsky, have taken the intention as the result and claimed that ‘Mass festivals or mass pageants represent the most striking form of propagandist theatre.’\textsuperscript{318} However, as von Geldern argues, such an assumption presupposes ‘a systematic consistency’ and ‘the existence of a single monolithic ideology’, which were certainly not present during the confusing years of the Civil War. Von Geldern also observes that dramatization of the Revolution was ‘represented by a shift from ritualism’ and ‘inspired a new mythology of Revolution that was enacted in the mass spectacles’. Drawing a comparison with Shakespeare and Schiller, who turned to the past not to report precisely but

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{314} Clark, \textit{Petersburg}, 104.
  \item \textsuperscript{315} For further information, see, for example, Stites, \textit{Revolutionary Dreams}, esp. 93-100; for description and illustrations of many of these spectacles, see Irina Bibikova and N. Levchenko (eds.), \textit{Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo: Oformlenie prazdneistv}, 2 Vols., Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1984.
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Stites, \textit{Revolutionary Dreams}, 94.
  \item \textsuperscript{317} Von Geldern, \textit{Bolshevik Festivals}, 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{318} Rudnitsky, \textit{Russian Theatre}, 44.
\end{itemize}
to draw a message from it for the present, von Geldern proposes that the Revolutionary spectacles adopted a similar design in order to ‘define who were the ancestors of the Bolshevik Revolution’. Clark too agrees that ‘The mass spectacle was an exercise in creating a new identity for the nation by reference to past models.’

One of Lunacharsky’s articles, published in 1920, offers some nuance to von Geldern’s arguments. Here he first praises the ‘popular festivals’ as a natural component of ‘any genuine democracy’ and, referring to the French Revolution as a model, states that ‘in order for the masses to make themselves felt, they must outwardly manifest themselves, and this is possible only when, to use Robespierre’s phrase, they are their own spectacle’. But he goes on to counsel against these festivities turning into ‘spontaneous, independent manifestation of the will of the masses. …This celebration should be organized just as anything else in the world that has a tendency to produce a profound aesthetic impression.’

The task of organising and directing these festivals fell mainly to artists whose names are paradoxically associated with the avant-garde. These were, among others, Nikolai Evreinov, Iurii Annenkov, Natan Al’tman, Konstantin Mardzhanov (Kote Mardzhanishvili), Piotrovsky and Radlov. The mass spectacles of 1920 took place between 1 May and 8 November, and became increasingly grandiose and large-scale, ending with the famous Storming of the Winter Palace, staged by Evreinov for the anniversary of the Revolution. Years later, reflecting on his participation in two of these spectacles (The Blockade of Russia and Towards a World Commune), Radlov characterised them as ‘grandiose one-day monuments (pamiatniki)’ whose ‘chain of impression stays for a long time’.

Based on the academic backgrounds of Radlov and Piotrovsky, Clark suggests that ‘these zealots of Greek revival were the most active of all in the agitational theatre, writing and directing both mass dramas and spectacles, training red Army and Navy recruits to act and direct, writing about spectacles, and serving on various bodies set up to oversee mass

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319 Von Geldern, Bolshevik Festivals, 12.
320 Clark, Petersburg, 134.
322 Iurii Annenkov (1889-1974), Russian artist, illustrator, portraitist and a member of Mir Iskusstva. He also worked for the theatre (including collaborations with Evreinov) and cinema.
323 Details of these spectacles, especially Storming of the Winter Palace, may be found in, for example, František Deák, ‘Russian Mass Spectacles’, The Drama Review, 19/2 (1975), 7-22; Vladimir Tolstoy et al., Street Art of the Revolution; and Leach, Revolutionary Theatre, 22-58.
propaganda. Clark argues that both directors ‘actually believed they were getting closer to the spirit of their beloved Hellenic Greece with their work on the mass spectacles than they would with any translation of actual Greek texts.’ Radlov’s own writings, present an even more complicated picture. Admittedly, the convoluted nature of his prose, as well as many instances of self-contradiction, make any assumption difficult to back up using the director’s own words. Yet his article on mass spectacles, written after the decline of the genre, suggests that he was aware of the danger of ‘naive realism’ and of the impracticalities of presenting these spectacles as a revival with reference to antique Greek theatre.

Von Geldern, on the other hand, regards Radlov’s work on mass spectacles as a variation on his on-going project of Theatre of Popular Comedy and asserts he applied the same compositional rules to both genres. According to Radlov himself, the audience for a mass spectacle could benefit from it by watching from a seat; the merging of stage and audience was not at all necessary and would ruin the aesthetic entity. Von Geldern presents an analysis of Radlov’s The Blockade of Russia, a show designed by Valentina Khodasevich and Ivan Fomin, which took place on ‘Rock Island’ (Kamennyi Ostrov) on 20 June, where the director took advantage of the setting to create an outdoor theatre: ‘the orchestra pit was filled in with water, creating a proscenium that no spectator would think of crossing.’ Noting Radlov’s improvements on the previous mass spectacle, The Mystery of Liberated Labour, organised by his rival, Iurii Annenkov, von Geldern points out Radlov’s innovations in terms of management of time and space and his use of characters in the same way as the masks of commedia dell’arte, in order to flatten the psychology and contribute to the intended propaganda.

1.6.2.4 Radlov’s Theatre of Popular Comedy
The rivalry of Radlov and Iurii Annenkov was only a little less significant than that of Radlov and Meyerhold. It may have stemmed from 1919, when the artist and illustrator staged

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325 Clark, Petersburg, 136.
326 Clark, Petersburg, 137.
328 Geldern, Bolshevik Festivals, 168.
330 Geldern refers to Rock Island as Vacation Island (Ostrov Otdykha) because Radlov’s mass spectacle was to mark the opening of vacation houses on the island, whose name was changed to Ostrov Trudiashchikh from 1920-1989 – see Geldern, Bolshevik Festivals, 168.
331 Geldern, Bolshevik Festivals, 172-4.
332 Zolotnitsky describes several instances of Meyerhold attacking Radlov – see, for example, Meyerhold’s reaction to a production at Radlov’s Experimental Theatre in 1923 and his accusing the young director of plagiarism - Zolotnitsky, Radlov, 32.
Tolstoy’s *The First Distiller* at Hermitage theatre, using circus performers alongside theatre actors for the first time. Radlov soon adopted the same formula for his Theatre of Popular Comedy, and the success of this theatre meant that many have regarded him as the pioneer of ‘circusisation’ of theatre.\(^{333}\) The influence of Annenkov on Radlov was certainly not unknown to critics of the time such as Viktor Shklovsky, who wrote that ‘Radlov had stemmed directly from Iurii Annenkov, passing through Meyerhold’s pantomime.’\(^{334}\) By contrast, passing over Annenkov’s influence, Rudnitsky suggests that Radlov soon escaped from Meyerhold’s shadow by experimenting in the spirit of detective thrillers with chases.\(^{335}\)

It is not just in connection with Annenkov’s influence that Rudnitsky displays lack of precision; his book (or at least the translation of it, which is in effect the major reference tool in this area for the English-speaking world) leads to other misleading conclusions. He argues, for example, that Radlov’s Theatre of Popular Comedy was in fact an outcome of the director’s theories regarding the importance of the ‘actor’s verbal improvisation’, which would ‘transform each performer into an independent creator’. And he quotes Radlov confirming that: ‘Here and only here can the living life of the future national theatre take refuge… [L]eaving behind the reconstruction of the style of various past epochs, the irritating pettiness of realism in the portrayal of the present, we shall aspire to sense, to feel and to forge the style of our epoch.’\(^{336}\) The reference for this quote reads simply: Radlov, *Vremennik TEO Narkomprosa*, vyp. 1, 1918, 30. However, the document from which this phrase is taken belonged to an unsigned creative manifesto of TEO, and Zolotnitsky simply assumes that it was written by Radlov.\(^{337}\) That assumption could only be valid if the phrase is translated and understood as intended. However, the English translation of ‘Ukhodya ot’, which reads here as ‘leaving behind’, should be ‘departing from’ in the sense of ‘based on’. This way the phrase would contribute to the more Radlovian concept that ‘the universal repertoire of antique theatre presents an enriching material’.\(^{338}\) Moreover, Zolotnitsky clarifies that ‘by realism here one understands life imitating the quotidian (*bytovizm*), pavilions and wings and in general all theatrical routines…the image of theatre-stadium, theatre of masses was taking

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336 Ibid., 57.
338 Ibid.
over the imagination of the director.’ And this in one way or another suggests that ‘Radlov had accepted the revolutionary reality and was trying to find a way of transferring it to stage.’ Evidently the picture is more complex than that reflected in Rudnitsky’s much referenced book.

The repertoire of Radlov’s Theatre of Popular Comedy provides another subject for conflicting readings. Rudnitsky argues that Radlov ‘steered towards a type of comedy where the actor would be entirely free, that is towards clowning comedy’, and that it was only in response to the critics complaining that his ‘circus-theatre was more circus than theatre’ that he started incorporating plays from the classics, including Shakespeare, Molière and Gogol, into the repertoire of his theatre. This reading is reasonable and valid, especially given that even Piotrovsky had expressed his concerns about the theatre’s ‘lack of content and connection to the internal affairs of the country’ and with performers being carried away from satire to farce. However, it could also be argued that the range of the repertoire of Radlov’s Popular Theatre was an outcome of the theatre crisis, which itself emerged from confusion regarding appropriate repertoire for the revolutionary theatre. As Clark observes, one solution that ‘merged with pre-Revolutionary initiatives’ was to stage great classics of the world drama. On the opposing side the solution was to create an entirely new repertoire. Radlov’s Popular Comedy, with its combination of classics and improvisation, would present a safe option for these liminal times. The performances took place at the ‘Iron Hall’ of the People’s House, a large club in Petrograd where the bare outlines and grey colours of the stage would contrast with the actors’ loud, bright costumes. The actor/circus-performer was always at the centre, ‘tirelessly demonstrating jumps, tumbling, somersaults, juggling with fire, conjuring tricks, verbal wittiness, musical clowning and other wonders banned from the serious theatre.’

However, with circus performers starting to leave Radlov’s Popular Comedy Theatre, its decline was imminent. In 1922 Lunacharsky announced that ‘the theatre of buffoonery directed by Radlov, which started out so well, seems to be folding its multi-coloured

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339 Ibid.
340 Rudnitsky, Russian Theatre, 57-58.
341 Piotrovski in Zhizn’ iskusstva, 19-20 June 1920, quoted in Rudnitsky, Russian Theatre, 59.
342 Clark, Petersburg, 109-111.
343 For a description of some of the productions see Mel Gordon, ‘Radlov’s Theatre of Popular Comedy’, The Drama Review, 1975/19, 113-116.
344 Radlov, Desyat’ let v teatre, Leningad, 1929, 179.
The idea of the ‘circusisation’ of theatre, however, was taken over in Moscow at the hands of Meyerhold and Eisenstein, and in Petrograd by FEKS (The Factory of the Eccentric Actor) founded by Leonid Trauberg and Grigori Kozintsev. The evolution of the creative life of the co-founder of FEKS, Grigori Kozintsev, had much in common with that of Radlov; in that they both abandoned experimental theatre and found their métier in Shakespeare scholarship and stage/cinema adaptations (see Chapter 5.2).

1.6.3 Meyerhold’s Hamlet: The story of a non-production

Whether in the form of influence or reaction, Meyerhold, despite his professed negative attitude towards both directors, provides the link that connects Akimov and Radlov.

For Meyerhold himself, the dream of staging Hamlet was a leitmotif of his entire career. From his first encounter with the Danish prince, as played by the touring actor Nikolai Rossov in 1891 in Penza, that dream repeatedly took shape, never to be realised. Alexander Gladkov quotes Meyerhold as saying: ‘Write on my gravestone: here lies an actor and director who never acted and never directed Hamlet.’

At the same time, the shifts in attitude throughout Meyerhold’s numerous references to the play reveal the evolving nature of his approach to Hamlet, and to theatre in general, as well as reflecting changes in the politico-cultural climate of the time and the artists’ obligations to manoeuvre accordingly.

In 1914-15, in his St Petersburg theatre studio for his class of ‘Stage movement’, Meyerhold turned to Hamlet as a teaching tool, producing two scenes from the play - the Mousetrap and Ophelia’s mad scene. In a pedagogical and at the same time experimental project, in line with his insistence on the centrality of the actor and the importance of the physicality and musicality of acting, these scenes were played with no words at all but as mime (pantomima). As a general principle expressed at this same time, Meyerhold believed that:

If the most essential elements of theatricality are well incorporated, any dramatic work could be shown in a full schematic way. Furthermore, even the words that

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346 Nikolai Volkov, Meierkhol’d, Moscow and Leningrad, Akademiia, 1929, 26.
348 For Meyerhold’s notes on the project see Edward Braun, Meyerhold on Theatre, 151-153, originally in Liubov’ k trem aper’synam, 1915/4-7, 208-11.
decked the skeleton of the script may be temporarily put aside. Yet such schematic
and miming theatrical performance can move the audience only because the scenarios
of such dramatic works are based on the traditional foundations of theatre as such.\(^{349}\)

In his announcement for the second year of his studio, Meyerhold decided to combine
‘exercises from the technique of stage movement’ with ‘excerpts from plays with words:
Scene “The madness of Ophelia”’. He insisted that the actress of Ophelia’s part should ‘aim
at the naïve simplicity of balagan’ and ‘that success can only be achieved by overcoming any
tendency to ballet à la Isadora Duncan’. As musical accompaniment for the exercises, he
suggested to ‘temporarily use the accompaniment of bamboo sticks tapping on a board’.\(^{350}\)

In their pantomime form, the two scenes from *Hamlet* were included in the first public
evening of the Meyerhold Studio on 12 February 1915.\(^{351}\) Accounts of the evening describe
how:

> the players jumped constantly from stage to forestage and back, performed clown's
> tricks or did resounding falls, crawled, climbed under the platform or even feigned to
> pull out each other's teeth. All this either at unusually high speed or with the slow
> stateliness of a funeral march (Hamlet, the madness of Ophelia) to the accompaniment
> on the piano of classical music by Mozart and Rameau or the improvisation of the
> pianist A.F. Malevinskij.\(^{352}\)

It could be argued that in the early 1920s Sergei Radlov, himself at that time an advocate of
circusisation of theatre, was in fact referring to this project of Meyerhold when he wrote:
‘Here’s a question: “what is closer to Shakespeare – scenarios for a mime (*stenarii
pantomimy*) or some sort of a play for reading?” I believe mime, because here the author is
dealing with the same material as Shakespeare: the human being (choslovok) as actor.’\(^{353}\)

During this time, Meyerhold announced that his studio had set itself the task of staging
*Hamlet* ‘without any cuts, either of complete scenes or of individual lines.’ These plans came

\(^{349}\) Meierkhol’d, ‘Studiia’, *Liubov' k trem apel’synam*, 1914/6-7, 110.
\(^{350}\) Meierkhol’d, ‘Klass Vs. Meierkhol’da’, *Liubov’ k trem apel’ synam*, 1915/4-7, 208, quoted in Marjorie
13/1 (Spring 1969), 23-41, here 30.
\(^{351}\) For details of the programme of the evening see Braun, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, 149-151.
\(^{352}\) Anon., *Liubov’ k trem apel’ synam*, 1915/1-3, 148-9, as quoted in Marjorie Hoover, ‘A Mejerxol’d Method?’,
33.
to an end with the February Revolution and the closure of his studio in spring 1917.\textsuperscript{354} However, in 1920 he became the head of a new theatre, which he simply called RSFSR 1; even before the opening of this venture he announced his plans for producing Shakespeare’s tragedy, and in his inaugural speech to the company, Meyerhold announced that ‘we shall need scenarios and we shall often utilise even the classics as a basis for our theatrical compositions. We shall tackle the task of adaptation without fear, fully confident of its necessity.’\textsuperscript{355} Once again, however, his plans for \textit{Hamlet} came to naught.

Elsewhere Meyerhold responded to accusations of ‘mutilating the classics’ by explaining that ‘from each work we extract the scenario, sometimes retaining isolated moments of it. But isn’t this just how those dramatists worked who since their deaths have become so revered? Wasn’t this the method of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Schiller, Tirso de Molina, Pushkin? … Or were they imbued with holy reverence for dead canons?’\textsuperscript{356}

It was only in 1926 that Meyerhold presented the most coherent realisation of all his concepts when tackling one of the most canonical texts of Russian literature, Gogol’s \textit{Inspector General}. This time he took his treatment of dramatic text much further by altering Gogol’s original and even adding to it, and thus creating an extended version that included added characters, pantomimes and \textit{tableaux vivants}.\textsuperscript{357} As in Akimov’s \textit{Hamlet}, music played a crucial part in the structure of \textit{Inspector General}. However, here the score was a combination of old and new, including arrangements of 19th-century Russian composers as well as original music composed by Mikhail Gnesin. And unlike Akimov, Meyerhold wrote and spoke extensively about the role of music and ‘the musical structure’ of the mise-en-scène, in which ‘the actual music was one element in an overall rhytmical harmony designed to reveal the “subtext” of the drama.’\textsuperscript{358} The influence of Swiss architect and designer Adolphe Appia and German theatre manager Georg Fuchs can be seen in his use of musical terms to illustrate his ‘orchestration’ of Gogol’s text.\textsuperscript{359} Thus, through his methodology ‘the play-text was taken from the realm of the dramatic into the realm of the theatrical.’\textsuperscript{360}

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\textsuperscript{354} Braun, \textit{Meyerhold on Theatre}, 118.
\textsuperscript{356} Braun, \textit{Meyerhold on Theatre}, 8-10.
\textsuperscript{357} For a bibliography of some of the literature on Meyerhold’s \textit{Inspector General} see Sergei Danilov, \textit{Revizor na stene}, Leningrad, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1954.
\textsuperscript{358} Braun, \textit{Meyerhold on Theatre}, 217.
\textsuperscript{359} For an example of such ‘orchestration’ see Braun, \textit{Meyerhold on Theatre}, 217-8.
\end{flushleft}
Meyerhold’s intention of restoring Gogol’s farcical elements by amending the text points to Akimov’s ultimate goal, which was to free Hamlet from the ‘Hamletism’ that had been thrust upon it (see Chapter 2.3). But the similarities between the two productions are also detectable in more immediate features of their mises-en-scène. Meyerhold’s treatment of the Mayor’s dialogue in the last act with the merchants, for example which is delivered by the Mayor alone in the form of an address to imaginary tradesmen and the sacks, fish and hams piled up on the table and sofa, chimes with the Ghost scene in Akimov’s Hamlet, which becomes a monologue by virtue of Hamlet speaking both parts - of the Ghost and himself.

Despite Meyerhold’s reinterpretation of Gogol’s text, the poet Andrey Bely was so enthusiastic about The Inspector General that he wrote in a letter to Meyerhold:

*The Inspector General* is being seen for the first time; and it might be worth troubling the grave of the late Gogol so that the deceased might rise from the grave and support you by his presence at the performance, because he would support you against the backbiting that for a whole week spewed from mouths in the newspaper columns. … All your attempts to move *The Inspector General* far in the direction of a screamingly funny revue are only a manifestation of Gogol himself.361

In 1927, in his lecture ‘About Theatre’ at the hall of Leningrad region unions board council for workers of clubs and theatres [Leningradskogo gubernskogo soveta professional’nikh soiuzov pered rabotnikami klubov i teatrov], Meyerhold once again spoke of his intentions of staging Hamlet, but in a manner that ‘each of Hamlet’s verbal ripostes (replica) should make the audience laugh.’362

Later the same year, during his speech at the Great Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonia, Meyerhold illustrated his approach to the Classics of theatre repertoire by describing a scene in his ‘future’ Hamlet:

For example, I read Hamlet in such a way that in my imagination, two people walk on the stage. And when staging this Hamlet, I thought of casting directly two actors for the role of Hamlet. Thus, one Hamlet will be playing one part of the role, and the other actor the other part. Hence we will have such a scene: one Hamlet starts citing ‘to be or not to be’, and the other Hamlet interrupts him and says: ‘But this is my

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361 Andrey Bely to Meyerhold, 25 December 1926, Moscow – see Meierkhol’d, *Perepiska*, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1976, 256-8
362 B. Mazing, ‘Meierkhol’d na tribune. (Doklad v zale soiuzov’), *Krasnaia gazeta*, 20 September 1927.
monologue’, and burning in anger the other says: ‘Well, I’ll just sit and eat an orange while you continue.’

Here, too, the parallel with Akimov’s 1932 staging is striking (see Chapter 2).

Fragments of Hamlet featured in Meyerhold’s 1931 production of Yuri Olesha’s A List of Assets (premiered on 4 June), in the former’s own theatre and with his wife, Zinaida Raikh, as the heroine of the play Lelia Goncharova, an aspiring actress of role of Hamlet, who is torn between ‘the past and the future, between Russia and Europe, between feelings and intellect.’ Olesha’s play was, as Rudnitsky observes, ‘a new variation on his usual theme’ of the incompatibility of ‘emotional richness of an individual with a decisive reconstruction of the world.’ The centrality of Hamlet and the topic of touring abroad to the plot of the play have led many, including Rudnitsky and Nikolai Chushkin, to conclude that Olesha’s play was in fact inspired by the figure of Mikhail Chekhov, who had left the Soviet Union in 1928 while touring his Hamlet to Berlin. Gladkov suggests that it was the plot of Olesha’s play that later raised rumours regarding Meyerhold’s plan for staging Hamlet with his wife as the Danish prince. In his overview of women as Hamlet, Tony Howard suggests that directors such as Meyerhold would cast actresses as Hamlet to present ‘allegorical enchained heroes, half saint-half beast’. Based on secondary sources in English, such as Rudnitsky and even Solomon Volkov’s discredited Testimony, and drawing parallels between Zinaida Raikh’s reputation in Moscow as a sexually emancipated woman and her tragic fate due to Stalinist repressions and Goncharova’s story, Howard provides an interpretation of The List of Assets and Raikh’s performance as a semi-autobiographical act.

Even during the Stalinist purges, Meyerhold’s Hamlet plans only increased in ambition. In 1936, upon his return from Paris, Meyerhold told his friends that he had spoken to Picasso regarding stage designs for a production of Hamlet that also would feature Shostakovich as composer. He had also spoken of his plans for creating a Theatre where the repertoire consisted of Hamlet only. As Gladkov remembers, when in 1938 Meyerhold was left

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363 Stenographic report, TsGALI, f. 998, op. 1, ed. 646.
364 Rudnitsky, Meyerhold the Director, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1981, 491.
365 Ibid.
366 Rudnitsky, Meyerhold the Director, 490-491.
369 Howard, Women as Hamlet, 160-179.
370 Gladkov, Piat’ let s Meierkhol’dom, 191.
without his Theatre, his thoughts turned to writing a book about the tragedy and his unrealised plans and ideas. *Hamlet: The Novel of a Director* was to be Meyerhold’s legacy, so that ‘sometime, someone on some nth anniversary of mine would produce the play according to this plan.’ Gladkov here also recalls how Meyerhold shared his idea for the scene of Hamlet’s encounter with the Ghost. Although Meyerhold might have indeed retold Gladkov this vision, he had already described this particular mise-en-sceène four years before the meeting of which Gladkov writes. During a talk at the ‘Masters of the Arts Club’ in Moscow, while comparing Pushkin’s and Tchaikovsky’s *Queen of Spades*, Meyerhold referred to his treatment of the ghost in staging *Hamlet* and Calderon’s *Constant Prince*, to explore how ‘theatrical horror’ could be achieved through ‘a combination of the elements of fantasy and reality.’ The essence of Meyerhold’s highly cinematographic interpretation of Hamlet and the Ghost’s reunion lay in the duality that Meyerhold had always associated with the tragedy. In this scene, it was explored through the colour of the characters’ cloaks and the physical externalisation of their emotions as they embraced: ‘we see the father in silver and Hamlet in black, then the father in black and Hamlet in silver.’ Meyerhold wanted to blur the boundaries of the real and the supernatural by showing that ‘the ghost of Hamlet’s father is capable of shivering and of displaying affection, of breathing heavily from exhaustion and of embracing tenderly.’ Meyerhold’s ghost was one ‘on whose cheek a tear of gratitude freezes.’

These lines and other rehearsal notes during Meyerhold’s work on his other unrealised project, *Boris Godunov*, reveal not only the director’s change of priority regarding the Classics (‘to stage classics without alteration’) and references to his years of work with Stanislavsky, but also, as Rudnitsky observes, point towards Meyerhold’s maturity and discovery of ‘connections between the theatre of Pushkin and that of Shakespeare.’ Even in his 1936 speech on Chaplin and Chaplinism, Meyerhold argued that ‘whenever Pushkin’s remarks on the drama are quoted, one should back them against [sic: presumably meaning ‘view them against the background of’] the devices employed in Shakespearean tragedy.’

Given the context of these speeches at the height of the Stalinist purges, it is difficult to avoid

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371 Ibid.
373 Ibid., 280.
374 Rudnitsky, *Meyerhold the Director*, 536.
interpreting Meyerhold’s shifting views as a result of an ongoing artistic and aesthetic negotiation between the director and his increasingly oppressive situation.

At any rate, from his mime experiments to his cinematographic ideas, Meyerhold seems to have been seeking what every other director has sought: the key to the interpretation of Hamlet. For Radlov this key was ‘realistic reading’ (see Chapter 3); for Akimov it was in redressing the balance between the comical and the tragic, between intrigue and philosophy. Each of these approaches, however, was shaped not only by the artist’s convictions but also by the constraints of official ideology and its practical ramifications at the time. What artists might have produced in a society free of such constraints will of course never be known. But traditions, the individual background of each creative artist and the changing popular and official taste, as well as practical matters, all have to be taken into consideration when studying any specific appropriation of Shakespeare’s tragedy. Only then can individual directors’ initiatives be properly understood; and only then can a full understanding emerge of how their particular Hamlets held mirrors up to their society irrespective of whether they were intended to.
Chapter 2
Conception and Realisation, or How Akimov and Shostakovich’s ‘Shakesperiment’ Blew Up

The goal of my mise-en-scène was to read and show Hamlet anew, ridding it from all that has been added to it through the three hundred and more years that separate us from the time of its writing.376

2.1 Introduction
The 1911 production of Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre, which featured the collaboration of two giants of European theatre, Konstantin Stanislavsky and Gordon Craig, has received much scholarly attention. But it could be argued that Akimov’s 1932 Hamlet at Moscow’s Vakhtangov Theatre qualifies as equally if not more significant, by virtue of its highly unorthodox interpretation, its contested reception and afterlife, and its fraught politico-cultural context. In 1982 Laurence Senelick published what he called a ‘reconstruction’ of the 1911 Hamlet, based on archival materials; yet Ilya Sats’s music for that production was barely touched on (see Chapter 1.4). For Akimov’s production, quite apart from Shostakovich’s vivid score, there is a wealth of virtually unknown material in various archives, which would suggest that a reconstruction of Akimov’s Hamlet – perhaps even a potentially stageable one – would be a feasible and worthwhile task, in order to complement such studies as Senelick’s and to create a fuller picture of the complexity of Shakespeare’s reception in Russia before and after the October Revolution. This chapter accordingly opens with a brief account of Akimov’s Hamlet and its context (‘An Anatomy of a Scandal’) before moving to detailed study of each of the major issues raised by the production, including the debates before and after the premiere, page versus stage, and Shostakovich’s music. The second half of the chapter presents a detailed scene-by-scene analysis of the production.

The period between Stalin’s consolidation of power in 1928 and the first mention of Socialist Realism in 1932 is now frequently referred to as the Soviet Union’s Cultural Revolution.377 During this time proletarian groups were vocal in their critical attitudes, and yet many theatre

productions continued in the avant-garde spirit of the 1920s. With hindsight it is clear that a new era was ushered in by the Central Committee 23 April 1932 Resolution ‘On the Restructuring of Literary and Artistic Organisations’, which dethroned RAPP (the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and instituted artistic unions. No significant production of Hamlet took place in the preceding transitional period. But in 1931 a new production was mooted that would turn into a controversial event in theatre history of the country, caught as it was on the cusp between one social-aesthetic paradigm and another.

Akimov’s Hamlet has justly been described as one of the most notorious milestones in the history of Shakespeare theatre productions. It was not just Akimov’s controversial scenic solutions but also Shostakovich’s extrovert music that contributed to this production being designated as a ‘Shakesperiment’, with the music eventually garnering more praise than the production itself, and enjoying a notably more successful afterlife. The premiere, which took place on 19 May, marked the beginning of Akimov’s theatre directing career – he had previously worked as a stage designer and artist – and at the same time the end of his collaboration with the Muscovite theatre.

2.2 Anatomy of a scandal

Following the more Meyerholdian side of Vakhtangov, Akimov decided to distance himself as much as possible from the most notable recent production of Hamlet featuring Mikhail Chekhov, which had premiered at MKhAT II (Second Moscow Academic Art Theatre) in 1924 (see Chapter 1.5). In Akimov’s conception, Hamlet was no philosopher. Played by Anatolii Goriunov, an actor mostly known as a comedian, he was a chubby, short, witty bon-vivant, a young man fighting for his right to be the King of Denmark. Thus the plot was emptied of its usual enigmas and instead focused on one main intrigue: the struggle for the Danish throne. Horatio’s role was considerably strengthened in order to represent at one and the same time an image of the ‘eternal student’, the failing intellectual and a caricature of Erasmus, whose words Akimov incorporated at some length. Acting as Hamlet’s double,

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380 T. Rokotov, “Sheksperiment” realisticheskogo teatra’, Vecherniaia Moskva, 19 April 1936. The term was applied by Rokotov retrospectively, in an article that also contained a review of a new production of Othello.
382 Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466-1536), often known as Erasmus of Rotterdam, or simply Erasmus: Dutch Renaissance humanist, priest, social critic, teacher, and theologian.
Horatio joined him in the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy, turning it into a dialogue, in the course of which Hamlet was trying on a papier-mâché crown left over from the actors’ rehearsal. The iconic Ghost scene was completely reinterpreted. Inspired by Erasmus’s *Colloquies*, Akimov evoked a masquerade, where Hamlet pretended to be the ghost and Horatio helped him by making spooky noises with the help of a clay pot, by which means the two men tried to attract more supporters for their cause. The dialogue between Hamlet and his father’s ghost was hence turned into a monologue for Hamlet, in what was effectively a mirror image of Akimov’s dialogued treatment of ‘To be or not to be’.

The character of Ophelia also underwent considerable transformation, eventually bearing little resemblance to the traditional figure as depicted, for instance, in Pre-Raphaelite paintings (most famously in Sir John Everett Millais’s ‘Ophelia’, dated 1851-1852) or in the poems of Afanasy Fet or Alexander Blok. Akimov’s Ophelia, as played by Valentina Vagrina, an actress renowned for her beauty, was a femme fatale who knew how to enjoy life. According to Akimov there was no real love between her and Hamlet, and her main function was to spy on Hamlet and to report back to her father Polonius. Considering her madness and that of Hamlet unacceptable for the modern audience, Akimov tried to explain each of these phenomena in a more rational way. Hence Ophelia gets drunk at the court ball and drowns accidentally. For his part, Hamlet is only pretending to be mad, and he does so, for example, by wearing a saucepan on his head, holding carrots in his hand, and chasing boys and piglets (Akimov used live animals for his production) in his nightshirt (in Act II, scene 4). As will be seen, Sergei Radlov took a similar view of Hamlet’s ‘madness’ but rationalised it with the help of his reading of English scholarly commentaries (see Chapter 3.5).

The play-within-the-play, known as ‘The Murder of Gonzaga’ or ‘The Mousetrap’, is performed in its entirety as a rehearsal for Hamlet and Horatio (Act III, scene 1). In order to achieve this, the translator, Mikhail Lozinskii, had to make adjustments to Shakespeare’s text, turning a pantomime into verse and adding an ending. Thus the real play-within-the-play is assumed to be performed offstage (Act III, scene 2) and we only see the audience (Claudius, Gertrud, Ophelia, Hamlet and other courtiers) observing it and later Ophelia shouting as she notices the frightened Claudius running down the staircase followed by his 14-metre long red

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384 Aspects of the scenario detailed in this paragraph and below are widely attested. See also the production book in RGALI, f. 2737, op. 2, ed. khr. 1.
cloak, in what was one of the most visually astonishing moments of the production (see Plate 2.6 in Chapter 2.10.3).

Even today, despite several homosexual Hamlets or Ian Rickson’s *Hamlet* set entirely in a mental asylum (Young Vic, London, 2011), some of Akimov’s decisions are controversial enough to raise eyebrows. Recent studies of this production resonate to a degree with 1932 reactions from Shakespeare scholars and critics. In his remarkable synoptic study of Russian Avant-garde Theatre, the theatre historian Konstantin Rudnitsky rather unguardedly states that:

in Akimov’s production as soon as Hamlet became a cunning schemer leading the ‘power struggle’, the tragedy promptly turned into a comedy, and this comedy, stripped of romanticism but burdened by the Shakespearian tragic text, did not turn out at all funny. Akimov’s production more than anything else resembled a parody of *Hamlet*.³⁸⁵

This judgment is somewhat remarkable in light of Akimov’s efforts precisely to ‘unburden’ the text by adding excerpts from Erasmus and Nikolai Erdman’s³⁸⁶ and Vladimir Mass’s³⁸⁷ writings.

Musicologist Gerard McBurney, in a survey of Shostakovich’s theatre music, agrees with Rudnitsky’s hypothesis regarding the failure of this production: ‘it was simply too late for its own time’. McBurney even suggests that ‘Akimov’s clunkily obvious intention was to turn *Hamlet* on its head’.³⁸⁸ Both studies compare Akimov’s *Hamlet* to Meyerhold’s theatre productions in the 1920s, when the latter turned to classical repertoire by playwrights such as Gogol and Ostrovsky but deliberately distorted them. However, this approach becomes problematic, once Meyerhold’s categorically negative reaction to Akimov’s *Hamlet* is taken into account (see below).³⁸⁹

Suspicions of Meyerholdivshchina were not on top of the list of critics’ worries at the time of the premiere on 19 May 1932, however. Months before the event, critics, Shakespeare

³⁸⁷ Vladimir Mass (1896–1979), Soviet dramatist and screenwriter.
scholars and Akimov himself had been debating whether or not there was a need for yet another production of *Hamlet*. Articles questioned the rationale behind returning to classics of the theatre repertoire and tried to recommend solutions to make them more appropriate for the proletarian audience. Akimov himself pre-announced intentions that were in most cases in line with the critical consensus. Thus there were great expectations of this production, which was widely considered to be an organised effort to bring Shakespeare back to ‘Soviet Reality’. However, for several reasons, aspects of Akimov’s conception got lost in the process of realisation, contributing to the production’s short stage life.

Akimov’s *Hamlet* is often quoted in the context of formalism and Soviet censorship. This is just one aspect that appeared mainly in later criticisms and studies of the production. In the immediate aftermath of the premiere, however, the general feeling among critics was one of disappointment. Akimov’s new *Hamlet* had proved to be merely a ‘Sheksperiment’, which, as it were, blew up in the laboratory. One of the clearest statements of a perceived gap between conception and realisation is Iuda Grossman-Roshchin’s reminder of Akimov’s promises and their outcomes. But in order to understand Akimov’s intentions more fully, we need to dig further back.

### 2.3 Immediate background

Prior to the premiere of his *Hamlet*, Akimov outlined his plans and the details of his approach in a series of articles in the national press. These were mainly based on the 79-page *doklad* he presented in March 1931 when proposing his project to the then still relatively young Vakhtangov Theatre. Here he argued that during the 330 years since the appearance of

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392 Akimov’s *Hamlet* only survived one season in Moscow. In personal exchanges with Marina Zobolotniaia in April 2013, she mentioned Iurii Elagin’s memoires regarding the production’s tour to Leningrad in 1933. However, neither she nor the archivist of the Vakhtangov Theatre could at that point provide any reference or evidence for the tour. In May 2015, I came across a few numbers from the journal *Rabochii i teatr* (1933/10 and 11, back covers) with announcements of forthcoming tours of the Vakhtangov Theatre to Leningrad and a repertoire that included *Hamlet*. Furthermore, *Rabochii i teatr* 1933/13 contains a one-page (21) review of the tour with a mention of this production.


394 Iuda Grossman-Roshchin, ‘Strashnai mest’’, *Sovetski teatr*, 1932/6, 7-11.

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397 Iuda Grossman-Roshchin, ‘Strashnai mest’’, *Sovetski teatr*, 1932/6, 7-11.
Hamlet’s text, each era had interpreted this work in its own way, consciously or unconsciously using the play as a mirror to reflect the ideology of its time. Thus, according to Akimov, Hamlet’s fate was indeed a tragic story not just within the confines of the play itself, but also since most studies had merely drawn the portrait of their own time using the Danish Prince’s image, paying little or no attention to Shakespeare’s dramaturgy:

‘Throughout the three centuries of Hamlet, every new stage of social thinking used Hamlet as a skeleton on which it hung outer covers and muscles of its own philosophy.’ And he announced that ‘the goal of any production of Hamlet in our days is to liberate it from such prisons.’ The most dangerous of these prisons was, according to Akimov, the problem of ‘Hamletism’ (see Chapter 1.2 for an examination of this term), which he believed to have been added to Shakespeare’s play by the Romantics of the 18th and 19th centuries, and by Goethe in particular.

In his historico-sociological account of Hamlet’s interpretations, Akimov accused Goethe of being the first to discard the deeper intrigue from the play and to adapt Shakespeare to the ideological needs of his time by ‘turning Hamlet into an affiliate of Wertherism’ (with reference to the melancholic-suicidal romantic outsider figure depicted in Goethe’s 1774 novel Die Leiden des jungen Werthers). This ‘bourgeois’ Hamlet was followed by many other ‘falsifications’ of the play by those who tried to prove that Shakespeare’s Hamlet represents ‘the essence of the 19th-century intelligentsia’.

After declaring war against Goethe’s Hamlet, Akimov provided an outline of Russian interpretations of Shakespeare’s tragedy, particularly the more recent ones at the Moscow Art Theatre by Stanislavsky and Gordon Craig in 1911 and at MKhAT II, starring Mikhail Chekhov in 1924. Akimov believed that ‘idealistic philosophy’ was at the basis of these productions, which focused on the battle of Spirit and Matter. Craig’s was mainly occupied by the sufferings of the Spirit surrounded by Matter, whilst Chekhov’s concentrated on the

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396 ‘Doklad N.P. Akimova’, 1; Nikolai Akimov, ‘O “Gamlete”’, Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 3 March 1932, 3 (a summary of the ‘doklad’).
398 Akimov, ‘O “Gamlete”’.
struggle of light with darkness. Akimov granted that ‘it is not surprising if the symbolists, the idealists or the mysticists didn’t use sociological analysis of Hamlet. But it will be most outrageous if we in 1932 were to do things the same way as our predecessors’. So instead of a ‘war of symbols and sources’, he considered Hamlet as a realistic work about the life of real ‘living people of the 16th century’. If his goal still sounded somewhat vague, Marina Zabolotniaia explains that the ambiguity of Akimov’s statement was a normal phenomenon for both RAPP slogans and Russian theatre traditions. The notion of ‘living people’ frequently belongs to the latter, implying the work of actors in a play whose heroes possess adequate life and psychological veracity.

With these statements we have a clear notion of what Akimov considered Hamlet not to be. And all this runs counter to the received wisdom that his motives were iconoclastic or primarily political. He was nothing if not deadly serious. Still, we only have as yet a very general sense of how he considered the play should be understood.

As for the cuts to Shakespeare’s five-hour tragedy, Akimov again confronted previous productions, where, according to him, ‘scenes without Hamlet are thrown away, but the monologues are kept intact, thus making it a play about Hamlet alone.’ His point is fair enough as regards the 1924 production of Hamlet at the MKhAT II with Mikhail Chékhov in the title role. So Akimov promised a homogeneously shortened play, where all scenes and characters were considered for cutting. Akimov’s attempt to save as much of Shakespeare’s text as possible echoed Meyerhold’s take on the play (see Chapter 1.6.3) and pointed towards Radlov’s 1938 production where he insisted on including several scenes that were often deleted and hence had remained largely unseen (see Chapter 3.5).

Akimov noted that the birth and development of ‘Hamletism’ ran parallel to the development of bourgeois ideology of the 19th century: ‘This historical process, however interesting and educational it may be, does not relate to our specific task of staging Shakespeare’s dramaturgy’. His goals were accordingly to better understand and interpret ‘the Shakespeare of the 16th century and not the Shakespeare of the 19th’, and ‘to consider Hamlet before

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400 Ibid., 9-10.
401 Ibid., 10.
404 Akimov, ‘Shekspir, prochitannyi zanovo’.
anything else a dramaturgical work rather than a literal one.’ 405 If the working material in the 19th century consisted of Hamlet’s philosophical monologues, ‘our material is the holistic dramatic work of Shakespeare’. 406 He admitted that the ‘Hamletism’ of the 18th and 19th centuries, followed by mysticism (as in Mikhail Chekhov’s Hamlet), reading between the lines and ‘falsifications’, were by then so deeply rooted in the audience’s sub-conscious that his more authentic Hamlet would paradoxically appear ‘false’. Akimov concluded that ‘in our time we should approach the question of interpretation of this work using ‘dialectical materialism’ which was, according to Stalin himself ‘the world outlook of the Marxist Leninist party’. 407

For Akimov, Hamlet was ‘a highly developed, healthy, optimistic young man whose jokes sparkle throughout the five acts of the play [and who] dies while trying in vain to combine his advanced theories with feudalism in practice’ in the society of his time. Akimov summarised his task as: ‘a creative interpretation of Hamlet using methods and devices of our theatre, considering the concrete situation of Shakespeare’s era.’ 408 He required that scholarly studies of the history of Hamlet and Hamletism should accompany his ‘de-Hamletising’ efforts outside the theatre, through debates, exhibitions, brochures and the like. 409

Akimov’s main objectives may be summarised as follows:

- *Hamlet* was to come across as a ‘living example’ of dramatic art, ‘a play with many excellent roles, a strong plot, written in a beautiful language, filled with a Shakespearean sense of humour which he does not lose even in his tragedies’ 410

- The play should represent the current ideology of the time by means of stage strategies and not by means of the pronouncements of masters of ceremonies (Sententsiami rezonerov).

- The play should make the audience perceive the ‘cheerful’ (bodrii) attitude of its author, so that the extermination of the heroes at the end does not darken the play completely. 411

405 ’Doklad N.P. Akimova’, 3.
406 Akimov, ‘Shekspir, prochitannyi zanovo’.
407 Joseph Stalin, ‘Dialectical and historical materialism’, in Stalin, Problems of Leninism, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976, 835-73, here 835. In the course of this lengthy essay, first published in 1938, Stalin traces the origins of the terms to Marx and Hegel and identifies them as pertaining to Marxism-Leninism only.
409 Ibid.
Akimov summarises his task as: ‘a creative interpretation of Hamlet using methods and devices of our theatre, taking into account the concrete situation of Shakespeare’s era’.  

2.4 Text, translation and adaptation

Akimov’s claims for, in effect, a fusion of authenticity and contemporary relevance went further. Regarding the problem of translating Shakespeare’s play into Russian, he maintained that previous translators, too, had served the ideology of their time, and that by adapting rather than translating accurately they had often taken part in the process of falsification. He illustrated this point through examples from ‘Belinsky’s Apocrypha’, and from Andrei Kroneberg’s insistence on Hamlet as a young and delicate prince, thus ignoring phrases such as ‘He is fat’ (Act V scene 2). Akimov then claimed that the new translation by Mikhail Lozinskii used for his mise-en-scène was ‘the first exact Russian translation both in form and artistic values’, and that it ‘depicts the character of Shakespeare’s language without the usual artificial varnish’. As an example, he noted that in most previous translations, Hamlet’s words to Laertes at the scene of Ophelia’s funeral are only selectively rendered, leaving out such phrases as ‘You eat a crocodile’ (V/1), which do not fit the beautiful image of the prince.

As we will see in 2.4 below, Lozinskii’s translation claimed to be one of great accuracy, reproducing ‘Shakespeare’s stylistic peculiarities – his lexicon, the architectonics of his speech and stylistic figures, as well as his figurative language, the very core of his poetry’, as well as achieving ‘the poetical equivalence of every verse in translation to every verse of the original’.

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411 Ibid.
412 Akimov, ‘Kak teatr im. Vakhtangov stavit “Gamleta”’.
413 Akimov was alluding to Vissarion Belinskii’s 1838 essay embracing Nikolai Polevoi’s translation and Pavel Mochalov’s rendering, which became a milestone in Russian perceptions of the play – see Chapter 1.
414 Kroneberg’s translation was used for the Craig/Stanislavsky production at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1911 - see Chapter 1.X.
415 The phrase has been a subject of debate among Shakespeare scholars, since ‘fat’ could also have meant ‘sweaty’.
416 Lozinskii’s translation was published for the first time a year after the premiere of Akimov’s production.
418 Akimov, ‘O “Gamlete”’.
419 ‘Doklad N.P. Akimova’, 5.
420 Quoted in Semenenko, Hamlet The Sign, 91. According to Semenenko, Soviet translators had access to different versions of Shakespeare’s text (Folio, first and second Quartos) and Lozinskii ‘most likely used some old “combined” editions, for example, Edward Dowden’s of 1899. Both Lozinskii and Pasternak translated the bits that are missing from F but exist in Q2 and also preserve the lines specific to F only.’ (Personal communications, 26 August 2015.)
Despite this, the ‘philological’ and ‘archaic’ translation of Lozinskii is often described as unsuitable for theatre productions, giving actors little room for manoeuvre.\footnote{See for example, Alexander Anikst’s statement, quoted in John Elsom (ed.), \textit{Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?}, London, Routledge, 1989, 44-45.} This may be one reason why Akimov did not hesitate to adapt the text to his theatrical requirements, injecting Shakespeare’s text with outside literature in the shape of extracts from Erasmus and Mass. Hence it was not surprising that prior to the premiere there were rumours circulating that Akimov’s \textit{Hamlet} had not used Shakespeare’s text. In his article in \textit{Sovetskoe Iskusstvo} dismissing these accusations, Akimov justified his use of excerpts from other authors’ works: Throughout the history of Shakespeare translation, he claimed, one of the major challenges had been translating puns and wordplays, retaining their wit while staying as loyal as possible to the original text. Akimov correctly pointed out that translating these puns directly into Russian results in heavy, even incomprehensible language. So he decided it would be best if he replaced such extracts in Shakespeare’s text by Russian puns on the same subjects, written by the best literary experts in this domain. This explanation was clearly meant to justify Akimov’s plans to include text by Nikolai Erdman and Vladimir Mass, particularly for the gravediggers’ scene.\footnote{Ibid. For details of discussions leading to such decisions see stenographic reports from dress rehearsals on 19 and 21 April 1932: ‘Stenogrammy khudozhestvennykh soveshchaniy po obsuzhdeniiu progona spektaklia “Gamleta”’, Vakhtangov Theatre Archive, Arkh. No. 530, Sviazka No. 22, op. 1.} Like several other of his innovative but controversial intentions, these excerpts were voted down during dress rehearsals and were left out of the final production.\footnote{Akimov, ‘Shekspir, prochitannyi zanovo’; also ‘Doklad N.P. Akimova’, 11.} As for the presence of lines by Erasmus of Rotterdam, this can be explained by Akimov’s intention to consciously free the play from Hamletism of the 19th century Turgenevian kind, in favour of Humanism the worldview centred on human agency rather than on the supernatural, dogma and, in more Marxist terms, social rankings. It was for the purposes of defending this conception, among other things, that Akimov turned to what he considered the essence of Elizabethan tragedies and their topicality, describing Hamlet as a ‘humanist of the 16th century, well ahead of his time, an individualist dying within his feudal surroundings’.\footnote{Akimov, ‘Kak teatr im. Vakhtangov stavit “Gamleta”’.} In general, he explained, on behalf of the Theatre, ‘We try to re-evaluate the play in relationship to the philosophy of the 16th century: that is, “humanism” with reference to Erasmus’s “Colloquies”.’\footnote{Akimov, ‘O postanovke “Gamleta”’, 146, n.156.} As convincing as Akimov’s reasoning may have sounded, his unconventional treatment of dramatic text could also be seen as a continuation and a toned-down version of Meyerhold’s
dictum of the 1920s, which went as far as suggesting that ‘a play is simply the excuse for the revelation of its theme on the level at which that revelation may appear vital today.’

Meyerhold’s 1926 production of Gogol’s *Inspector General* was the ultimate realisation of this view. In 1926 such interventionist productions could command a degree of comradely support (see Chapter 1.6.3). However, the evolution of the cultural climate of the country from then until 1932 meant that Akimov did not receive such backing for his untraditional treatment of *Hamlet*.

### 2.5 Meyerhold versus Akimov

Despite having recently advocated far-reaching potential alterations, when it came to Akimov’s production, Meyerhold took offence and accused the mise-en-scène of eclecticism:

> ‘I love the Vakhtangov Theatre’, he declared in a speech at the Theatre Workers’ Club on 26 January 1933,

but their latest, especially *Kovarstvo i liubov’* (*Cowardice and Love*) and *Hamlet*, scared me (*napugali*). Eclecticism is the easiest thing. A little bit of Dobuzhinsky, a little bit of Gordon Craig, a little bit of the journal in which Parisian artists print their work, etc. And what comes out of all this mess? In the midst of confusion Goriunov plays the role of Hamlet. Hamlet is shifted from the point at which Shakespeare had put him. And the result is a shambles (*kavardak*).

One can hardly help hearing the resonance of this statement with the notorious *Pravda* article of 28 January 1936 branding Shostakovich’s music ‘A Muddle instead of Music’ (*Sumbur vmeste muzyki*). Of course the two statements are from opposing sides of the cultural war, but they indicate that both were prepared to use similar verbal weapons.

On 21 May 1934, during his lecture on theatre at the ‘Intourist’ seminar, Meyerhold returned to Akimov’s production, using it as an example of an unsuccessful remake of a classic, and warning theatre directors of the dangers of thoughtless re-workings that destroy the essence of a play:

> The new ‘remakers’ (*peredelki*) - not all, but many - think that remaking is a self-sufficient art in itself. This is no good. These adapters have started to break away from

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426 Meierkhol’d, ‘Meierkhol’d o svoym Lese’, *Novyi zritel*, 1924/7, 6.
427 Mstislav V. Dobuzhinski (1875-1957), one of the artists of ‘Mir Iskusstva’.
428 Published as ‘Vs. Meierkhol’d, “Put’ aktera. Igor’ Il’inskii i problema ampula’, in *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* 1933/10 (26 February), 256-260.
the tasks set by the author. The most unfortunate example of this, in my opinion is *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov theatre. This is to such an extent ‘Not Shakespeare’ that there is already nothing remaining of Shakespeare. Above all, you don’t see what the main idea of the director is; you are always in a state of hesitation and you cannot guess.

I think we should fight against such remakes. It would be so much more interesting if we directors, when facing the question of classics, started to produce them without making any alteration. At the same time, we can show them in a new way. We don’t need simply to reshape and rebuild the stage - this is not the only path. Speaking of the actor being the main element, we can give the actor this task: that the thing should start to sound new, and not only in this way but also in the sense that paradoxical casting may create the effect of a new perception of things.\(^{429}\)

By this stage, ‘Meierkhol’divshchina’ (Meyerholdism) had become almost synonymous with reckless interventionism and experimentation in production. But Meyerhold himself had evidently moved his position, whether out of conviction or expediency, or perhaps a bit of both. Indeed his comments on Akimov’s *Hamlet* are close to those in his famous self-defence in 1936, ‘Meierkhol’d protiv Meierkhol’divshchina’ (Meyerhold against Meyerholdism),\(^{430}\) but quite different from his earlier writings and remarks on his attempts at producing *Hamlet*. Indeed his suggestion of leaving the classics unaltered is the exact opposite of his own previous practice, as evinced in his production of Gogol’s *Revizor (Inspector General)* (see Chapter 1.4.3).

As an example of this shift in principles, at the time of his leadership of RSFSR 1 in 1920 Meyerhold had planned to ask Mayakovsky to rework the gravediggers’ scene in Shakespeare’s play, giving it a more political edge to go with the clown-like image of the characters.\(^{431}\) So when in 1932 Akimov commissioned Erdman and Mass to rewrite the same

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\(^{430}\) For the complete text of this speech, see Meierkhol’d, ‘Meierkhol’d protiv meierkhol’divshchiny’, in Aleksandr Fevral’skii (ed.) *V.E. Meierkhol’d: Stat’i, pis’ma, rechi, besedy*, Vol. 2, 330-347.

most theatre scholars considered this an act of Meyerholdism, ignoring the evolution of Meyerhold’s concepts over years as reflected in his speeches and writings.

2.6 Internal debates

What Meyerhold and the critics were unaware of was that they were only seeing Akimov’s production after it had been extensively discussed, altered and abbreviated by the Theatre, subsequent to many rehearsals and particularly the discussions following the dress rehearsal on 19 April 1932. Taking place over two days, these discussions were attended by members of the crew and cast, including Boris Zakhava (executive director), Osvald Glazunov (actor of the second gravedigger and ex-director of theatre), Pavel Antokolskii (one of the directors), I. Golchanov (first name and role unknown), Manishko (first name and role unknown), Konstantin Mironov (actor of Guildenstern), Osip Basov (permanent actor of the theatre), Anatoly Gorinov (actor of Hamlet), Vasilii Kuza (assistant director), Boris Shchukin (actor of Polonius) and Akimov himself. The accounts of these sessions kept at the archive of the Vakhtangov Theatre reveal invaluable information on details of the mise-en-scène and its practicalities, on major concerns of the production team about certain aspects of the show, and on Akimov’s justification of his choices. Reading between the lines, we can glean from the debates something of how Akimov’s production might have been, had it not undergone such trials.

What worried those present at the debates were: Akimov’s manipulation of Shakespeare’s text; the interpretation of Ophelia; the logical continuity of certain elements such as the clay pot used to evoke the ghost; and the overall length of the production (over five hours) and related logistics. Apart from these things, the directorial team was accused of turning Hamlet into Richard III, by concentrating solely on his thirst for power.

The actual length of the production was the most discussed item. At over five hours in dress rehearsal, Akimov’s Hamlet was simply too long. During the debates where the necessity of cutting out several scenes was discussed, there was no mention of Meyerhold’s earlier intentions of producing a Hamlet without leaving out a single scene ‘even if the play takes from 6 p.m. until 2 a.m.’ Various solutions were proposed to Akimov. Some as drastic as cutting complete scenes – particularly those that contained the most daring staging –

433 Stenographic reports of discussions, 19 and 21 April 1932, Archive of the Vakhtangov Theatre, Moscow, Arkh. No. 530, Sviazka 22, op. 1.
434 Meierkhol’d, ‘Iz lektsii na teatral’nom seminare “inturista”’, 298.
reworkings of the structure of the play and even reduction in the number of acts. These were all strenuously opposed by Akimov (see below). One of the scenes that did not survive this scrutiny however, despite Akimov’s protestations, was that of the gravediggers; this was especially due to the added dialogue provided by Mass.

Accounts of these and similar discussions reveal how Akimov was aware of the shortcomings and how he tried to change the situation regarding these episodes. The cuts meant that he had lost many brilliant scenes and important themes, such as various chase scenes, which had given the production a special flavour. It was only natural for some critics to complain that ‘in general the architecture of the composition of the play was destroyed’.435 But the blame should not have been laid at Akimov’s door alone.

Marina Zabolotniaia has perhaps come closest to a reconstruction of the production, using newspaper cuttings, reviews and accounts of discussions preserved at the Vakhtangov Theatre archives.436 In their printed version her valuable efforts and documentation are not as clearly articulated as they might have been,437 to the point that the production’s details remain more or less as obscure as they had previously been. The American critic Alma Law offers a clearer, less subjective and more factual account of the show, where she depicts the highlights of the production together with a few photographs of major scenes. But her lack of information about the background to the production, due to the inaccessibility of archives at the time of writing, places limitations on her reportage.438

2.6.1 Reporting from discussions

The executive director, Zakhava started off the session by presenting a brief summary of problems at hand, chief among them being the production’s length. He noted that ‘the fourth act is clearly not ready, and needs to be radically cut.’ He suggested cuts to the scene of the banquet (pir) and the scene at the cemetery, and especially the gravediggers’ conversation, which he felt should be cut to 40% of its actual length. ‘The scene in the bath tub439 is also to be cut in half … Furthermore the image of Fortinbras needs reworking.’440

436 Zabolotniaia mentioned her still unfinished work in our personal correspondence, April 2013.
437 Zabolotniaia, ‘O postanovke “Gamleta”’, 91-120.
439 This is the scene where Osric invites Hamlet to a fight with Laertes. In Akimov’s rendering this scene takes place when Hamlet is in a bath tub.
440 Zakhava in Stenographic report of discussions (see n. 433). From this point on, all quotes and reports come from this sources, unless otherwise stated.
Zakhava approved of the production’s unusual reinterpretation of Ophelia’s death as making it more approachable for the contemporary audience. Returning to the graveyard scene, he then outlined the practicalities of changing scenes: at the end of the cemetery scene, Hamlet would try to say something sympathetic to Laertes, then leave; then the change of scene behind the curtain would happen as the music starts. This is a rare occasion when Shostakovich’s music was mentioned during these debates: ‘Here Shostakovich has composed a magnificent Requiem, which is to be accompanied by male chorus hiding in the orchestra or in the box seats and hence invisible to the audience. This chorus grows into a powerful forte and finally the first panel curtain (padduga) rises, and there Laertes and the King are standing to the background of the second padduga, in poses as if in a church. The Requiem is heard to the end. While the monologue about the return of Hamlet is going on, the bath tub scene can be prepared (behind the second curtain).’ Zakhava’s depiction of this scene reveals the place and role of Shostakovich’s ‘Requiem’ in Akimov’s mise-en-scène. As will be shown in 2.10, due to Akimov’s interference with Shakespeare’s text and his liberties with the order of the scenes, a few numbers from Shostakovich’s score, including this one, would be difficult to place were it not for such reports and descriptions.

Moving on to the ending of the production, Zakhava noted that ‘in order to finish the show on a high note, we thought of many solutions, until N.P. [Akimov] came up with a brilliant idea.’ According to this suggestion, Hamlet would remain the main acting role but this time not through his physical appearance on stage. Instead after the final fight and the hero’s death, Fortinbras arrives and orders, ‘Take the bodies away!’, and all bodies are carried away except for Hamlet’s. Then, after everyone else’s, Hamlet’s corpse is taken away, however just as fast and as carelessly. Whilst this is taking place, Horatio is lying in grief, not noticing when Hamlet’s body is gone. Then he looks around and sees there is nobody left, but finds the helmet in which Hamlet had fought. He takes this mask, looks at Fortinbras, looks in the direction of Hamlet’s exit and slowly goes out with this mask. ‘This is the last moment of the play. In it once again the attention is focused on Hamlet, but through an object which has remained of him, and which symbolises everything about him and all who killed him.’ Whether or not in the final version of the production this scene was carried out exactly as Zakhava described it here is not known.441 However, the importance of an object as a symbol certainly resonates with Akimov’s earlier work, as described and analysed by

441 The Production Book at RGALI (f. 2737, op. 2, ed. khr. 1, 242) does not include this episode; instead the scene breaks directly into a translation of Erasmus.
Bartoshevich. The use of mask here could also be seen as a homage to Vakhtangov’s well-known interest in this object. At the same time, using an object as a substitute for the hero chimes with Meyerhold’s controversial solution for the last act of his 1926 The Inspector General where in the last scene all the characters were replaced by dummies (wax figures).

Zakhava’s long presentation was only the beginning of these two-day discussions, which ended in a session of voting for certain scenes to remain or to be left out. The main passages under consideration were: the texts written by Mass and Erdman and added to the gravediggers’ scene; the interpretation of Ophelia as a character, and her function; the logical continuity of certain elements; and of course the overall length of the production and related logistics.

Following Zakhava’s introduction almost every speaker started by addressing the key question: ‘why (radi chego) are we producing a Hamlet?’ Glazunov insisted on the ‘responsibility of a new Hamlet mise-en-scene’, while Golchanov started by supporting Akimov’s views on the distortions brought into Hamlet adaptations ever since Goethe’s time, describing the self-imposed task of the Vakhtangov Theatre to re-establish the fundamental idea of the play and to show what could be done with it (p. 13). Objecting to this statement, Kuza replied: ‘I think Goethe is not as stupid as he has been presented to us recently. It has been said that Goethe interpreted Hamlet in the interests of his own class. Do we have the right to claim that we have interpreted Hamlet brilliantly today? I think not. Unfortunately we made quite a lot of noise in promoting our show in this regard’ (p. 25). He continued that ‘with just 25 days before the premiere we cannot possibly speak of a major discovery in Hamlet.’ Kuza’s concerns were echoed in Golchanov’s remark: ‘either the work on production is not finished yet, or all that the director has managed to do has been to free the path [for de-Hamletising] but has not clarified what he is doing this play for’, and he accused the directorial team of ‘turning Hamlet into Richard III’, by concentrating solely on his thirst for power.

Representing the directorial team, Zakhava rounded off the question of ‘radi chego’: ‘before anything, so that we could identify our relationship with this masterpiece that has occupied people’s minds for 300 and more years; to clarify our own understanding; and to compare this personal relationship with other personal relationships existing until now, that is during

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442 Aleksandr Bartoshevich, Akimov, Leningrad, Teaklub, 1933, 40, 68-73.
443 Rudnitsky, Russian and Soviet Theatre, 53.
444 Senelick and Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theatre, 264.
the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th’. Agreeing with Akimov, who believed that Shakespeare was in fact writing about himself when he created Hamlet, Zakhava concluded that ‘Shakespeare definitely sympathises with him (Hamlet) entirely, but does not understand him completely, because he couldn’t have had enough distance from the character, from where he would understand those people surrounding him. He wrote of himself in Hamlet’ (p. 32).

Some topics of discussion were later echoed in the critics’ views, and there was indeed some truth in them, for instance as regards the problems of continuity, and especially the ghost and the clay pot. As Antokolskii correctly observed: ‘The problem with the clay pot is not in that it comes out of nowhere, but in that it never reappears in the play, whereas Shakespeare’s ghost figure reappears later in the play.’ Hence certain scenes had lost their raison d’être. For example, as Maniushku noted: ‘If the ghost is made up by Hamlet (with the help of Horatio), why in “To be or not to be” does he tell Horatio that “the ghost appeared to me” and after the play-within-the-play “I bet the ghost said the truth”?’

Kuza then turned to Ophelia’s death, finding Akimov’s solution ‘not convincing’: ‘In our age, this death should have a motive, perhaps a rape’ (p. 29). This point having been taken by Glazunov and Basov, they pointed to another problematic moment, namely the gravediggers’ scene and especially the added text written by Mass (and Erdman). Apart from Akimov himself, nobody seemed to be in favour of these excerpts. The dissatisfaction was expressed in different manners, starting from the relatively calm remarks of Goriunov, the actor of the title role, who admitted his dislike for the texts, despite not being able to judge their value, and who suggested replacing them with Shakespeare’s words. At the other end of the spectrum came harsher critiques from Glazunov: ‘Mass’s text is the most uninteresting part of the play’; Maniushku: ‘As for the text by Mass, it must be shortened even more than it has been suggested. We lose nothing by cutting Mass’s text short’; Kuza: ‘After careful study of such texts, I believe that these don’t give anything to the play. They add no contemporaneity’ (p. 30); and finally Basov: ‘Again attacking Mass’s text, I confirm that the whole text of the gravediggers is so unfunny that it becomes funny from that’ (p. 22). Akimov politely overruled these complaints: ‘I am convinced that this text will be received well by the public. During the dress rehearsal I watched a few guests closely and they became very excited when they heard familiar words (expressions). The texts are already shortened - both the gravediggers’ and the actors’. I advise that we don’t take aim at these texts.’ (p. 42)
Nevertheless they seem to have been left out of the final production in their entirety.\textsuperscript{445} In the production book (\textit{rezhisserski ekzempliar})\textsuperscript{446} kept at RGALI, these texts are crossed out in pencil, possibly indicating Akimov’s hope to retain them at the last moment. Paradoxically, the official poster of the production which was sketched by Akimov himself, depicted the gravediggers’ scene (see Plate 2.1).

\textsuperscript{445} Akimov, ‘O postanovke “Gamleta” v Teatre im. Vakhtangova’, 147.
\textsuperscript{446} Akimov, \textit{Hamlet} Production book, RGALI, f. 2737, op. 2, ed. khr. 1.
One major goal in cutting out these texts was to shorten the production as a whole. The efforts seem to have been successful, since none of the critics and reviewers complained about the length. Long productions were not unusual at the time, as Zakhava noted: ‘I believe that this show will be normal for the size of our theatre… MAT started the show half an hour earlier, MKhAT II finished the show at 12.30, and we finish not later than 12.00. So I think trying to achieve the size of Turandot isn’t necessary’ (p. 34). After the dress rehearsal,
which lasted six hours, even Akimov agreed that certain cuts were necessary. However, his choice differed greatly from those eventually adopted, and it is only by studying the production book and the stenographic reports of the debates that we can work out how the cuts distorted his initial concept and its logic and hence caused a different perception of the play by the audience (see the detailed analysis of each scene below, 2.10)

Zakhava defended his suggestion of limiting the cuts to the final act by pointing out that ‘here all intrigues come to their conclusion’ (p. 34). This was quickly ruled out by Glazunov, who was in favour of more evenly-spread as well as more drastic excisions, with not only words but also complete scenes taken out. Kuza also objected to Zakhava’s solution, warning of the ‘danger of reaching the final act and realising that we cannot possibly hold the attention of the public any longer, the more so because this act is the weakest of all’. He suggested that ‘the more is taken out elsewhere, the less we need to omit from the deciding 4th act.’

Antokol’skii rather vaguely invited everyone to concentrate on ‘the rhythm’ of the production rather than on its ‘tempo’. Not developing his remark any further, he pointed out that, ‘The main problem of the play is its composition, which appears to be weak. This is not just because of the length of the play, but also because insignificant things play too important a role’ (p. 11). However, his proposed solution of dividing the play into five sections rather than Akimov’s four, where the third section would finish with the fourth scene, and the fourth section would end at the graveyard, leaving the fifth as quite a short one including the bath tub scene and the finale, did not prove to be popular with the other participants.

On the second day of discussions (21 April 1932), Antokol’skii came up with concrete suggestions regarding scenes to leave out. He proposed that they discard the scene of the reception of the Norwegian ambassador, shorten the dialogue of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in front of the King and the Queen during the hunting scene, and finally make some cuts to the ‘closet scene’, even though he believed it had artistic value. Akimov responded more or less positively to the first of these suggestions. However, he warned that cutting that scene might disturb the logic of Fortinbras’s story-line. In the end a vote was taken that assured the discarding of this scene (p. 35).

One of the other scenes under discussion was that of Claudius’s prayer after the play within the play, wherein, according to Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet enters with the intent to kill the King. Akimov was criticised for keeping the prayer in but omitting Hamlet’s entrance. The critique was justified by explaining that ‘Hamlet’s humanism is very clear here. Hamlet
doesn’t kill the King during prayers because this is against humanist ideas’ (pp. 29, 40). 30 years later, Grigory Kozintsev would apply the same solution to this scene for his cinema version of Shakespeare’s tragedy (see Chapter 5.2)

Akimov’s response to this and some other complaints came in the form of describing technical and acting issues, including what he saw as the actors’ own shortcomings (pp. 45-47). These descriptions provide insight into his methods of work, his intentions and expectations. They also reveal his enthusiasm and bravado, since he was not afraid of openly criticising colleagues. The following are a few examples from his long presentation.

Addressing the Ophelia problem first, Akimov insisted that during the scene of the banquet (pir), Ophelia was the leading character and that this scene could be intertwined with the scene of Horatio and the pirates. He added that ‘Horatio should be carrying a candle and wearing a night gown, so that it is understood that the actions are happening at night.’ Then he moved to Ophelia’s death and gravediggers’ scene. Akimov insisted that despite all the tragic events the graveyard scene should begin with the scene involving ignorant but comic gravediggers. Deflecting criticism of its ‘unfunniness’, he reminded participants that the decor for this scene was supposed to be blooming with flowers, but then because of financial restrictions ‘flowers were one by one taken away from the cemetery’.

As for the fourth act, which had been severely criticised before Akimov’s presentation, he insisted that ‘this act can only be justified through the impetuosity (stremitelnost’) of development of the actions’. He continued to complain that the actor of Laertes, Shikhmatov, was mistaken in his view of his character’s personality. According to Akimov, Shikhmatov (who seems to have been absent from the discussions) insisted on representing Laertes as a nobleman caught in the spider’s web of Claudius’s cunning plans. Judging this as ‘trying to be more naïve than Shakespeare himself’, Akimov deplored not only this interpretation but also Shikhmatov’s compromise solution of presenting a parody of Laertes (p. 46).

2.7 Aftermath and reception

So far as the Soviet press of the time goes, one reaction was common: no critic seemed to agree with Akimov’s claims of liberating Hamlet and reviving Shakespeare’s concept. The general tone of the critical reception may be judged from such observations as:

- ‘Hamlet is reduced to the ranking of a throne seeker and adventurer, admittedly also interested in exact science... . Everything is allowed and is legal. Machiavellianism –

- ‘Akimov has preferred a Hamlet who is unthinking and unreflecting…. Akimov’s directorial idea derived from “topsy-turveydom”. It was from the start an idiosyncratic academic “reduction ad absurdum”. Shakespeare is reduced to absurdity.’ Pavel Markov, ‘Gamlet v postanovke N. Akimova’, Sovetskii teatr, 1932/7-8, 15-18.

- ‘She (Ophelia) languishes in high sensuality. That’s it. Is there really nothing else to say about her? Does the theatre really recognises such a dilemma: either she is made of moonlight, dream and reveries or she is happily drowning in whisky and speaks ambiguously?” Iuda Grossman-Roshchin, ‘Strashnaia mest’, Sovetskii teatr, 1932/6, 8.

- ‘If Turandot was the joyful smile of a blossoming creativity, Hamlet is a grimace and in many ways an unhealthy one.’ E. Beskin, ‘Gamlet spisannyi so scheta’, Literaturnaia gazeta, 17 June 1932.

What everyone seems to have forgotten, or simply ignored, was the conditions set by the Theatre repertoire committee (Repertkom) in 1931, when discussing and commissioning the production of Hamlet for the anniversary season of the Theatre. As Akimov himself later explained, at the time when his Hamlet was in progress the agenda had been very different from the time of the premiere: in 1931 no rich person or royalty could possibly be a positive hero, and depicting the ghost as a metaphysical creature would also cause concerns. According to Akimov, his changes and interpretative choices made it possible to stage a tragedy of Shakespeare at a time when it was not on top of the authorities’ list of priorities. Accordingly, what Akimov did was largely working towards the objectives set for him at the time. Of course within a year much had changed in the cultural and political climate of the country. April 1932 saw the Central Committee’s decree ‘On restructuring literary and artistic organisations’, which led to the dissolution of RAPP, the organisation of creative Unions and the doctrine of Socialist Realism. With hindsight, this resolution marked a pivoted moment in the cultural history of the country, leading to a more rigid, centralised bureaucracy. However, to assume, as Senelick and Ostrovsky do, for example, that the

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‘inflexible framework was constructed’ overnight would be an oversimplification. In fact the dissolution of RAPP and its likes appeared to many as a relief from the hard-core instructions and expectations of these proletarian organisations.

At any rate the resolution of the Central Committee, promulgated barely a month before the premiere, proved to be crucial in determining later views on the ill fate of the production. The reception of Akimov’s Hamlet was not merely reactive to the problematic mixture of the director’s conception and his realisation of it, but it was also to a degree prescribed. Had the production been staged at the time of its conception in 1931, it would most likely have had very different resonances for critics and public alike, in the sense that its interventions would have been perceived as more mainstream.

Hamlet was shown in Moscow for only a single season in 1932/33. Yet its shadow followed Akimov throughout his life. In the gathering of artist workers discussing the 28 January 1936 Pravda article, ‘On the fight against formalism’, Akimov reminded participants that apart from Hamlet he had worked on 86 other productions, nineteen of them following his doomed Hamlet, yet he could not redeem himself from the stigma of formalism as a result of his rendering of Shakespeare’s tragedy.

Even so he was clearly not ready to step back and admit to his mistakes. In 1936 he published an informative essay outlining his reading of Shakespeare’s tragedy and his reasons for considering his interpretation more genuine and closer to the Bard’s intentions and to Elizabethan traditions than traditional Hamlets. What was even more curious was that this directorial explication was published in the annus horribilis for artists, when most had to either stop creating or reconsider their former works - to self-censure or pay the price.

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448 Senelick and Ostrovsky, Soviet Theatre, 296.
450 See Rudnitsky, Russian and Soviet Theatre; McBurney, ‘Shostakovich and the Theatre’.
451 According to personal conversation with Marina Zabolotninaia, November 2013.
452 Akimov, ‘O postanovke “Gamleta” v Teatre im. Vakhtangova’, 119; and Akimov, ‘O postanovke “Gamleta” v teatre im. Vakhtangova v 1932 g.’, in Gvozdev (ed.), Nasha rabota nad klassikami, 125-168 (N.B. this is not the same document as the previous title).
2.7.1 Exhuming *Hamlet* in 1943

Akimov’s 1936 article was not to be the last time that his *Hamlet* was exhumed. In 1943, the Shakespeare Cabinet of the Soviet Union, headed by Mikhail Morozov,\(^454\) returned to it in a discussion session in the presence of Akimov and certain artists from the production, as well as other Shakespeare scholars. The stenographic notes from this session have been reproduced by Marina Zabolotniaia.\(^455\) However, since the original documents have been destroyed in a fire, however, it is impossible to verify the exactness of her materials.\(^456\) Information in the following eight paragraphs is from this source.

At the time of this session, admiration for Shakespeare was among very few things, apart from hatred for the Nazi Germany, that the USSR and the UK had in common. In fact, the British authorities helped in the organisation of the Shakespeare festival in Yerevan (Armenia) in 1944, and the 1943 special session of the Shakespeare Cabinet may well have been a part of the preparations for this event (for more on Shakespeare in the Soviet Union in wartime, see Chapter 4.3 below).

Morozov opened this special session on 29 September 1943 by explaining that it was not going to be yet another trial for Akimov’s *Hamlet*. He insisted that since the 1932 production was done by such a great artist, ‘however wrong it was’, it still carried much useful information for contemporary productions of Shakespeare. Morozov admitted that in the course of studying Akimov’s sketches for *Hamlet*, he had realised that the spirit of this production was very close to English ballads, and hence quite in harmony with Shakespeare’s style.

Morozov’s logical and level-headed opening speech was followed by the key-note speaker, Liubov’ Vendrovskaia,\(^457\) who reminded the participants of key scenes and presented an analysis of the historical context of this production.\(^458\) She correctly pointed out that the premiere on 19 May 1932 came just a few weeks after the dissolution of RAPP, whilst the initial plans for the production were born during the most advanced period of RAPP’s doctrine, when it was simply impossible to stage *Hamlet* in a classical manner and free of avant-garde ideas. As a young artist just embarking on his independent theatre directing career, Akimov had to convince the Repertkom of his intentions in liberating *Hamlet* from

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\(^{454}\) Mikhail Morozov (1897-1952), Soviet Shakespeare scholar and theatre critic.

\(^{455}\) Marina Zabolotniaia, introductory article to ‘Obsuzhdenie akimovskogo “Gamleta”’, 393-396.

\(^{456}\) Ibid.

\(^{457}\) Liubov’ Vendrovskaia (1903-1993), Soviet theatre scholar.

\(^{458}\) Zabolotniaia, ‘Obsuzhdenie akimovskogo “Gamleta”’, 398-404.
the idealism of 18th and 19th centuries, making the hero approachable by the common people, who were energetic and devoted to his goal: to fight for the throne of Denmark. The speaker then pointed out Akimov’s changes to the play and his efforts to omit its philosophical images. She also singled out a few deleted scenes, such as the procession of the beggars, which was to be carried out to a foxtrot and charleston music by Shostakovich (it seems likely that her memory was of a rehearsal or discussion, since this section of music, though composed in short score, was never actually orchestrated). Despite agreeing that Akimov had stripped the tragedy of any philosophy, she identified his main ‘philosophical’ and sociological understanding of Hamlet as the latter’s duality and the tragedy of not being able to accomplish his task: ‘Hamlet belongs to two different groups simultaneously: royalty and humanists.’

This description and the speaker’s toned-down criticism of the production led to further discussion and inevitable further judging of Akimov and his Hamlet. Everyone agreed on the artistic merits of Akimov and his stage work. Many scenes were described as memorable and amazing, and the production was counted as an important and ‘necessary’ one. However, it was noted that some of his visual solutions had taken pride of place over what should have been the actors’ work; hence the philosophical part of the play, which could only be revealed through the art of acting, had gone missing. Yet most speakers referring to Mikhail Chekhov’s 1924 production of Hamlet at MKhAT II – the one known for its lead actor overshadowing all other aspects of the production – praised Akimov in comparison, for his innovation and above all for reviving Hamlet after prior ‘wrong’ interpretations.

The participants considered it their prime role to discuss Akimov’s ‘mistakes’ and to draw conclusions that could then be useful to any new artist attempting an interpretation of Shakespeare’s works. Yet again, all this seemed much calmer and more constructive than the harsh critiques around the time of production.

The question of formalism was dismissed, with the explanation that a work would be formalist if it had no content or goal, whereas Akimov’s intentions, however wrong they might have been, were crystal-clear: namely to depict the struggle for the throne of Denmark. Even so, the same speakers did not refrain from accusing Akimov of returning to Sumarokov’s misinterpretation and rewriting of Shakespeare (see Chapter 1.1).

459 Ibid., 403.
Despite Morozov’s warning at the beginning of the session, the discussions inevitably turned into questioning Akimov and his production. These arguments gradually changed the tone of the session, leading to what Akimov described as a ‘Galileo moment’, when he was expected to admit his mistakes. Trying to avoid engaging with the accusations, Akimov returned to the much more important and global subject – as he saw it – of the general history of theatre production of the classics in the Soviet Union. Echoing the key-note speech he emphasised that at the time when his Hamlet was in progress, the agenda of Repertkom was very different.

He also reminded the participants that in those days an important part of being a theatre director had consisted of reworking and reinterpreting (peredelat’) plays. He insisted that if he had concentrated on the intrigue of struggle for the throne, it was mainly to avoid being accused of ‘formalism’, which he nevertheless was. Maintaining that due to cuts and inevitable changes he did not manage to realise all his goals through the production, he announced his wish to stage Hamlet again, of course once the previous production was finally left alone and shelved.

Perhaps this is why he in fact never did realise that dream; he understood that however different a new production of Hamlet by him would be, it would always fall in the shadow of his 1932 production.

Whether Akimov could have deviated so far from the anticipated self-criticism had this meeting been held in 1948 or immediately afterwards, is doubtful. In the years of The Great Patriotic War, creative artists were enjoying relative freedom, due to the troubles of war and the over-riding need for boosting the morale of a war-stricken nation. In fact the most surprising thing about these discussions is that they took place at all. Accordingly, despite some more or less harsh criticism, the overall outcome of the Shakespeare Cabinet’s 1943 session can be regarded as the first general retrospective survey of Akimov’s Hamlet to concede its artistic values and its importance as a landmark in Soviet theatre history.

2.7.2 The reaction of the Western press

If time was a healer for Soviet critics, for their Western colleagues distance seemed to lend enchantment to the view. In the reviews following the premiere they at least seemed to notice many more positive aspects of Akimov’s production. Today it is almost inconceivable that a Soviet production of a Shakespeare’s tragedy by a newcomer at a young theatre, which could
be considered Moscow’s third-ranking stage at the time,\textsuperscript{460} should have attracted such international attention., Akimov’s Hamlet was reported in several Danish, German, American and English publications, where it was generally viewed as, at best, a breakthrough masterpiece and at worst as an interesting and unusual event.\textsuperscript{461}

The Observer described it as a ‘daring experiment’, in which ‘Akimov transformed Hamlet from tragedy into comedy… calculated to evoke gusts of laughter’. Finding the production somewhat ‘cold’, the same writer nevertheless praised it as ‘a specimen of how ingenious use of settings and costumes can change the accepted version of a play, while leaving the original text tolerably intact’.\textsuperscript{462} By contrast, as we have seen, to Soviet/Russian critics the changes to the original text were nowhere near ‘tolerable’, even though one might have assumed that English speakers should be more sensitive to any manipulation of Shakespeare’s words.

The Western journalists described the Soviet press’s reaction was mixed rather than negative, presenting two different approaches: those who demanded more individuality in Hamlet’s interpretation as a character, and those who required clearer depiction of the ‘struggle between the trade capitalism and feudalism which according to strict Marxists dominated the life of Elizabethan England.’\textsuperscript{463}

The Manchester Guardian took a relatively even-handed approach, trying to balance the show’s originality with its dissimilarity to any traditional interpretation: ‘Akimov has created a play that Shakespeare with his keen sense for good dramatic effects would most probably have admired, but would scarcely have recognised as his own work.’\textsuperscript{464} Although the The Guardian’s review conceded that some of Akimov’s ‘iconoclastic interpretations upset the inner structural harmony of the play’, it astutely summed up the complexity of the production: ‘Akimov has made a brilliant, hard, and unsentimental play of intrigue, in which elements of farce predominate, despite the sanguinary climax.’\textsuperscript{465}

\textsuperscript{460} Compared to the Moscow Art Theatre (founded by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko in 1898) and its offspring MKhAT II, Vakhtangov Theatre was still relatively new at the time.


\textsuperscript{462} ‘Hamlet produced as a comedy, daring experiment in Russia’, The Observer, 26 June 1932.

\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{465} Ibid.
A more subtle critique of Akimov’s production appeared in the writings of Russian-born American theatre designer, Mordecai (Max) Gorelik who was visiting the Soviet Union at the time and who was clearly intrigued by this production. Praising several aspects of Akimov’s staging, Gorelik nevertheless criticised several scenes that he considered as mere ‘theatrical stunts’.

If several reviews missed Akimov’s scientific reasons behind his untraditional interpretation of Shakespeare’s tragedy, Ivy Low in the *Moscow Daily News* managed to provide one of the first analytical readings of Akimov’s *Hamlet*, claiming that this ‘brilliant production is in truth an extremely respectful and scientific restoration of the original *Hamlet*, and may be compared to the work of the archaeologist’. She failed to clarify whether by ‘original *Hamlet*’ she meant Shakespeare’s play or the medieval legend on which the Bard’s tragedy is based. In the latter case, she should surely have dismissed Akimov’s insistence on the notion of Hamlet as a university student and humanist, which sets the action in the Renaissance rather than the medieval era.

Low’s extremely positive review berated those who criticised the production as ‘magnificent but not Shakespeare’, stating that ‘very few people know what *Hamlet* ought to be like… the *Hamlet* we are pleased to call “traditional” is a mere bourgeois simulacrum thrust upon the world.’ Low was a special case. She was the wife of Maxim Litvinov, People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs in the 1930s and later Soviet ambassador to the US. They had married in 1916 while he was a revolutionary exile in London and she lived in Moscow from 1920 before returning to England in 1972, where she died five years later. Her opinion might be judged as an example of pro-Soviet bias, even though the example of her fellow critics shows that this did not necessarily guarantee a positive review.

One reason why many Western critics admired Akimov’s *Hamlet* had to do with its counterbalancing the contemporary trend to consider the play mainly as a vehicle for the star actor of the title role. The latter trend still reigns today, to the extent that many productions are merely known by the name of the lead actor (e.g. Cumberbatch’s *Hamlet*, or David Tennant’s) while the directors are often side-lined. By contrast, Akimov’s Hamlet was not

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468 Low, *Hamlet in Soviet Dress*. 
just ‘the principal boy continually pursued by the spotlight, but a man among men’. All this contributed to Richard Watts Jr. from the *New York Herald Tribune* describing the production as ‘curious and exciting… and perhaps the best show in Europe’.

**2.8 Page vs Stage vs Age**

For a fuller understanding of the dichotomy of Western and Soviet receptions of this production, it may help to step into the field of translation studies, and of semiologists such as Dirk Delabastia and Aleksei Semenenko.

Almost every post-war account of Akimov’s *Hamlet* places the production in its historic-political context, viewing the developing cultural climate of the time as the catalyst for the mixed reception of the play. In explaining the outcome of Akimov’s production, scholars often refer to the dissolution of RAPP, and the emergence of new doctrines, above all Socialist Realism. However, studying Akimov’s production in isolation from its immediate political setting and observing its particularities within the historical process of canon formations offers a different, complementary explanation for the problem of its reception.

As discussed in Chapter 1.1 the history of Shakespeare reception in Russia as well as major areas of Eastern/Central European culture was hugely influenced by German and French trends. According to Paul Conklin, in the case of *Hamlet*, the play and the hero began to exist separately from very early on, with the prince often pictured as a ‘malcontent avenger’ already in the seventeenth century. As Semenenko argues, this meant that there was already an interpretative canon of *Hamlet* that was more oral (or sensory) than written, being based on the theatrical presentations of the play. However, the German Romantic interpretation of *Hamlet*, Goethe’s in particular, proved to be pivotal to the process of separation of page and stage canons, with the ‘psychologised’ Hamlet being more a child of literature than of theatre. Likewise, in his study of *Hamlet* in the Netherlands, Dirk Delabastita affirms that Shakespeare’s tragedy was received along ‘two relatively independent lines, namely in the theatre and in literature’.

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469 Ibid.
471 See Rudnitsky, McBurney, *et al.*
474 Dirk Delabastita, ‘*Hamlet* in the Netherlands in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: The Complexities of the History of Shakespeare’s Reception’, in Delabastita and Lieven D’Hulst (eds.), *European
Following this tradition, Semenenko concludes that the Russian *Hamlet* in the nineteenth and twentieth century was a dual canon, a dichotomy that was clearly reflected in translations of the tragedy: ‘There were simultaneously two canonical translations in each period which coexisted more or less peacefully due to the fact that they occupied different media: literature and the theatre.’ In other words, one translation is considered relatively more accurate and closer to the source and therefore orientated towards the reader, whereas another is received as more creative, ‘multimodal’, dynamic and hence suitable for performance. As nineteenth-century examples of source-oriented translations Semenenko cites those by Mikhail Vronchenko, Nikolai Ketcher, Dmitrii Averkiev, and ‘K.R.’ (Grand Duke Konstantin Konstantinovich of Russia), describing them as ‘philological’ with an ‘ethos to “educate” the audience and – more importantly – to convey the canonical status of the work.’ Such translations tend to use an archaic and elevated style of speech, whereas creative translation often adopts contemporary language and modern style.

In the Soviet era this duality manifested itself very clearly in the opposition between so-called academic translations such as that by Mikhail Lozinskii (commissioned for Akimov’s production and published in 1933) and poetic or creative ones, most famously that of Boris Pasternak (c. 1940).

Lozinskii considered himself as a professional translator and a theoretician, who accordingly paid special attention to methodological principles. He confirmed the dual approach to translation in a speech of 1936, characterising the types as ‘reorganizational’ and ‘recreating’. Choosing the latter, Lozinskii described the process as reproducing the form and content of the original with the maximum possible degree of accuracy. He admitted that such a task can only be fulfilled to a certain extent and that the quality of the translation depends on how close the translator gets to the original. Acting as a ‘scientist-restorer’ (*uchenik-restavrator*), he singled out two functions of translation: the aesthetical and the cognitive.

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*Semenenko, ‘No Text is an Island: Translating Hamlet in Twenty-first-century Russia’, in Brian Baer (ed.), *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Amsterdam, J. Benjamins, 2011, 250. Semenenko defines a literary canon as a model of a text which can be used as a pattern for the creation of other texts – see Semenenko, *Hamlet the Sign*, 29-50.

*Semenenko, ‘No text is an island’, 251.

(poznavatel’nai). He applied those principles to his translation of Hamlet, consciously aspiring towards an academic, canonical text.

One of the most distinguished features of this translation was the ‘archaisation’ of the language, adopted in order to suggest that the play itself was very old. Furthermore, Lozinskii applied ‘his own unique system of equivalence – on metric, rhetoric and lexical levels’ – and in order to avoid ‘literal’ translation he deployed ‘semantic and stylistic substitutes’. Thus he created an academic and philological text, which strove to present the exact Russian counterpart to Shakespeare’s text.

The accurate, academic translation canon may be understood as primarily reader-orientated and not particularly suitable to be adopted for stage or screen performance, since it does not really offer ‘latitude to the creative power of the translator and/or director’. The antitheses to Lozinskii’s translation which appeared around the same time were those by Anna Radlova (1937) and Boris Pasternak (1940). Of these Pasternak’s, despite existing in several different versions/editions, has come to be considered canonic and has been the one most often used by theatre/film directors. Whereas Radlova announced that the focus of her translation was on the modern Soviet audience and theatre performance, Pasternak went further and described his method as ‘rendering thoughts and scenes’ rather than ‘translating words and metaphors’, and he required that his work ‘be judged as an original Russian dramatic work because… it contains more of that intentional liberty without which there can be no approach to great things.’ Of course, given Pasternak’s affinity with Hamlet and the fact that through the increasing pressure in 1940s and 50s he took refuge in translation as an act of escapism, the personal and poetic nature of his translation of the tragedy comes as no surprise (see Chapter 4.4 and 4.5).

Given the accounts by Pasternak, Lozinskii’s translation is rightly considered to belong to the opposing pole and therefore to be more in agreement with literary traditions, as opposed to

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480 Semenenko, ‘No text is an Island’, 252.
481 Anna Radlova, ‘Kak i rabotaiu nad perevodom Shekspira’, Literaturnyi sovremennik, 3 (1934), 138-145.
theatrical ones. Hence it seems paradoxical that Lozinskii’s ‘philological’ translation was actually prepared specifically for Nikolai Akimov’s seemingly anything but academic staging of *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre. Lozinskii’s elevated style made a clear dissonance with Akimov’s iconoclastic rendition of Hamlet and his tragedy, despite instances of Akimov’s adding to and interfering with it. This important dichotomy has not been pointed out by commentators and critics. Furthermore the archaism of the translation apparently contradicted Shostakovich’s modern-sounding music, which, as we shall see in the next section, not only carried no trace of early music but deliberately exploited contemporary genres and cabaret style. Whether or not these dichotomies were intended by Akimov, the resulting dissonance could be counted among the factors for the frustration caused by this production, even if only at a subliminal level. Both the visual and musical interpretation might have been better received by the contemporary audience had the translated text been more stage-orientated.

### 2.9 Music and reception

If Akimov’s *Hamlet* as a whole had a mixed reception, critics were unanimous in one respect: that Shostakovich’s incidental music was excellent. Even the satirical journal *Krokodil* could not help but praise it: ‘The composer Shostakovich leaves me in a very stupid situation as a critic. You see, when one writes for a satirical journal, one is supposed mainly to tell people off. But Shostakovich has composed such music that there is simply not a single fault with it. Amazing music!’\(^{483}\) What preceded this appraisal of Shostakovich’s music was sharp-edged criticism of Akimov’s production, claiming that the only Hamlet present at the theatre was in fact Vasilii Kachalov,\(^{484}\) who as the reviewer noted was in the audience and who should have been traumatised by what was happening on the stage in the name of Shakespeare.\(^{485}\)

Other critics were not much different in preferring Shostakovich’s ‘magnificent’ music to Akimov’s scenic solutions. The harshest words directed at Akimov were probably those of the theatre critic and head of literary section of Moscow Art Theatre, Pavel Markov (1897–1980), who complained that ‘At times it seems that the production is preventing us from hearing Shostakovich’s music, let alone Shakespeare.’\(^{486}\) In this article Markov accused Akimov of betraying Evgeny Vakhtangov’s traditions, this being even more hurtful in the

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\(^{483}\) Armans Zoilova, ‘*V plane i razrezе*’, *Krokodil*, 1932/17.  
\(^{484}\) Vasilii Kachalov (1875–1948), Russian actor who played Hamlet in Craig/Stanislavsky’s production at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1911/1912.  
\(^{485}\) Ibid.  
anniversary year of the great theatre director (10th anniversary of his death). He admitted to having detected brief echoes of Vakhtangov’s theatre, not through Akimov’s production but thanks to Shostakovich’s music: ‘Only a few times, during the long duration of the show, could Vakhtangov’s principles be felt in it, and almost always this perception was caused not by the director’s interpretation nor by the actors’ skills, but by the music that Shostakovich composed in the teeth of Akimov.’

By pointing to contradictions between Shostakovich’s music and Akimov’s production, these critics were no doubt responding to a problematic relationship. This is best illustrated by the fact that in one issue of *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (27 May 1932) two separate articles were published: one discussing the production as a whole and the other Shostakovich’s music. In the latter article, E. Gal’skii praised Shostakovich’s music by suggesting that ‘Shostakovich used music not only as an illustrative device but also in several moments he managed to give it the important, profound and clear significance of an independent composition. Thus, it is not rare that the music goes against the director’s interpretative decision for a given scene.’

Do these contradictions mean that Shostakovich’s music simply overpowered Akimov’s production and thus did not comply with the traditional subordinate function of incidental theatre music? Or were they perhaps a result of lack of communication and close collaboration between the two artists? To this day, no document has emerged to prove that Shostakovich composed his music with any detailed knowledge of Akimov’s interpretative intentions. The two short letters that survive from the correspondence between these two men only reveal that Shostakovich started the composition quite late, due to his being overloaded by other projects, as he put it. Akimov and Shostakovich may well have elaborated their approaches at least to some extent independently, contributing to the apparent divergence between their readings. Even so, the little we do know about the background to Shostakovich’s score helps us to understand its specific qualities and its relationship to the actual production, whether or not it was worked out through telephone conversations, meetings, letters that are now lost, or (as seems highly unlikely) without such communication altogether.

487 Ibid.
489 For a rare study of theories of incidental music, see Kim Baston, ‘Scoring Performance: the Function of Music in Contemporary Theatre and Circus’.
490 Letters from Shostakovich to Akimov dated 22 October 1931 and 18 February 1932, RGALI, f. 2737, op. 2, ed. khr. 214.
In the absence of such documentation, it may prove beneficial to refer back to the composer’s previous incidental music and particularly to his first experience in this field, which was thrust upon him by none other than Meyerhold himself. When Prokofiev declined the offer to compose the incidental music to Meyerhold’s 1929 production of Mayakovsky’s *The Bedbug*, the director turned to his young protégé and friend, Shostakovich, who was at this time the pianist in residence at the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow. Meyerhold’s specific ideas regarding the musicality of theatre meant that he took great care to outline his requirements regarding the music and took the liberty of interfering in the process of composition and application of the musical material; this is revealed in his detailed letters to the composers involved in his productions explaining in detail his demands and in his essential role in Shostakovich’s music to *The Bedbug*, as detectable from the manuscripts and the final performance score where much pre-composed material was simply left out.

A study of this score and Shostakovich’s subsequent incidental music in conjunction with his other contemporary opuses reveals several instances of the composer’s reusing of his own material. The recycling of musical material between different productions and between his theatre music and other genres suggests that many of his ideas were in fact generic rather than specifically intended for a particular character or scene. This may have been simply a result of onerous working conditions and strict deadlines dictated by the theatres, to which Shostakovich reacted in his famous ‘Declaration’ article in 1931 (see below); but it also illuminates the composer’s ‘cool-headed grasp of the way the same music could bear different meanings in different contexts.’ Pre-composed generic musical excerpts had been an essential tool for the musician/accompanists of silent cinema, and this was a job from which Shostakovich himself had made money as a teenager. In his twenties, composing incidental music offered an opportunity to try his hand at diverse styles and aesthetic orientations, as well as to test out musical ideas from more ambitious ongoing projects, including most notably, his second opera, *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* (1930-1932).

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493 Ibid., 147.
2.9.1 Shostakovich and Shakespeare

Akimov’s production gave Shostakovich his first working encounter with Shakespeare; but it would be far from the last (see the list of works in Table 2.1). It is curious that in 1929, replying to a questionnaire, the young Shostakovich had admitted to a dislike for Shakespeare’s work; however, this was before he had engaged with any of the Bard’s works as a composer. The 1932 Hamlet seems to have left its mark, since from this point on he would return to Shakespeare at regular intervals during his career: in 1941 for Grigory Kozintsev’s production of King Lear at the Leningrad Gorky Theatre (Bolshoi Dramaticheskii Teatr im. Gorkogo), in 1942 when he included a setting of Sonnet 66 in his song cycle, Six Romances on Verses by English Poets, Op. 62, and in 1954 when he recycled parts of the King Lear music together with a few newly-composed numbers for Kozintsev’s 1954 production of Hamlet at the Pushkin Theatre in Leningrad (now the Alexandrinsky Theatre). In 1963, Kozintsev asked Shostakovich to provide the music for his famous cinema version of Hamlet, which was to mark the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth. The collaboration continued in 1970 with Shostakovich’s score for Kozintsev’s film version of King Lear.

The composer would have two further encounters of the Shakespearean kind, through characters rather than text, when he turned late in his career to Hamlet and Ophelia, this time to Russian poetic renderings of them. ‘Ophelia’s Song’ opens his Seven Verses of A. Blok, Op. 127, depicting Ophelia’s sorrow when bidding farewell to her beloved Hamlet. Finally ‘Dialogue of Hamlet with his Conscience’, which forms part of Shostakovich’s Six Verses of Marina Tsvetaeva, Op. 143, describes Hamlet’s inner turmoil as he blames himself for Ophelia’s death (for further commentary see Chapter 5.4.1).

Table 2.1: Shostakovich’s Shakespearean works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work / Op.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Source/Text</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet, Op. 32 and 32a</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Incidental music</td>
<td>Translated by Mikhail Lozinski, with some additions from Erasmus</td>
<td>Nikolai Akimov</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Translation Details</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>King Lear</em>, Op. 58a</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Incidental music</td>
<td>Translated by Boris Pasternak</td>
<td>Grigori Kozintsev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Six Romances on English poets</em> (texts by Raleigh, Burns and Shakespeare), Op. 62 and 62a, no. 5: ‘Sonnet 66’</td>
<td>1942, 1943</td>
<td>Voice and piano, arrangement for voice and orchestra</td>
<td>Translated by Boris Pasternak</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hamlet</em></td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Incidental music</td>
<td>Translated by Boris Pasternak, Sonnet 74 at the end by Samuil Marshak</td>
<td>Grigori Kozintsev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hamlet</em>, Op. 116</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Film score</td>
<td>Translated by Pasternak</td>
<td>Grigori Kozintsev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Seven Verses of A. Blok</em>, Op. 127, no. 1: ‘Ophelia’s Song’</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Vocal music</td>
<td>Aleksandr Blok</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>King Lear</em>, Op. 137</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Film score</td>
<td>Translated by Pasternak</td>
<td>Grigori Kozintsev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Six Verses of Marina Tsvetaeva</em>, Op. 143 and 143a, no. 3: ‘Dialogue of Hamlet with his conscience’</td>
<td>1973, 1974</td>
<td>Voice and piano and arrangement for voice and orchestra</td>
<td>Marina Tsvetaeva</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from Shostakovich’s self-chosen contact with Shakespeare, and *Hamlet* in particular, the image of the ambivalent self-doubting hero was also thrust upon him by critics, especially with regard to his Fifth Symphony. As Derek Hulme observes ‘there are several instances in Russian books and articles of the Fifth Symphony being “dubbed the “Hamlet Symphony”.’ Suggesting that the idea was probably started by David Rabinovich,\(^{495}\) Hulme argues that ‘the composer would have known of this nickname’.\(^{496}\)

Ian MacDonald, one of the more florid and (over-)imaginative of Shostakovich commentators, reports – without indication of source - that:

\(^{495}\) Rabinovich analyses the symphony by alluding to the ‘accursed’ questions that the composer asks through his music – see David Rabinovich, *Dmitry Shostakovich*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1959, 47-50.

Since the staging of Yuri Olesha’s *A List of Assets* [in 1931] the commonest symbol of individualism in Soviet culture had been Shakespeare’s Hamlet, a man locked in the torture chamber of his own limited ideas. Incorporating this ready-made concept into their analysis of the Fifth, Soviet critics were soon talking about its individualism as ‘Hamletesque’ and referring to the work itself as the ‘Hamlet symphony’. From here, it was a short step to identifying its beleaguered hero as Shostakovich himself and discussing all his music in terms of its composer’s so-called ‘Hamlet aspect’. 497

In fact, as mentioned in the previous chapters, the symbolic qualities of Hamlet can be traced back to long before Olesha’s play. In any case it is debatable whether, as MacDonald puts it, ‘with the Hamlet theory, the Soviet authorities invented a myth about the composer which could be used to account for all deviations from optimism on his part’, 498 though of course this rings true to some extent if we conceive of Hamlet as he was traditionally portrayed: a dark, nostalgic prince.

Akimov’s production had started Shostakovich off with quite a different Hamlet. Conceivably it may even have been an intimation of the director’s untraditional and eccentric approach that tempted Shostakovich into this collaboration, despite his earlier ambivalence towards Shakespeare and theatre music in general, although in 1931 the two men would have known of each other from their joint participation in the music-hall revue, *Uslovno ubyti* (Declared Dead). 499

In November 1931, Shostakovich published an extraordinary manifesto in the journal *Rabochii i teatr*, entitled ‘Declaration of a composer’s duties’, attacking the state of music in the theatre world, denouncing all his own theatrical and film music, and regarding only his ‘First of May’ Symphony [No. 3] among his recent works as a worthy contribution to the development of Soviet musical culture:

> It is no secret to anyone that at the fourteenth anniversary of the October Revolution, the situation on the musical front is catastrophic. We composers answer for the

498 Ibid.
situation on the musical front. And I am deeply convinced that it is precisely the
universal flight of composers into the theatre that has created such a situation.\footnote{Shostakovitch, ‘Deklaratsiia obiazennosti kompozitora’, Rabochii i teatr, 1931/31 (20 November), 6.}

Deploring the role of music diminished to what he called ‘naked accommodation’ with the
appalling tastes of some theatres, Shostakovich summoned composers to turn away from
submission to directorial requirements while composing works for the stage. And although he
promised to fulfil his contract to provide incidental music for \emph{Hamlet} at the Vakhtangov
Theatre, he vowed to return the advances and cancel contracts for any other incidental music
and to reject all future theatrical commissions for the next five years.\footnote{Laurel Fay, \textit{Shostakovich: A Life}, 64.}

The fact that Shostakovich went ahead with his contract for \emph{Hamlet} is easy to trivialise. It has
been speculated that he had already spent the advances paid by the theatre, or that it was
difficult to escape Akimov’s ‘convincing charm’.\footnote{Ian MacDonald, \textit{The New Shostakovich}, 81, rev. edn. 98-9.}

But one might equally propose that \emph{Hamlet} appealed to him as an excellent opportunity to set an example of how incidental
music might resist what he had decried as total ‘subordination to the theatrical institutions’.

This point was particularly highlighted in Gal’skii’s glowing appraisal of Shostakovich’s
music to \emph{Hamlet} in his article published on the same page as a harsh criticism of Akimov’s
production in \textit{Sovetskoe iskusstvo}: ‘Earlier this year \[sic\], Shostakovich wrote an article in
which he announced his dislike for theatre music and his decision to write “proper” music
only. Shostakovich’s music to \emph{Hamlet} is the best reply to the composer himself, the best
piece of evidence to prove how wrong his opinion of his own theatre work was.’\footnote{Gal’skii, ‘Muzyka k Gamletu’.}

For another thing, being obsessed with the ongoing project of \textit{Lady Macbeth}, Shostakovich’s
work on Akimov’s \emph{Hamlet} evidently provided him with a chance to try out the ‘tragedy-
satire’ genre within which he classified his opera.

Unlike composer Vladimir Kobekin, who explicitly called his 2008 operatic take on \emph{Hamlet} a
comedy,\footnote{Vladimir Kobekin, \textit{Gamlet (datski)} (rossiiskaia) komedia, musical theatre piece premiered at the
Stanislavsky-Nemievoich-Danchenko Academic Music Theatre in 2008 (see also Chapter 5.4.3).} for all Akimov’s interventions in the Shakespeare’s text, he did preserve the word
‘tragedy’ in the title of his production. Yet he chose to illustrate the poster with the
Gravediggers’ scene, which would presumably have been one of the satirical highlights, had
it been preserved in the actual production. Such fusion of tragedy and satire points to
Shostakovich’s idea of a satirical rendering of Leskov’s tragedy in *Lady Macbeth*, which could even have had its roots in the Vakhtangov production of *Hamlet* – existing documentations and evidence do not enable us to establish an exact chronology. That tragi-comedy was in the air at the time is suggested by, for instance, the successful production of the well-known play *An Optimistic Tragedy*, written by Vsevolod Vyshnevskii, and staged in 1933 by Tairov at the Kamernyi Teatr, which dealt with the story of a female commissar who sacrificed her life in order to bring glory to the Baltic fleet during the Civil War.\(^{505}\)

### 2.9.2 Music and drama

Shostakovich’s music to *Hamlet* was and remains the finest example of his theatre music and in a way the highpoint of all his incidental music of the 1920s and 30s.\(^{506}\) However, it is often assessed in isolation from the production itself, with most analysis being based on the musical material from the orchestral suite which the composer produced from his incidental music in 1932 and which has entered the concert repertoire (Op. 32a).\(^{507}\)

Due to the lack of dramaturgical study of the music and production, and indeed the paucity of established theories for analysis of incidental music in general, even if it is considered in its theatrical context, Shostakovich’s music has been described as closer to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* than anything else in Akimov’s mise-en-scène. This highly debatable notion was possibly implanted by Iurii Elagin, a member of the Vakhtangov Theatre orchestra who emigrated to the West after the War, having been interned in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp, and who published his memoirs in English in 1951: ‘The music Shostakovich wrote for *Hamlet* was magnificent. Though it was very modern, it came closer to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* than anything else in Akimov’s production.’\(^{508}\) As we shall see, there is a grain of truth in this observation. But the glaring mistakes that Elagin makes while describing the music and its respective scenes indicate that his memory was, to say the least, fallible.\(^{509}\) In fact, as we shall see, Akimov’s untraditional interpretation of the tragedy is directly reflected by Shostakovich’s music in several respects, not least in Shostakovich’s choice of cabaret genres for several numbers.

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\(^{505}\) See also Senelick and Ostrovsky, *The Soviet Theatre*, 338-41.

\(^{506}\) For a sympathetic survey of his other contributions in the field, see McBurney, ‘Shostakovich and the Theatre’, 145-178.

\(^{507}\) Derek Hulme, *Dmitri Shostakovich: A Catalogue, Bibliography, and Discography*, 105.

\(^{508}\) Juri Jelagin, *The Taming of the Arts*, 35.

\(^{509}\) One of these mistakes, regarding the recorder scene, is pointed out by McBurney, see McBurney, ‘Shostakovich and theatre’, 167-168. See also 2.10.3 below.
In support of Elagin’s observation, the 60 or so musical numbers of the piano score kept at the Vakhtangov Theatre archive\textsuperscript{510} are more or less divisible into the four categories Christopher R. Wilson lists as typical musical cues for incidental music to Shakespeare’s works, namely stage music, magic music, character music and atmospheric music.\textsuperscript{511} In this way, all the fanfares, processions and transition (‘stinger’) numbers belong to the category of stage music, while Ophelia’s songs and the gravedigger’s are character music. Wilson argues that “atmospheric music” is the most subtle of the four categories, because it is concerned with such intangibles as mood, tone and emotional feeling, and because it may involve changes from suspicion to trust, from vengeance to forgiveness or from hatred to love.\textsuperscript{512} So it comes as no surprise that those numbers from Shostakovich’s score which could be designated ‘atmospheric’ often belong to another category as well, and that it is by adding extra musical layers that the composer gives them subtle undertones, thereby musicalising the intangibles listed by Wilson. For example, as will be shown below, ‘Hunt’ is a ‘stage music’ (quasi-onomatopoeic), which at the same time underlines Ophelia’s betrayal.

2.10 Akimov and Shostakovich’s *Hamlet*: Act-by-act description and analysis

Akimov’s production, due to its length, was subject to much debate regarding its outline, and several scenes had to be excised (see above 2.6). The production book and the music-dramatic synopsis (see below) indicate that Akimov’s original concept was also more or less based on a five-act structure following Freytag’s pyramid (or triangle)\textsuperscript{513} though in the course of its development it ended up in four acts. When viewed in the context of Freytag’s pyramid, liberties such as the omission of the Ghost of King Hamlet (replacing it with a fake ghost as impersonated by Hamlet and Horatio), reveal the director’s personal take on the tragedy (see Figure 2.1), since these liberties have a significant effect on the exposition, the rising action and the climax.

\textsuperscript{510} At my first enquiries (2012–2014) the theatre’s archivists claimed they no longer held this material. However, in 2014 they handed me a folder containing the scores. These are still uncatalogued and only carry the folder designation No. 26 and the stamp of the former Music Library of the Vakhtangov Theatre.


\textsuperscript{512} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{513} Created by nineteenth-century critic and novelist, Gustav Freytag, the Freytag Pyramid is a visual representation of how a dramatic plot develops. It consists of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement. See Freytag, *Die Technik des Dramas*, Leipzig, Hirzel, 1863 (the pyramid or triangle appears first at p. 100).
As Pavis observes, when it comes to analysis of a performance, ‘segmentation remains the core issue’, and although he concedes that there is little to be gained from ‘atomization of a performance into minimal units’, he also admits that it is not clear ‘what kind of macro units’ work best. Nevertheless he discourages what he calls the habitual trend of text-based, ‘philological’ segmentation in favour of a ‘découpage’ that is based on observable units derived from the actual mise-en-scène, its particular ‘rhythmic frameworks, its moments of rupture or pause’. Moreover, he insists on the importance of ‘those sequences when text and stage move out of sync.’

Pavis’s further argument reveals that the ‘stage’ is understood to include all visual and audible elements of the mise-en-scène, including music and rhythm.

What follows builds on Pavis’s theories and tools (derived from his Analyzing Performance), taking into account the role of music in ways that he himself does not undertake.

An overview of Shostakovich’s score reveals a high degree of affinity (‘synchronization’) with the overall structure of Akimov’s staging (see Table 2 in the Appendix). In fact, referring any incidental music back to the Shakespearean original is problematic, given the non-definitive status of the text in its various incarnations. The three different early versions of the play – the First Quarto (Q1, 1603), the Second Quarto (Q2, 1604), and the First Folio (F1, 1623) – each include lines, stage directions and even entire scenes missing from the others, and hence the play’s structure, its discontinuities and irregularities have inspired much critical scrutiny, which goes beyond the scope of this project. Clearly an analytical progression from text to production to music, of the kind Pavis deplores, is not practical in this instance (see Introduction).

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514 Pavis, Analyzing Performance, 21.
515 Ibid., 22.
516 For more on synchronization/desynchronization see, Pavis, Analyzing Performance, 220.
There follows an act-by-act description and analysis of each scene and its corresponding musical number where applicable, while the accompanying table presents an overview of the production and the sources used for this study (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

2.10.1 Akimov Hamlet Act 1

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* opens with a key question that will echo throughout the play: ‘Who’s there?’ Pronounced by Bernardo, a frightened common soldier on guard, who is also the first person to appear on the stage, the question might seem innocuous, but it introduces the key topic of spying and conspiracy. However, and notwithstanding the common view regarding the dominance of the theme of espionage in Akimov’s production, he chose to open his *Hamlet* with a short prologue, to be read in front of the closed curtains by the most philosophically depicted of his characters, Horatio. Horatio’s costume, with its long university gown and round glasses, is intended to remind us of Erasmus (see Plate 2.2). This personalised prefacing of the play recalls Sir Laurence Olivier’s 1948 film, where Olivier himself sets the play in motion with a summary of his understanding of the tragedy’s main theme: ‘This is the story of man who could not make up his mind.’ In Akimov’s *Hamlet*, the opening words are not made up but come from the very end of the tragedy. In a sense Akimov actually finishes the play before he starts it, by quoting Horatio’s final lines from V/2/364-369:

364 .... So shall you hear
365 Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
366 Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
367 Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
368 And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
369 Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads: all this can I
       Truly deliver.

This opening ploy strikes an unexpected philosophical and social tone, where Horatio’s words suggest a universalised reading of Shakespeare tragedy as placed in a socio-political and historical context. If Olivier’s *Hamlet* is about the dilemmas of an individual, Akimov’s from the start deals, at least by implication, with the problems of a much larger impact on society, hence contributing to his reading of Hamlet as belonging to a social group caught between two eras. For Akimov, Hamlet is not just a man trying to regain what belongs to him; rather, he is a representative of two classes: a prince and a humanist in search of truth.

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517 *Hamlet*, 1948, Laurence Olivier (dir.), Universal International (viewable on DVD, Two Cities Film, Criterion, 2000).
Despite this textual transposition, Akimov then follows Shakespeare closely by giving Horatio the task of reader/narrator (it has been said that the name Horatio is derived from ‘orator’\textsuperscript{518}).

Plate 2.2: Akimov’s Horatio played by Aleksandr Kozlovskii (with the clay pot used for the ‘Ghost’ scene)

The sources do not indicate whether Shostakovich’s ‘Introduction’ was played before or after Horatio’s speech. However, its \textit{fortissimo-marcato} character, and its harmonic open-endedness suggest that it would have been suitable for calling the audience’s attention before the entrance of the actor. At any rate it establishes a tone of Tchaikovskian fatefulness which will be echoed at the end of the first act.

The curtain opens on the scene of the Night Patrol. The background story explains this depiction of security measures at Elsinore: Old King Hamlet has killed Fortinbras’s father, the King of Norway, and has taken away lands from Norway. Fortinbras’s uncle is the new king of Norway (an echo of what is happening in Denmark). Yet Fortinbras himself, like Hamlet, is determined to avenge his father and claim back his lands. Akimov uses Shostakovich’s haunting music for the ‘Night Patrol’ to frame this scene, which starts as a mime. The motivic basis of the musical episode echoes down through Shostakovich’s later works, the clearest example being the scherzo of his Tenth Symphony (see Ex. 2.1). In Hamlet its subdued yet naggingly insistent character suggests a mixture of vigilance and terror. Its static quality – quite unlike the naked brutality of the Tenth Symphony - is fully in accord with Shakespeare’s overall image. This episode is also a recycling of the ‘Infantry March’ from Shostakovich’s previous year’s theatre score to Adrian Piotrovsky’s Rule, Britannia (Op. 28) about communist agitation in the West.

Ex. 2.1: Shostakovich, Hamlet Act 1, ‘Night Patrol’, opening; b) Symphony No. 10, second movement, opening

Despite the similarity to Shakespeare’s opening scene in terms of the overall atmosphere of fear, reinforced by the music, Akimov’s decision to leave out the Ghost of King Hamlet as a separate character means that the source of the fear of these common soldiers (Bernardo and Marcellus) is not clear. The production book at RGALI notes that the Ghost appears and is mentioned in the soldiers’ conversation, but it does not clarify the staging solution adopted by Akimov (namely its impersonation by Hamlet and Horatio). However, a still from the production depicts a figure (most probably Hamlet) dressed as a ghost appearing to the soldiers and Horatio (see Plate 2.3). In any case, the result may have been initially confusing to the audience, which had yet to discover Akimov’s Ghost-free concept.
While in Shakespeare’s play it is the rooster’s crow that makes the Ghost disappear, there is no evidence of any musical rendering of this moment. Instead, Horatio’s words ‘I’ve heard this and believe it [i.e., that the rooster’s crow is known to make ghosts disappear]’ is followed by the ‘Shepherd’s pipe’, played on the clarinet, which announces the breaking of dawn.

The second scene is visually the opposite of the first. It is daytime, and everyone is dressed in bright colours ready for the new King’s wedding – everyone except Hamlet. Akimov assigns Hamlet a very dramatic entrance, singling him out not only visually but also dramatically. Following Claudius’s words justifying his marriage and the celebrations, Shostakovich’s ‘Funeral march’ is played while Hamlet enters wearing a black veil that covers his face (Ex. 2.2).
This was a moment widely praised for its intensity and powerful drama. Pavel Markov, for instance, claimed that this was the scene where he encountered and felt Shakespeare, but he insists that this was thanks to Shostakovich’s music, rather than to Akimov’s staging. Shostakovich’s music, according to Elena Zinkevych, could be placed beside the funereal music from his First Symphony (third movement) and the finale of his Fourth Symphony. If, as she argues, in the First Symphony the funereal music appears as a prophetic warning for those tragic events yet to come in Shostakovich’s life and the life of his country, and in the Fourth as a philosophical reflection, in *Hamlet* it represents pain and decay, arising directly from the tragedy of life. These interpretations are made with hindsight. The use of orchestral tutti and octave doublings of the melodic line during significant portions of the opening ‘Funeral march’ points to a more universalised status of mourning, rather than individual suffering. It might be added that to well-attuned musical ears the B flat minor tonality, echoing that of Chopin’s famous Funeral March Sonata, reinforces the archetypal impression. By conveying Hamlet’s mournful state and the universality of the tragedy of the King Hamlet’s death, the ‘Funeral March’ goes beyond simple ‘stage music’ marking the protagonist’s entrance. In fact, in the absence of the actual Ghost of King Hamlet from Akimov’s mise-en-scène, Shostakovich’s music in a sense fills in for this missing component.

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519 Pavel Markov, ““Gamlet” v postanovke N. Akimova”, 67.
in the ‘exposition’ of the tragedy, according to Freytag’s pyramid structure, and by means of musico-dramatic irony brings to the audience’s consciousness the murder of the King.

This scene ends with Claudius announcing that Hamlet is next in line to the throne, and that to show his love to his nephew and now step-son he will be drinking to his health all through the celebrations. Claudius then invites everyone to a day of feasting, drinking and firing cannons. His exit, which is followed by that of the Queen and everyone else except Hamlet, is accompanied by Shostakovich’s startlingly up-tempo galop music in the manner of Offenbach (Ex. 2.3). Although Zinkevych finds this music to be ironic and hence an example of Shostakovich’s use of ‘muzyka byta’ (everyday music) to convey decay and evil, the preceding announcement of the feast and the overall joyous atmosphere of the wedding justify Shostakovich’s choice of idiom also in a non-ironic way, in accord with both Shakespeare and Akimov.

Ex. 2.3: Shostakovich, *Hamlet*, Act 1, ‘Exit of the King and Queen’ (complete)

![Allegro](image)

In general, Akimov shuffles Shakespeare’s text quite extensively from this point. For example, he transposes to this scene Hamlet’s remark about Claudius’s being a villain despite smiling, which in Shakespeare comes only after the departure of the Ghost and Hamlet’s finding out about the destiny of his father (I/5/106-108).

106  O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
107  My tables—meet it is I set it down,

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521 Zinkevich, ‘Muzyka k pervomu Gamletu’, 98.
By this means, Akimov reinforces his overall concept that Hamlet knew from the beginning of the play that his uncle was guilty and hated Claudius intensely for stealing the throne of Denmark. Hence, whilst Shakespeare’s Hamlet needs a reason to justify his darkest inner feelings towards his uncle and is at times confused about those feelings, Akimov’s prince seeks no such justification, but rather proceeds to put his plan into action and to gain support for his cause. The production book at RGALI suggests that this shuffling of text took place at a relatively late stage of work on the mise-en-scène, since the extract is written in by hand. It seems that Akimov was trying to reinforce his interpretation, by insisting that Hamlet knew from the beginning of the play who his enemy was. In this way, again applying Freytag’s pyramid, it is Hamlet and not the Ghost who is the ‘exciting force’ behind the ‘rising action’. This is confirmed by Hamlet’s staging of the ‘ghost scene’ and later ‘the mousetrap’.

The following musical number, the ‘Dining music’, despite contributing further to the festive mood of the scene with its waltz-like lilt, is probably mainly a filler for the change of set for the next scene, which takes place at Ophelia’s closet (see Table 2 in the Appendix). There is no musical accompaniment for this scene, which depicts Ophelia being summoned by her brother and then by her father, and advised to spurn Hamlet’s advances. Here Shakespeare’s text offers no insight into Ophelia’s heart, and her personality and feelings towards Hamlet indeed remain open to different interpretations. Traditionally, and especially in Russian secondary literature, she has been understood as a symbol of purity and innocence. Yet Laertes’ and Polonius’s worries could just as easily be the result of some hypothetical prior misbehaviour and lustful attitude on her part, and this is the approach chosen by Akimov.

The fourth scene of this act in Akimov’s production corresponds to the end of Act 1, scene 2 in Shakespeare’s text. Akimov delays the reunion of Hamlet and his old comrade Horatio until this point. This scene, which he calls ‘Arsenal’ and which is also without music, shows Hamlet revealing to Horatio his strategy for regaining the throne of Denmark and asking for his friend’s help. He is, in fact, planning to pretend to be his father’s ghost in order to win more support for his fight with Claudius for the throne (confusingly, he has already done this in Akimov’s production, at the opening of the play). The title ‘Arsenal’ is appropriate both metaphorically and literally, referring to Hamlet’s envisaged plan of action and at the same time to his trying on the armour that he has found in a closet in order to prepare for assuming the part of the Ghost in the following scene. Akimov’s choice of an actor with a large
The scene entitled ‘The Ruins’ conflates scenes 4 and 5 of Shakespeare’s first act; since there is no ghost, there is no need for a separate scene of ‘Hamlet and the Ghost (I/5)’. The scene begins with Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus awaiting midnight and the reappearance of the Ghost. Following Shakespeare’s text, there are flourishes and cannon-fire, followed by ‘Dancing music’ emanating from Claudius’s feast in the distance. The _sempre piano_ performance instruction and somewhat uncanny Mahlerian character of this musical number, evoked by the unexpected caesuras, are impossible to explain other than by the context of the play and with the help of the production book, which reveals its designated place. Notwithstanding the lack of precision in the musico-dramatic synopsis, this piece was almost certainly designed to be heard as though sounding from a distance. Hence the more usual _forte_ of dancing music (which would cover up the noise of feet on the stage) is replaced by a _sempre piano_. The transparent orchestral texture and the caesuras simulate the distance that, diegetically speaking, could well render the bass register acoustically inaudible (see Ex. 2.4).

**Ex. 2.4: Shostakovich _Hamlet_, Act 1, ‘Dance Music’**

The setting of the ‘Ghost scene’ – or, more accurately for Akimov’s production, the ‘non-ghost scene’ - has been immortalised by photographs that depict Hamlet kicking in the air as

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523 Zabolotniaia, ‘O Postanovke “Gamleta”’, 94.

171
if to repel an invisible ghost, and a bit further on by Horatio holding a clay pot in front of his mouth and making spooky ghost-like noises (see Plate 2.4 and, for the clay pot, Plate 2.2 above). The fact that this visually intriguing scene is without any music may seem strange. Following Shakespeare’s text and musical tradition, as outlined by Christopher Wilson, this scene would require incidental music of the ‘magic’ category; however, in the absence of supernatural phenomena (i.e. the Ghost) such accompaniment would be futile and even misleading. The absence of music could also have been a case of avoiding making the scene too laden with semantic layers for an audience encountering this extremely original approach for the first time. Shostakovich’s manuscripts and sketches show no sign of any draft for this scene, and in the absence of any significant correspondence between the two artists indicating their method of collaboration, it is impossible to establish whether or not Shostakovich was up to date with all the changes or was following any specific instructions given by Akimov. Whatever the case, Akimov’s solution to the problem of the Ghost is highly innovative and is clarified in the production book, where instead of a dialogue between Hamlet and the Ghost the entire text is spoken by Hamlet alone. Great care is taken to include all of the Bard’s words, including those spoken by the Ghost from under the stage, which Akimov allots to Horatio. Yet Akimov’s interpretation has its logical flaws: the whole ‘swearing by sword’ scene appears not to fit with Akimov’s concept of Hamlet’s staging the Ghost scene in order to agitate the people against Claudius. Why does he now make the witnessing crowd swear to secrecy about what they have seen? It might be that Akimov had other agendas that were either deleted before finding their way into the production book or else got lost in the process of staging, not all of whose revisions are documented.
Act 1 finishes with a short closing music (‘Finale of the First Act’) which recalls the Tchaikovskian character of the opening number but with a new concluding C minor twist, perhaps as an indicator of ‘something… rotten in the state of Denmark’ (found in Shakespeare Act 1 scene 4) or as a premonition of the bloodshed and tragedy to come.

If, as a whole, Shostakovich’s music for Act 1 consists mainly of pastiche and lacks a personal stamp, the second act will offer more of his individual idiom, to the point of self-quotat[ion](#), adding another semantic layer to the events and (apparent) personalities of the characters.

**2.10.2 Akimov Hamlet Act 2**

Akimov’s realisation of the second act is almost impossible to reconstruct without a parallel study of archival materials, mainly because several scenes and ideas did not survive the scrutiny of panels before the premiere. In this act Akimov’s imagination takes wing, and he is not afraid of moving scenes around and even adding scenes not found in Shakespeare’s text. Some of these were eventually cut out, and as a result much of Akimov’s general concept became distorted. Since some of the excised passages had no words and were designed as interludes (Intermedia), it is often quite difficult to work out their exact relation to the plot or their place in the play. This is the case with the scene, ‘Passage of the Beggars’, which is included in the piano score published in the Soviet Complete Collection of Shostakovich’s works, but was not orchestrated, evidently because it was not included in the production
itself. According to the commentaries to that volume, the order of the pieces was established according to the manuscripts and copies kept at the Vakhtangov Theatre archives and at RGALI, as well as the conductor’s list (music-dramatic synopsis). However, this scene, which in this volume has been placed after the end of Act 5, was among those left out in the production itself, which seems to be the only reason for placing it at the very end. Gerard McBurney, on the other hand, chooses to follow the logic of Shakespeare’s text for the placing of his orchestration within the complete score as performed and recorded by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, logically assuming that the beggars would appear at the graveyard scene after Ophelia’s death (Act 5 in Shakespeare’s text and 4 in Akimov’s production). To establish the true place of this scene dramatically and according to the intentions of Akimov, we need to look at a much lesser-known archival document, entitled ‘Protokol’, which is a stenographic report of Akimov’s outline for his production in March 1931. According to this document, the scene of the beggars was to be placed at the beginning of the second act, depicting those who are ready to sell themselves and become the King’s spies (principally to keep an eye on Hamlet). Akimov describes the scene in detail:

The second act starts with a musical and dancing procession. A few monks and behind them beggars. Beggars were like a plague in that time. Because of the competition they would think of all sorts of tricks to feign deformity. The procession takes place on the proscenium. The music is catholic-religious with beaters (kolotushki) and sleigh bells with hints of the Charleston as a response to contemporaneity. The last beggar is pseudo-legless, rolling his cart along the proscenium; he leaves it and comes to the window. He knocks and hands in a letter. Polonius instructs him on how to spy on Laertes. The instruction is interrupted several times; the beggar leaves and comes back again. A pig’s squeal distracts Polonius. In the end, the beggar rides his cart along the proscenium and bumps into Ophelia. Ophelia gives Polonius her first report. Polonius decides to go and see the King.

526 Shostakovich: Hamlet & King Lear, various soloists, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Mark Elder (Signum SIGCD052, 1994).
528 Ibid., 20. Admittedly the sources show that a repetition of the beggars’ music might have been considered by Akimov for the gravediggers’ scene – see 2.10.4 below.
Akimov’s specifications are barely detectable in Shostakovich’s score, whose character is rather of a slowed-down grotesque hybrid of march and polka. Since it remained unorchestrated, we cannot know whether he would have approached Akimov’s concept in this respect.

In his attempt to preserve all the scenes from Shakespeare’s text, albeit if necessary in abridged form, Akimov even kept the scene of Polonius and Reynaldo, which has no apparent effect on the main plot and is often cut from modern productions. In this scene Polonius asks Reynaldo to keep an eye on Laertes in France and to prevent him from following his lustful desires. Hence, from the start espionage and pursuit are the main themes of the first scene of the second act; this is also where Hamlet’s feigned madness is encountered for the first time. For this purpose, and in order to convey Hamlet’s pretending to be mad, Akimov once again goes beyond the usual means of relying solely on Shakespeare’s words and actors’ performances and employs visual and physical strategies, notably in the episode which follows Polonius’s words to Ophelia (II/1/107-109), who claims to be frightened by the prince’s strange visit:

107 That hath made him mad.
108 I am sorry that with better heed and judgment
109 I had not quoted him.

This is the scene entitled ‘Passage of Hamlet and boys’, which is illustrated in one of Akimov’s sketches for the production as well as in the ‘protokol’ document: Hamlet is wearing a white nightgown with a saucepan on his head, holding a carrot and running after boys and piglets. It was this particular image that the theatre director Valery Fokin would reference in his notorious 2010 production of Hamlet at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. Although that production has been often described as a reconstruction of Akimov’s, it is really nothing of the sort. There are, of course, images and interpretational solutions quoted from Akimov’s Hamlet, but these can be understood as homage rather than reconstruction.529 Fokin’s setting, designed by Aleksandr Borovsky, which is set in modern times and dominated by metal and iron décor, is far from Akimov’s Renaissance costumes and stage. Furthermore, Fokin calls on the music of his usual collaborator, Aleksandr Bakshi, and for the leading role chooses Dmitrii Lysenkov, an actor of small frame and hyperactive personality, who if anything resembles Inokenty Smoktunovsky’s energetic Hamlet in Kozintsev’s 1964 film. In his tragicomic grotesque interpretation, Fokin, like Akimov and

Meyerhold, interferes with Shakespeare’s text and structure, employing a combination of translations by Pasternak, Lozinskii and Polevoi.

In motivic/gestural terms Shostakovich’s music for the scene of Hamlet and the boys points towards the seduction scene from his opera, *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, which was being composed parallel to his work on *Hamlet*. At the same time, it is arguably also a reworking and development of the opening bars of ‘The Wedding’ scene from his 1929 incidental music to Meyerhold’s production of *The Bedbug* (see Ex. 2.5).

**Ex. 2.5:** a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 2, ‘The passage of Hamlet with the boys’; b) *Lady Macbeth*, Act I, scene 3; c) *The Bedbug*, ‘The Wedding’

![Musical Examples](image)

Finally it is Ophelia’s turn to be appointed as a spy to watch Hamlet. This is illustrated musically in the ‘Galop of Polonius and Ophelia’, which is quite comical and – like the ‘Exit of the King and Queen’ in the first act - very much in the style of Offenbach. Akimov explained that Polonius is the most comic character of the tragedy,\(^{530}\) which justifies the tone of this short extract, marked to be repeated until the actors have left the stage. By deploying

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\(^{530}\) Akimov, ‘Protokol’, 20 verso.
a similar grotesque style and genre, Shostakovich confirms the director’s grouping of Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia and Polonius as opponents to Hamlet and his cause.

The second scene of Act 2 is made up of meetings and examinations, and finishes with the arrival of the actors and Hamlet’s soliloquy. In the absence of any stage direction in Shakespeare’s text, and probably in accordance with the possibilities of Shakespeare’s Globe theatre with no curtains, the entire scene can take place with the same staging. But Akimov decides to change the background set, making extensive use of the proscenium and thus enriching the production visually while further reinforcing the images he wishes to attribute to each character.

In this vein, Claudius is first perceived posing while surrounded by the courtiers. But it turns out that he is in fact trying on the clothes of the old King, which are too big for him and are being altered to fit him. At this point Polonius enters and announces the arrival of Norwegian ambassadors and also that he has discovered the reason behind Hamlet’s madness. This is followed by the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Here Akimov envisaged interludes that were eventually to be excised before the premiere. For example, in Shakespeare’s text, Hamlet’s unexpected visit to Ophelia’s closet features as a report by the young woman to her father (Act 2, Scene 1). It is common practice for film directors to have these or other spoken reports and narrations acted out as scenes in their own right: this is the case, for example, with Kozintsev’s 1964 film, which depicts Hamlet’s going to Ophelia’s closet after the ghost scene (another more familiar instance is Ophelia’s death, which in Shakespeare’s text has no independent scene and is merely reported by Gertrude).

But theatre productions generally follow Shakespeare’s text in such instances and keep the events as spoken reports. According to the ‘Protokol’, Akimov conserved parts of the dialogue between father and daughter but transferred some of the action to an interlude, together with Hamlet reciting his love poem to Ophelia (II/2/106-119), which in Shakespeare’s text is read by Polonius to the King and Queen. Akimov used this moment as an opportunity to reveal his concept of Ophelia’s personality:

Ophelia is sitting at the window. Ivy is hanging from the window with Hamlet on it. He is reading out a poetic text. Ophelia slams the window. Hamlet jumps down and
falls on or near a voluptuous girl, from whom he runs away. Another young guy appears, the window opens up, he sneaks in and the window closes behind him.\textsuperscript{531}

There is no sign of this scene in any of the other archival materials, and Shostakovich’s score – despite the fact that the production book points towards ‘Hamlet and musicians’ – does not contain any number that could have been destined for it.\textsuperscript{532}

Hamlet and Horatio, meanwhile, are in a library reading, when Polonius walks in on them. This is how Akimov confirms that Hamlet’s and especially Horatio are humanists and university people. Seen among piles of books, Horatio is examining a skeleton, while Hamlet is reading from the German humanist, scholar, poet and reformer, Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523). Accordingly the ‘words, words, words’ seem to come from this scholar’s book. The Yorick scene from Act 5 scene 1 is transferred to here, when a gravedigger presents Hamlet with the skull, thus returning Yorick to where he once belonged: according to Shakespeare’s text, Hamlet used to play with Yorick in the castle as he was growing up (Hamlet, V/1/174-179). Neither of these scenes has any designated music.

The other interlude, which does appear in Shostakovich’s score, depicts the conversation between Hamlet and Rosencrantz. This includes Akimov’s additional words about the wandering actors and the critics’ mean attitude towards them. Shostakovich’s parodic music, quite similar to the ‘Passage of Hamlet and boys’ scene, punctuates Rosencrantz’s added words: ‘When critics see a heroic play, they claim that this is not enough… and when they see a satirical play, they say that this is already too much.’ These phrases, which were left out of the final version of the production, accurately prophesied the critical reaction to Akimov’s \textit{Hamlet}.

Here, as Esti Sheinberg points out, Shostakovich is sending up a well-known Soviet popular song of the time, ‘They wanted to beat us, to beat us’.\textsuperscript{533} This moment of musical parody has wrongly been reported by Elagin as belonging to the much later ‘Flute Scene’ (see below), and almost all accounts of this production draw on his version. In fact, for the Rosencrantz and Hamlet dialogue, Shostakovich’s parodic music simply mirrors in updated form Shakespeare’s mocking of the theatre of his time. The original march was composed in 1929 by Alexander Davidenko, a leader of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians

\textsuperscript{531} Akimov, ‘Protokol’, 20 verso.
\textsuperscript{532} Akimov, Hamlet Production Book, 43
\textsuperscript{533} Esti Sheinberg, \textit{Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich}, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000, 103-104.
(RAPM) which since the late 1920s increasingly controlled the critical climate of Soviet music (see Ex. 2.6) In this light it is perhaps ironic that less than a month before the opening night of Hamlet, this organisation had been dissolved by the decree of the central committee, making Shostakovich’s parody unexpectedly timely. As regards the musical distortion of the tune, Patrick McCreless argues persuasively that this may be Shostakovich’s ‘first usage of semitonal displacement with a political, or at least political-aesthetic, edge’. Like the scene of Hamlet with the boys, this ‘crude march’ points towards the Passacaglia in Lady Macbeth and its use of semitonal downward displacement in order to convey the shifting grounds of the drama.

Ex. 2.6: a) Davidenko, ‘Nas pobit’ khoteli’; b) Shostakovich Hamlet, Act 2, [Scene with Hamlet and Rosencrantz], adapted from Sheinberg, Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque, 104

A quasi-military tattoo, with allusions to Shostakovich’s Third Symphony, represents the arrival of actors and is to be played several times, first pianissimo and then forte, illustrating the troupe getting closer to the castle (see Ex. 2.7). This ends up with Hamlet announcing that there is to be a performance the next day, followed by the exit of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which is accompanied by a parody march in E major with flattened scale-degrees to point up its witty character. In a similar manner to the ‘Galop of Polonius and Ophelia’, Shostakovich’s music taints Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with satirical distortion and hence helps to place them in the enemy camp.

Ex. 2.7: Shostakovich a) *Hamlet*, Act 2, [Arrival of the Actors]; b) Symphony No. 3, bars 262-71 (in each case the bass stave is Shostakovich’s piano rendition of a side-drum tattoo)

a) Allegro

b) [Allegro]

Here there was to be another interlude following Hamlet’s stating of his plan of action – to observe and examine the King’s reaction to the performance of the ‘Mousetrap’ in order to catch him red-handed and reveal his criminal act. The musical interlude, entitled ‘Dialogue of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’, has Shostakovich’s typical flattened II and V degrees – always associated with a darkening of mood or image - and is performed *sempre piano*, which further illustrates the conspiratorial and secretive nature of the men’s dialogue (Ex. 2.8).
The apotheosis of this act is ‘The Hunt’, which Akimov in his ‘Protokol’ describes as ‘a musical scene’. Accordingly it contains the longest continuous musical number of the entire production. The title, in fact, carries a double meaning: a literal hunt with real horses on the stage and with the participation of Hamlet, Claudius, Polonius and other courtiers; and at the same time a metaphorical hunt for the real reason behind Hamlet’s ‘madness’. This scene leads to and replaces ‘the nunnery scene’ from Shakespeare’s tragedy (III/1), where Hamlet is confronted with Ophelia in a meeting with Polonius and Claudius watching them closely. Akimov adds a comic twist to this scene by placing these two inside a hollow tree trunk, from which Polonius would have trouble getting out.

The enigma of this scene as to why Hamlet’s gentle tone with Ophelia suddenly becomes aggressive is often solved by suggesting that the prince actually notices Polonius and that he is being ‘set up’. Akimov opts for the same strategy, and Shostakovich assists this by conveying Ophelia’s betraying deed in the troubled pulsation of the hunting music, reinforced by bass drum and, in the second section of the number, by driving syncopations. This is a truly Shostakovichian, obsessive galop in the manner of Lady Macbeth. Here, as in several instances already witnessed in Act 2, Shostakovich’s music demonstrates the hallmark of his individual modal style, which serves as a distinct layer of semantic progression from the more generalised style of Act 1 and reinforces the gathering intensity of the drama, along the lines mapped out in contrasting ways by Shakespeare and Akimov.

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One of the main distinguishing factors of any production of *Hamlet* is where the main climax is situated. Despite several instances of mirroring actions, Shakespeare himself cleverly avoids an exact symmetry and modifies the conventional five-act structure. Hence, in different productions the place of the climax varies: candidates include the King’s prayer scene (III/3), the Queen’s bedroom scene (III/4) as in Olivier’s somewhat Freudian reading, the killing of Polonius, the final duel, or even the flute scene, as in Kozintsev’s 1964 film. The importance given to both musical and visual forces of the ‘Hunt’ scene, with live horses and the only outside set of the production, suggests that Akimov may have considered it to be the peak of the ‘rising action’ in terms of Freytag’s pyramid, or even the turning-point and climax of the play. Corresponding to Akimov’s main theme of the struggle for the throne, this scene marks the beginning of an open confrontation of the two camps. Finishing the entire second act with a repeat of the breathless last eleven bars of this scene’s musical accompaniment asserts its crucial role.

**2.10.3 Akimov Hamlet Act 3**

Having transposed the ‘nunnery’ scene (here the ‘Hunt’) from the third act to the second, Akimov begins Act 3 with Hamlet’s advice to the actors, in one of the most often quoted phrases of Shakespeare: to play as if holding a ‘mirror up to nature’ (III/2/22). Since for Akimov the speech and the following scene are supposed to be a rehearsal for the ‘Mousetrap’ performance, he sets them in a wine cellar, with Hamlet, Horatio, actors and musicians present. The rehearsal scene was to have started with a musical jeu d’esprit from Shostakovich, illustrating the musicians tuning up their instruments (chromatic distorted open fifths on the strings), but this was presumably cut, since the music, though composed in short score, was never orchestrated.

In order to realise his unusual concept of presenting the play-within-the play first complete as a rehearsal and then with the real performance off-stage, Akimov asked Lozinskiii to provide him with an ending for the rehearsal, since in Shakespeare’s text the final scene of the show is interrupted by the King’s storming out. This mise-en-scène also permitted Akimov to include most of the lines from the ‘Murder of Gonzago’ and hence to preserve the deeper and usually less explored side of Shakespeare’s text for this scene. Most theatre/film directors reduce the text of the play-within-a play to its bare minimum, thus losing out on such interesting moments as the old King giving the Queen permission to forgive herself if she forgets him and remarries after his death (III/2/200-215).
The King’s lines, which seemingly pardon Gertrude’s later actions, should have rung a loud bell with Shostakovich, who in turn was justifying the violent actions of the heroine of *Lady Macbeth* on which he was working at this time.\(^{537}\) The accompanying music, and especially the introduction to the rehearsal of ‘The Murder of Gonzago’, repeats the allusions in *Lady Macbeth* Act 4 to Mussorgsky’s ‘Gnomus’ – all drawn from a semantic pool of musical representations of the horrific by means of quasi-onomatopoeic shivers (Ex. 2.9). The same motif will reappear in Shostakovich’s incidental music to Kozintsev’s 1964 film version of *Hamlet*, where the composer depicts the flight of a seagull, symbolising Ophelia’s death (around 1:47:55, score unpublished).


For the most authoritative among many commentaries, see Caryl Emerson, ‘Back to the Future: Shostakovich’s Revision of Leskov’s “Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District”’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1/1 (March 1989), 59-78.
points by Hamlet’s descriptive instructions and commentaries, cleverly incorporated here from Shakespeare’s later scene. The entrance of the poisoner and the pouring of poison inside the sleeping King’s ear are depicted musically in harsh atonal fragments (Ex. 2.10).


Finally the music for the exit of the poisoner resonates once again with Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth*, after Katerina Izmailova has poisoned her husband (Ex. 2.11).
Ex. 2.11: a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 3, ‘Exit of the Poisoner’; b) *Lady Macbeth*, Act 2

![Musical notation](ex211a.png)

![Musical notation](ex211b.png)

Similar to Katerina’s crocodile tears, this poisoning scene is followed by the actor-Queen’s passionate reaction as she finds out about her husband’s death; the music here is in a syrupy mock-Richard Strauss style, suggesting the superficiality of the woman’s behaviour.

Lozinskií’s suggested ending to the play-within-a-play was inspired by Shakespeare’s ‘dumb show’ – a mimed version of ‘Murder of Gonzago’ - which precedes the actual performance in front of the guests. This shows how the Queen and the poisoner got together as the new royal couple. This rehearsal is followed by Polonius’s announcing Gertrude and Claudius’s willingness to attend the performance and Hamlet’s ordering him as well as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to make the actors hurry up.

What followed was the riskiest episode in Akimov’s reading of *Hamlet*, as it tackled the most famous episode not only of the play but probably in the entire Shakespeare canon. Having delayed the celebrated ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy until this point, Akimov presents the monologue as a dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio while Hamlet is trying on the papier-mâché crown left by the actors and wondering ‘to be or not to be [i.e. King]’ followed by a discussion of doubts between the two friends (see Plate 2.5). Already during the rehearsals Akimov was harshly criticised for this unusual reading. But he never backed off from offering what was quite possibly the first dialogued version of Shakespeare’s most famous soliloquy.

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538 In the text of First Folio the soliloquy comes at the start of the nunnery scene (III/1/55-89).
The ‘To be or not to be’ dialogue was to be followed by the musical number, ‘Dialogue of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’ played, pianissimo several times, underlining the secretive nature of their conversation. The arrival of the guests, who include the royals and court noblemen, is presented musically in a very Soviet-public-style movement, similar to the climactic episodes from Shostakovich’s Symphonies 3, 4 and 5 and presenting his signature dactylic rhythm. Curiously, the composer did not employ here any of the more grotesque genres as he did with the confirmed opponents of Hamlet.

Since the complete version of the play-within-a play had already been shown as a rehearsal incorporating Hamlet’s commentaries from a later scene, here Akimov made the audience join Hamlet and Horatio in observing the guests, particularly Claudius, closely, whilst the performance is continuing off-stage. To this end, the actual performance is transferred off-stage, with a few bars of each musical episode preserved as a background to Hamlet’s mocking of Ophelia and Claudius. The whole thing is then interrupted as Ophelia screams ‘The King stands up’. What follows is visually the most iconic moment of the production, which was praised and quoted by critics, even those who despised the rest of the mise-en-scène: After shouting out ‘Give me light’ (in Russian translated as ‘fire’), the frightened and furious Claudius, played by an actor of small stature, runs down the stairs followed by twelve
metres of red velvet train, suggesting a river of blood. This dramatic and somewhat Macbethian scene alone proves that Akimov had no intention of turning *Hamlet* into a comedy or farce (see Plate 2.6).

**Plate 2.6: Hamlet, Vakhtangov Theatre (1932), Act 3, after ‘Muder of Gonzago’**

With its references to Stravinsky’s *Petrushka*, the musical number that illustrates the ‘Flute scene’ has been widely referred to in the Shostakovich literature. This is probably thanks to its being mentioned in Elagin’s memoirs: ‘Hamlet held the flute to the lower part of his torso, and the piccolo in the orchestra, accompanied by double-bass and a drum, piercingly and out of tune played the famous Soviet song “They wanted to beat us, to beat us’ written by the composer Alexander Davidenko, the leader of the proletarian musicians’ It seems that Elagin had made a mistake regarding the instruments assigned to play the parody of Davidenko’s tune, since the second half of this number features a much more overtly satirical timbre – a tuba accompanied by a tambourine (Ex. 2.12). However, Elagin’s mistake is much more fundamental, since the parody in question is actually heard not here but in Rosencrantz and Hamlet’s scene in Act 2 (described above).

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539 Juri Jelagin, *The Taming of the Arts*, 35.
Ex. 2.12: Shostakovich Hamlet, Act 3, Flute scene (the bass stave is Shostakovich’s piano rendition of the tambourine)

Given his (imprecise) description of this parodic scene with its satirical instrumentation, Elagin’s claim that Shostakovich’s music overall was closer to Shakespeare’s tragedy than was Akimov’s staging seems a touch paradoxical.

The next scene is a musical pantomime, with a score that features fairy-tale-like intonations in the manner of Prokofiev’s comic opera, The Love for Three Oranges. This scene, entitled ‘The King is unwell’, depicts the ailing Claudius surrounded by court doctors; the composer uses glissandi to represent the King’s sighs of pain, very similar to those of the ailing prince in Act 1 of Prokofiev’s opera.

Shakespeare’s ‘Prayer scene’, with Claudius addressing the heavens, has proved to be one of the most problematic for any production. The problem is not so much Claudius’s confession of his guilt as Hamlet’s reaction to it, or rather his non-reaction. With Claudius alone and helpless, this would have been an ideal opportunity for Hamlet to do his ‘duty’ and kill the murderer of his father. Yet he hesitates about killing a praying man, as this would supposedly allow the latter to ascend to heaven: a logic not acceptable to those believing in Hamlet’s superior culture and intelligence. Akimov tried many different solutions, including the one Kozintsev would use in his 1964 film, which is to keep the King’s speech but to omit Hamlet’s entrance. In the end, this scene, which apparently had no accompanying music, was cut from the final version.

Akimov’s presentation as inscribed in the ‘Protokol’ document provides three different ‘variations’ for the following scene at the Queen’s closet. These are all different solutions for Polonius’s hiding place: the first under the carpet on the ground with his slippers left out, the second behind a tapestry with a portrait of Claudius on it, and finally behind a wardrobe. The piano score offers two variations for this scene, the first an untitled pastoral music and

541 Personal exchange with Alexander Kozintsev, son of the film director, Grigori, 30 March 2013.
the second a Prokofievian satirical fragment. It seems more plausible that the pastoral music
would have accompanied Hamlet’s farewell to his mother, whereas the satirical fragment
could have been appropriate to Hamlet’s carrying Polonius’s dead body up the stairs.

Shakespeare’s Act 3 finishes here. However, with the overall structure having gone through
several changes, the five acts of Akimov’s original were finally condensed into four,
Shakespeare’s fourth act being distributed across Akimov’s third and fourth. Hence the
following scene in Akimov’s Act 3 is the dialogue of Gertrude and Claudius at the Queen’s
bedroom, where Gertrude tells Claudius of Hamlet’s murder of Polonius. Shostakovich’s
cabaret-style foxtrot music, which follows Claudius’s mournful words: ‘My soul is full of
discord and dismay’ (IV/1/45), moves further from Shakespeare than any other component of
Akimov’s staging of this scene. Apart from that, it is in clear contrast with the intense funeral
march that is designated for the King’s following monologue as he sends Hamlet off to
England. His dark plans to have Hamlet murdered upon the latter’s arrival in England are
suggested in the score (at R2), which bears close resemblance to the music of poisoning from
the ‘Mousetrap’, reinforced by allusions to Dies irae chant in the bass (Ex. 2.13, cf. Ex. 2.10
above).

**Ex. 2.13: Shostakovich Hamlet, King’s monologue**

What comes between these two musical representations of Claudius is a visual masterstroke.
The confrontation of Claudius and Hamlet reaches a highpoint when two groups carry the
protagonist and the antagonist on chairs, holding them face to face, which prophesies the final
duel of the play. Shostakovich again draws on the style of *Lady Macbeth*, particularly the
whipping and seduction scenes, with their obsessive, indeed excessive, drive (Ex. 2.14, cf.
Ex. 2.5b above).

The final scene of the act, which again was apparently mostly cut in the actual performance, takes place at the harbour front, where martial music accompanies the arrival of the Fortinbras’s forces. Music of similarly military character would represent Fortinbras at the end of the tragedy.

**2.10.4 Akimov *Hamlet* Act 4**

The fourth act of Akimov’s production starts with a royal banquet and an accompanying vocal waltz, entitled ‘Romance for the feast’, which seems to have been left out of the final version, since it only features in the piano score and is clearly crossed out from the musico-dramatic synopsis at a late stage. The title of the following musical number, which was to begin just as the applause for the previous one quietened down, seems to have been changed more than once – from Feast (*Pir*) to Cancan and back, with a preference for the latter title. As McBurney notes, this Offenbachian parody number is in fact a transcription of the ‘blistering’ cancan that ends the music-hall scene in the *Golden Age* ballet of (1929-30).\(^{543}\)

The composer seems to have felt an affinity between the two scenes and their depiction of Western decadence.

This entire scene and the pantomime seemingly performed parallel to it on a separate part of stage, entitled ‘Pirates’, are quite difficult to reconstruct, as the musical and dramatic sources

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\(^{543}\) McBurney, ‘Shostakovich and the Theatre’, 168.
are contradictory and seemingly mis-matched. According to the ‘Protokol’, at this moment the arrival of the raging Laertes should have been marked by the noise of breaking plates, and this was to be followed by Ophelia’s entry. Akimov’s reasons for depicting a drunken Ophelia rather than a mad one are much more logical and respectful to theatrical and cultural history than was suggested during the discussion of the production (see 2.6 above). In his defence, during the discussions of the dress rehearsal, Akimov explained that in Elizabethan times seeing a mad person on the stage was considered something comic and hence entertaining. In modern times, however, it was not acceptable to laugh at such a figure. Hence the originally planned effect of Ophelia’s and Hamlet’s mad scenes, which, according to Akimov, had more to do with the comical side of the play than the philosophical one, is lost unless a strategy is employed to adapt them to our contemporary views. Claiming that a drunken person on the stage is more comic and also appropriate for modern times, Akimov justified his reading of Ophelia’s final scenes showing her as tipsy rather than mad. Not everyone might agree with Akimov’s rationale, but it shows once again that his agenda was much more serious and thought-through than is often implied.

Of all the characters of Shakespeare’s tragedy, Ophelia is the only one who shows an obvious evolution - from innocent obedient daughter, to passionate lover, to mad victim of a tragic fate. Akimov’s interpretation disregards this evolution to a certain extent by depicting her primarily as a spy among other spies, whose principal function is to observe Hamlet and report to her father. Ophelia’s musical depiction, on the other hand, is a perfect example of Shostakovich following Akimov’s interpretation while at the same time staying loyal to a more Shakespearean image of the heroine. Ophelia as a member of the list of Elsinore’s spies and baddies is best revealed in numbers such as the trivial ‘Galop of Ophelia and Polonius’ in Act 1. On the other hand, the more delicate Ophelia - as portrayed by Russian poets such as Blok and Fet - is represented most remarkably in the ‘Lullaby’ (later in Act 4), which in turn points ahead to Shostakovich’s music for her in Kozintsev’s 1964 film. The passionate Ophelia who mirrors Katerina, the heroine of Shostakovich’s, Lady Macbeth, is shown through her cabaret-style song during her mad scene, where the composer incorporates a motif also sung by Katerina in the last act of the opera (Ex. 2.15). Finally the tragedy of her fate and the cruelty done to her are expressed in the Requiem accompanying her funeral (see below).

The scene of the Royal Feast is interrupted by one showing parallel events related to Hamlet’s voyage to England. This scene features Horatio at the library repairing a skeleton while wearing a nightgown and holding a candle, thus implying that it is still night time. Hamlet’s letter is delivered, and Horatio learns about the Prince’s confrontation with pirates and his imminent return to Elsinore. According to Zabolotniaia the whole adventure was acted out on the proscenium, which could imply that the musical number ‘Actors’ pantomime’ could have belonged here and not to the ‘Mousetrap’ scene, as in the CBSO recording (see Table 2 in Appendix). Horatio is now due to pass another letter to Claudius. We are back to the royal banquet, and we follow on where we left off: Claudius is trying to convince Laertes that he must avenge his father by killing Hamlet. Whether it is the news of Ophelia’s death or Claudius’s powerful words that sway him, Laertes agrees to the King’s apparently foolproof plan.

Although it is not clear where it fits with the rest of the dramatic plan, musically Shostakovich’s ‘Lullaby’ is definitely one of the most intriguing numbers of this scene. As noted above, most probably it depicts the gentler and more fragile side of Ophelia’s character. It is composed as a string quartet in C major, the tonality of Shostakovich’s first String
Quartet proper, composed six years later. The identical tonalities and related character of musical ideas raise the question of whether this episode could even be considered as a kind of first draft for his future opus (Ex. 2.16). According to Shakespeare’s text, and taking into account the musico-dramatic synopsis, it is possible that this music was either to accompany Laertes grieving over Ophelia’s death, or, as in Kozintsev’s film, to constitute a solemn moment depicting the young woman’s untimely death.

Ex. 2.16: a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 4, ‘Lullaby’; b) Shostakovich String Quartet No. 1, first movement

With the curtain rising to a pastoral musical episode similar to the ‘Shepherd’s pipe’ of the first act and depicting birds singing, the graveyard scene was to be presented under the glowing sun and covered in flowers. However, as Akimov put it during the discussions of the dress rehearsal, due to financial exigencies the flowers disappeared one by one and the scene started to resemble a desert rather than a flower garden (see Plate 2.7).

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547 Akimov, ‘Stenogrammy khudozhestvennykh soveshchaniy’, 46.
Asserting that the best way to translate Shakespeare’s humour and preserve its freshness and wit would be to rewrite the jokes directly in the target language (i.e. Russian) while referring to contemporary issues, Akimov commissioned Nikolai Erdman and Vladimir Mass to rewrite the dialogue of the clowns at the start of the scene.\textsuperscript{548} This decision went down badly during the rehearsals, however, and Akimov was severely criticised for his choice of text and for mixing Shakespeare’s words with the ‘unfunny’ writings of Mass. Thus, as the production book reveals, almost the entire scene had to be left out of the final version. This excised scene included Shostakovich’s ‘Gravedigger’s song’ and a possible repetition of the grotesque polka entitled ‘The passage of beggars’. Akimov proposed for the rest of the scene that the lights should dim, thus suggesting the clouds that were gathering as the body of Ophelia is carried to the stage, followed by Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude. The funeral is accompanied by Shostakovich’s powerful ‘Requiem’, sung by off-stage male chorus (not solo, as on the CBSO CD recording); this is another scene where Shostakovich’s music was praised by critics for its affinity with Shakespeare’s tragedy. However, it was not only Shostakovich’s music that conveyed the much-awaited tragic intensity. As Markov puts it: ‘As for staging,

\textsuperscript{548} This text may be found in Nikolai Erdman and Vladimir Mass, \textit{A Meeting about Laughter: Sketches, Interludes and Theatrical Parodies}. Luxembourg, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995, 139-154.
[the presence of] Shakespeare was felt only after the beginning of the “Dies irae”, in that dark gloomy dialogue which Laertes and the King had as they were holding candles at Ophelia’s funeral.\footnote{\textit{P. Markov, ‘Gamlet v postanovke N. P. Akimova’, \textit{Sovetskii teatr}, 1932/7-8, 12.}} The other interest of this scene lies in Shostakovich’s preserving of the Latin text of the Dies irae in his music, at a time when composing a full-scale Requiem in Latin would have been politically out of the question.\footnote{For a detailed account of Western sacred genres performed in the Soviet Union, see Pauline Fairclough, ‘“Don't Sing It on a Feast Day”: The Reception and Performance of Western Sacred Music in Soviet Russia, 1917–1953’, \textit{Journal of the American Musicological Society}, 65/1 (Spring 2012), 67-111. Shostakovich’s Requiem for Hamlet is not mentioned here.} Perhaps in deference to this, he ends the Requiem with a mock antique cadence.

The heavy, dark atmosphere is balanced by the following scene, added by Akimov, which takes place at the bathroom, where Hamlet is shaving and telling Horatio what has happened to him. This is where Osric comes in to invite Hamlet to a fencing match with Laertes. There is no music for this scene; however, Goriunov’s acting was said to have acquired more softness and lyricism at this point, suggesting Hamlet’s tiredness and eventual acceptance of his tragic destiny.\footnote{\textit{Shchukin, ‘Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia spektaklia v Teatre im. Vakhtangova’, 14 February 1932, Vakhtangov Theatre Archive, Arkh. No. 529, Sviazka 22, op. 1, 5.}}

The final duel scene starts with Shostakovich’s score (‘Joust’), couched in the style of Soviet public celebrations and pointing forward to his 1941 music for Lear’s Fool, which makes explicit the resemblance to ‘Jingle Bells’ (Ex. 2.17). The entire scene was staged similarly to medieval knights’ tournaments, with many extras consisting of both actors and papier-mâché dummies, and with the main participants wearing masks. There are two main musical numbers for the duration of the duel: a fast and a slow one, both rooted in G minor and again reminiscent of Shostakovich’s obsessive score to \textit{Lady Macbeth}. There are also two key moments that Shostakovich marks individually, the first being as the Queen drinks from the poisoned cup that kills her, which is preceded by a flourish, and the second at the end of the fight, which follows Goriunov’s ‘the blade is poisoned too’ and foreshadows the composer’s music for the Ghost in Kozintsev’s 1964 film.
Ex. 2.17: a) Shostakovich *Hamlet*, Act 4, ‘Joust’; b) Shostakovich *King Lear* (1941), Songs of the Fool, No.1

Finally, when everyone except Horatio is dead, Fortinbras arrives on his white horse, together with his soldiers. Here three character marches are played, not all that different from one another in their character. The first two follow Hamlet asking Horatio to tell the truth about his story and Horatio’s final words (respectively), and the third leads to the trumpets’ signalling the final scene following Fortinbras’s ordering of a military salute in the honour of the dead Prince. The entire music of ‘Fortinbras’s march’ is in fact a variant of the ‘Camouflage’ march from Shostakovich’s music to the music hall production, *Hypothetically Murdered.*\(^{552}\) The scenic solution of Akimov was described during the discussions of the rehearsal: Hamlet’s presence is felt through the only remaining object belonging to him – the mask he was wearing during the duel.

The reconstruction of the very ending of the production presents yet another difficult case, due to divergent reports and the missing last page of the production book. In any case, as the musico-dramatic synopsis suggests, the above-mentioned ‘Fortinbras March’ followed Horatio’s last line, closing close the production on a triumphant note. As to what Horatio’s last words were supposed to be, at least two different versions have been reported; of course it is possible that there was a combination of the two versions or that different words were used on different nights. The production book at this point contains several pages (different

\(^{552}\) See McBurney, ‘Shostakovich and the Theatre’, 168.
paper and different ink) with Erasmus’s words on Science, the last few sentences reading: ‘He knew how to enjoy the sound of mosquitos, but enjoying a normal life, that he did not know’. The latter phrase is quoted in the musico-dramatic synopsis as a cue to Fortinbras’s march. On the other hand, Eleanor Rowe, quoting Nikolai Chushkin, suggests that the production ended by Horatio citing Ulrich von Hutten’s words: ‘O Century, oh Science, What a joy it is to be alive’. Incidentally these exact words were used by Goebbels a year later at the time of the Nazis’ book-burning. Regardless of this, ‘Hutten’s words of 1518 were interpreted, in the early modern period, as the clarion call of an altered epochal awareness.’ Moreover, ‘what was celebrated was the euphoric feeling of standing at the threshold of a new age.’

2.11 The Relationship of Shostakovich’s music to Akimov’s staging

In general Shostakovich’s music to Akimov’s Hamlet marked a new stage in Soviet/Russian Hamletiada, not least by tackling those aspects of Shakespeare’s tragedy that seemed inaccessible for music in the 19th century, specifically its irony. In her study of Shostakovich’s music for this Hamlet, Zinkevych points out that this was a task which Tchaikovsky had famously declared impossible: ‘Music can’t find the means to reveal the irony that is hidden in the words of Hamlet.’ However, this comment does not take account of the context of Tchaikovsky’s remark, which had to do with his first encounter with Ambroise Thomas’ 1868 opera, Hamlet. It also misses the point that Tchaikovsky was referring to Hamlet the hero rather than the play. Zinkevych provides several musical examples from Shostakovich’s score to illustrate a mocking effect, but these are not directly linked to the protagonist: such as the march accompanying the exit of the King and the Queen in Act 1 (see Ex. 2.3) – a small cheerful childish number, rather than a regal, grandiose piece as might have been expected. However, Zinkevych’s study is mainly based on the orchestral suite rather than on the full incidental music, and she seems not to have had access to the

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553 Rowe, Hamlet a Window on Russia, 130.
554 As reported in Völkischer Beobachter, 12 May, 1933.
556 Pyotr Chaikovskiy, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, Vol. 2, Moscow, Muzyka, 1977, 301. See also Chapter 5.4.3.
production material which would have enabled her to encounter the same elements of irony in Akimov’s mise-en-scène. This close reading of Shostakovich’s score - probably unique in Russian musicology – is therefore in need of revision.

A few so-called ‘illogical outcomes’ of the show that were severely criticised could arguably have been avoided had the score been different in its characterisation. As we saw, the scene of Ophelia’s funeral, for example, struck the critics for its overwhelming tragedy, which one assumes as normal for a traditional production, but which is quite irrational if Akimov’s depiction of Ophelia and her loveless relationship with Hamlet is followed to its logical conclusion. However, most critics, while praising the magnificent music of Shostakovich for this scene, failed to see – or at least to comment on - how the heavy, tragic Requiem and Funeral March resulted in a much darker perception of the scene than Akimov’s staging suggested. Of course it is possible that Akimov may have intended the contrast and communicated this conception to Shostakovich, but there is nothing in the existing sources to confirm or refute this possibility.

Given that in places Shostakovich’s music admittedly works contrapuntally to Akimov’s scenic solutions, studying the convergences and divergences between the settings and its music reveals, among other things, each artist’s creative obsession at the time: securing a career as an independent and self-sufficient theatre director in the case of Akimov and ongoing work on the opera, Lady Macbeth in the case of Shostakovich.

Hence, and probably to try out the musical ideas for his opera, Shostakovich’s most compelling divergence from Akimov’s conception lay in his choice of style. Unlike many productions of Hamlet at the time, where the events of the play take place in the Middle Ages, Akimov had decided that it was more logical to place the tragedy in the time of Shakespeare himself. Shostakovich, however, did not follow suit but incorporated cabaret genres such as cancan and tango and galop in an uproarious updated-Offenbach style. As Richard Taruskin has observed, it was especially the latter genre that was used extensively in Lady Macbeth to dehumanise the characters surrounding the heroine, in an attempt by the composer to justify her murders and evil deeds.557

In the same vein, and in accordance with his sympathetic reading of the otherwise monstrous heroine of Nikolai Leskov’s novella, Shostakovich seems to have identified common traits between her and Ophelia. These are musically revealed through similar motifs sung by the two women in similar situations and through the universalised state of mourning depicted in the ‘Requiem’ accompanying Ophelia’s funeral. Here again, Shostakovich apparently followed Shakespeare more closely than did Akimov, since in the director’s interpretation Ophelia’s death was by accidental drowning, following her drunkenness during a court ball. Shostakovich’s music, composed as a free interpretation in the style of early music, develops from mourning to a depiction of the inevitability of tragic fate. However, it is Akimov’s interpretation of Ophelia as a passionate, sensual and lustful woman that permitted Shostakovich’s assimilation of her to the heroine of his opera in the first place; a more traditional reading of Ophelia as the symbol of purity and innocence would not have allowed such representation. In the case of the opera, Shostakovich was his own master. Therefore there was no question of disharmony in the conception, other than between his view and that of Leskov’s original.

The parallels between Akimov’s Hamlet and Shostakovich’s Lady Macbeth extend beyond purely musical affinities and are manifested in ideological aspects and especially in their reception. Shostakovich’s programme note for the premiere of his opera in 1934, in which he outlines his task as correctly interpreting what Nikolai Leskov could not fully grasp from his contemporary time, conspicuously echoes Akimov’s statements about his Hamlet in above-mentioned articles published prior to the opening of his production. Akimov, too, argued that Shakespeare was too close to his era to be able to understand and interpret the ongoing events he reports in his Hamlet. Indeed class struggle was at the centre of both works: if Shostakovich’ opera dehumanised the crowd and the heroine’s social environment, Akimov, with the help of the composer, drew a ghastly portrait of the beggars by representing them as parasites, who would do anything for money.

In general, apart from drawing on his extensive experience with music for the theatre, Shostakovich’s incidental music provided him with a kind of laboratory to try out many aspects of his still evolving musical language. Being a young composer, and despite the fame that had already to some extent been thrust upon him, his musical language at this time was

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559 See for example ‘Doklad N.P. Akimova’, 19. This view was echoed by the executive producer (otvetstvenyi rezhisser), Boris Zakhava, during the discussions of the dress rehearsal, see ‘Stenogrammy khudozhestvennykh soveshchani’, 19 April 1932, 32.
not yet fixed and secure. Contact with big personalities in related artistic fields, such as Kozintsev, Akimov and not least Vsevolod Meyerhold, was crucial in defining his musical persona (or his multiple personae, one might say). At this point in his career it could be argued that his concerns were not so much social criticism as how to place himself as modern, individual and at the cutting-edge of artistic developments. The development of his experiments from the 1932 Hamlet on is not only reflected in his later Shakespearean works, and especially Kozintsev’s film, but also in his symphonies and, more immediately, as we have repeatedly seen, in his second opera, Lady Macbeth. By composing a self-contained score for Hamlet, which, as one of the critics of the time somewhat over-optimistically put it, would ‘definitely find its way into the symphonic repertoire’, Shostakovich stuck to his manifesto of not submitting to the instructions of theatre directors. Could we perhaps go further and say that in avoiding compromises and following his inner light, Shostakovich composed music that was simply too good for the production, and hence inadvertently exposed its shortcomings? Perhaps the only way to test this hypothesis would be a reconstruction of the entire production – a project which, as we have seen, faces almost insuperable difficulties.

Since its reported disappearance from Russian stages between 1762 and 1809 because of the parallels between the tragedy’s plot and the murder of Peter III leading to reign of Catherine the Great, Shakespeare’s Hamlet has been considered, especially in Eastern Europe and Russia, as a politically charged tragedy. In this vein, and especially in the Soviet era, productions of this play have often been read and understood as political commentaries. Akimov’s version has raised many speculations along political lines, especially among Western scholars. Theories regarding its true intentions vary from Simon Morrison’s reading of the production as a direct allusion to power struggle of the 1920s leading to Stalin’s reign, to Akimov’s supposed efforts to comply with the forthcoming socialist realist doctrine, as suggested by Boika Sokolova. However, compared to such productions and adaptations of Hamlet as Lyubimov’s (1970s) and Slonimsky’s opera (1991), that of Akimov made a comparatively passive and generalised political statement on historical and political events, rather than an immediate and contemporary one. If anything, again to echo Taruskin’s

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560 E. Gal’skii, ‘Muzyka k Gamletu’.
561 Eleanor Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 13.
controversial reading of Lady Macbeth, by concentrating on the positive impact of a hero in something akin to the class struggle, Akimov’s Hamlet could be read as affirming the concept of epochal change from feudal to bourgeois values in Shakespeare’s time, as outlined by Marxist dialectics. If this conception was unclear to Akimov’s contemporaries, that can largely be laid at the door of vicissitudes in the production process. And if it was his prime intention, as a straightforward reading of his spoken and written declarations would suggest, it could be argued that Akimov’s Hamlet has never been seen at all.
Chapter 3
Sergei Radlov’s Shakespearealism

Unlike that of Akimov, Radlov’s career as a theatre producer was fully shaped by the time he tackled Hamlet. Moreover, he had established a specific reputation as Shakespearean director and scholar, combining the two aspects in the way that would later be praised as a positive characteristic of Soviet Shakespearology by John Dover Wilson and taken up by Grigori Kozintsev. Radlov’s approach to directing Hamlet was formed not only by his own early colourful career (see Chapter 1.6.2) and by the socio-political context but also by his other Shakespearean works. Accordingly, this chapter begin with an overview of the major trends in his Shakespearean projects prior to Hamlet, including his collaboration with Prokofiev on the latter’s ballet, Romeo and Juliet. Similarly, Prokofiev’s incidental music for Radlov’s Hamlet will be placed in the context of his previous experience with theatre and cinema, and with Shakespeare in particular.

As for the production itself, the very few archival materials from the performance are not sufficient to allow a reconstructive analysis, in Pavis’ terms, in the way that is possible for Akimov’s. What is clear from the existing reviews, reactions and Radlov’s own writings, is that the production tried to stay as close as possible to Shakespeare’s text, reducing directorial interference of the Akimovian kind to a minimum. There is plenty of evidence for the ways in which Radlov tried to put across his interpretation of each character and the major issues of the tragedy as he saw them.

It is also interesting to observe the harmony and convergence between the various components of the production, particularly the music and staging, which is again quite different from the frictions and inconsistencies of Akimov’s staging. Accordingly, the second part of this chapter attempts a description of the production based on Il’ia Berezark’s ‘analyse-reportage’ (to use Pavis’ term again), supported by Radlov’s own writings (in particular his detailed letter to Prokofiev), reviews and reminiscences of the actors as found in the uncatalogued collection of David Zolotnitsky held at the St Petersburg State Theatre Library. In addition, a letter addressed to Prokofiev from Ksenia Kochurova, wife of

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564 Il’ia Berezark, Gamlet v Teatre im. Leningradskogo Soveta: opyt analiza spektakl’ia, Leningrad and Moscow, VTO, 1940.
565 Radlov, Letter to Prokofiev, RGALI, f. 1929, op. 2, ed. khr. 466.
composer Iurii Kochurov, based on the now unlocated production book for Radlov’s staging of *Hamlet* in Ukraine, helps to place the musical numbers within the production.  

### 3.1 The year 1932: A tale of two productions

On 4 May 1932, a fortnight before the premiere of Akimov’s *Hamlet* at Moscow’s Vakhtangov Theatre, Sergei Radlov’s *Othello* opened in Leningrad. This was his first ever Shakespeare production with his own theatre, at the time known as ‘Molodoi Teatr’ (Youth Theatre). The modest staging, performed by young and as yet unknown actors was completely overshadowed by the media dazzle surrounding Akimov’s tour de force. Nevertheless, it attracted the support of such critics as Aleksei Gvozdev, who wrote:

> ‘Interesting productions of the classics have to be seen in small theatres, and the recent work on Shakespeare’s *Othello* at the Youth (Molodoi) Theatre, produced by S.E. Radlov, indicates that a skilful approach can achieve valuable results even on a tiny stage and having a collective of very young actors.’

Despite their obvious differences, the two productions had much in common: they both avowedly rejected the preconceptions of received acting traditions and scholastic conceptions, and they chose to set universal conceptions such as duty, honour, jealousy within an historical framework, creating concrete characters and actions. As for their cultural-intellectual context, Zolotnitsky observes that ‘both tragedies were staged just before publication of letters of Marx and Engels on the tragic element in art – on “Shakespearization” and “Schillerization”’. The two productions had very different fates, however, which become ironic with hindsight. After its premiere, Akimov’s *Hamlet* continued to be a media phenomenon, but mainly in a negative way, as we have seen. The debates and condemnations meant that it was removed from the repertoire of the Vakhtangov Theatre after only one season. Radlov’s *Othello*, by contrast, received very little critical response, but it managed to secure a place in the repertoire of the Youth Theatre for three more seasons.

History had more cards to play. After the war, Radlov and his wife were accused of treason and sentenced to ten years in the Gulag; hence he became a non-person, and his name

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disappeared from documents of the time. Akimov had by then created his own Comedy Theatre in Leningrad, and despite the many risks he took with his chosen repertoire, he survived the regime’s ordeals. Despite Radlov’s rehabilitation in 1957 and his Shakespeare productions in the post-Stalin era, it was in the end Akimov’s 1932 Hamlet that survived the test of time, at least in the sense that it retained a place in the history books, albeit mainly as prominent example of eccentric interpretation of Shakespeare’s tragedy.

By the mid-1930s Radlov and his own Studio Theatre (developed from his Youth Theatre) had become an authoritative presence in Russian Shakespeare production, and the translations by his wife, Anna Radlova, were widely discussed. On 15 April 1935, Radlov’s Othello was presented in a new version (at his Theatre), receiving acclaim and praise from critics nationwide. The reviews and Radlov’s own writings of this time also shed light on his 1932 production, which at the time had passed by relatively quietly. For one thing, Radlov dissociated himself from what was now considered the ‘formalist’ production of Akimov’s Hamlet:

If Hamlet at the Vakhtangov Theatre, three years after its premiere, was finally and irrevocably condemned as a nihilist attempt to remove the central problem of Shakespeare’s play, in my sketchy production of Othello I began to feel my way towards finding the main and the only conceivable approach to Shakespeare as a realistic playwright, which became the leading principle in my further work.

Given the political climate of the time, barely four months after the assassination of Kirov, it is hard to judge the sincerity or otherwise of Radlov’s accounts of Akimov’s work. This becomes even more complicated in view of the fact that in a year’s time Radlov would be collaborating with Akimov, and indeed Shostakovich, on a production of Saliut Ispan’ia.

In any case, it is clear that Radlov’s own Hamlet, which was premiered with great success on 15 May 1938, was in part a reply to Akimov’s (formalist) production and in part representative of the by then reigning Socialist Realist doctrines. Equally, however, it was a continuation of his prolific theatre career with its many apparently contradictory trends, which are today little known, even among specialists.

571 See, for example, Anna Radlova, ‘O roli i otvetstvennosti perevodchika’, Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 11 April 1934, 4; Radlova, ‘Perevody Shekspira’, Literaturnaia gazeta, 4 December 1935, 4; Aleksandr Smirnov, ‘O russikh perevodakh Shekspira’, Zvezda, 1934/4, 165-172.
573 Play by Aleksandr Afinogenov about the Spanish civil war, premiered 23 November 1936 at Leningrad’s Pushkin Theatre.
3.2 Radlov’s Shakespeare productions before *Hamlet*

It is tempting to interpret Radlov’s radical changes of direction in his creative outlook (see chapter 1.6.2) primarily in the light of the 1930s purges and the increasing popularity of Shakespeare in the context of Socialist Realism. Valerii Gaidebura, for one, certainly avoids this pitfall. Gaideburov became one of the most prominent advocates of Radlov, publishing several articles and monographs with the goal of ‘an actual rehabilitation’ of Radlov in addition to the ‘official’ one. In 1958 he wrote: ‘Radlov’s misfortunes were not associated with the repressions of the 1930s. … His fate was safe then, and his popularity reached its zenith.’ The 1930s were indeed Radlov’s starry decade, and as Svetlana Bushueva observes it was not ‘fate’ that saved Radlov; ‘he was his own saviour in that in its essence, his art happened to be in harmony with the spirit of the time.’ Of course, it could be argued that Radlov was obliged to modify his works in order to survive the repressions of the anti-formalist campaign of the mid-1930s, and this seems to be what Zolotnitsky implies throughout his book. Simon Morrison, too, interprets Radlov’s Socialist Realist concept for his 1938 *Hamlet* as dictated from above, with the artist given little choice (see below).

It has also been suggested that Radlov was simply ‘a loyal safe’ option as opposed to more problematic directors, such as the Ukrainian Les Kurbas. It is impossible to be certain either way; there could be no doubt that Radlov’s creative output was a result of conscious and unconscious negotiations with the prevailing politico-cultural climate of the country. On the other hand, many of Radlov’s socialist realist tendencies had already manifested themselves before the doctrine was introduced in 1934. For example, his views as expressed during the debates of 1928 regarding what Soviet opera should be like, represented an alternative vision to the modernist one suggested by the likes of Ivan Sollertinsky. As Marina Frolova-Walker observes, Radlov ‘put forward two necessary features for the future

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574 For more on Shakespeare and Socialist Realism, see Arkady Ostrovsky, ‘Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare’, in Irena Makaryk and Joseph Price (eds.), *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2006, 56-83.
of Soviet opera: its form should be “monumental”, and its content “concrete”. According to Radlov himself, the new operatic genre would be ‘heroic in its content’. He announced:

I envisage man, shown in moments of the greatest tension of emotion and will; I envisage the mass of people in moments of uplift. Music enters in its full power, as a relief of this tension. The audience feels that music enters where one cannot do without it, where the orchestra cannot resist playing, the singer cannot resist singing. This is where the music of revolution emerges.

It is difficult not to detect echoes of these visions of Radlov in his production of Hamlet ten years later. Although Radlov’s main Shakespearean productions belong to later years, the core of his views concerning the treatment of the Classics in general and of Shakespeare’s work in particular remained essentially unchanged throughout his career. Even in the years of the Theatre of Popular Comedy, Radlov avoided the temptation ‘to put Shakespeare, who has done us no harm, upside down (verkh nogami)’. In an interview prior to the 1920 production of the Merry Wives of Windsor, his very first Shakespearean mise-en-scène and the only comedy of Shakespeare he ever staged, Radlov warned that his work ‘might appear not leftist enough’ and that he had ‘treated Shakespeare according to the nature of the material in front of us’. Despite continuing to juxtpose circus and theatre, and, for example, giving the roles of the servants to acrobats, and regardless of his innovative setting on two platforms and uninterrupted action on lower and upper levels, Radlov insisted that ‘this is not an experimentation; this is a mathematical calculation from the essence of the work.’ The positive reaction of the critics suggests that even in the age of experimental theatre, such a respectful approach to the works of Shakespeare was welcome. Georgi Guriev, a young theatre director, found Radlov’s work ‘brilliant, resonant, and full of energy’ and described it as ‘authentically Shakespearean production’. The idea of ‘not a new Shakespeare but an authentic (podlinnii) Shakespeare’ would soon become mot du jour in newspaper discussions of the 1930s, including those around Akimov’s Hamlet.

Notwithstanding the positive reviews, Radlov himself would later look back with regret on his first Shakespearean attempt, admitting that he was far from ‘any correct scenic rendering

582 Ibid.
of Shakespeare. … Thinking back to what I was doing back then, I must admit that some of
the staging was quite close to the “geography” of an Elizabethan performance, but it had little
in common with the very essence of the problems of Shakespeare’s drama.’

He had the
same sceptical opinion towards his first production of Othello at The State Academic
Dramatic Theatre (Alexandrinsky) in 1927, which was designed to mark the 35th anniversary
of the artistic career of the veteran actor, Iurii Iur’ev. At the time of his 1932 production of
Othello, which Radlov considered ‘a landmark and a turning point’ for his creative career, the
director remembered his earlier production of the tragedy and wrote: ‘This [1932] production
is as serious and important as my previous mise-en-scène of Othello at the State Academic
Theatre was unfortunate.’

Working with Iur’ev on Othello was not the only time Radlov’s directorial initiatives for his
Shakespearean work were challenged by the creative presence of a legendary actor. But the
next two instances of such collaborations proved to be very different. In 1935, Radlov staged,
or at least inherited and finalised the staging of, King Lear at the State Jewish theatre, with
the great Solomon Mikhoels at the title role. This production, which Gordon Craig reportedly
watched at least four times and described as ‘a real shock’, has been object of many studies
and much speculation. Apart from its marking the first Shakespeare production in Yiddish on
this stage, and Mikhoels’s performance, which immortalised him as an inimitable Lear, the
main subject of debate concerns the extent of Radlov’s involvement as the production’s
director. Theories range from Zolotnitsky’s complete attribution of the directorial role to
Radlov to Rudnitsky’s denying him any function whatsoever, apart from ‘signing off’ Les
Kurbas’s final work due to the latter’s imprisonment and being purged prior to the opening of
the show. Irena Makaryk’s pioneering book on the Shakespearean works of Kurbas sheds
new light on the talents and initiatives of this neglected Ukrainian director, presenting a more
documented and objective account of the destiny of his work on GOSET’s production of
Lear. Whatever the nature of Radlov’s role, Mikhoels had his own concept of the tragedy,
which in many ways contradicted Radlov’s reading. Radlov remembered how this was

585 Radlov, ‘Kak ia stavliu Shekspira’, in Gvozdev (ed.), Nasha rabota nad klassikami, Leningrad,
Khudozhchestvennaiia literatura, 1936, 20.
586 Edward Gordon Craig, Vospominanie, stat’i, pis’ma, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1988, 337.
588 In her chapter on Lear, Nataliia Vovsi-Mikhoels refers to Radlov as the producer of the production. See:
Nataliia Vovsi-Mikhoels, Moi Otets Solomon Mikhoels (vospominaniiia o zhizni i gibeli), Tel-Aviv, Iakov Press,
1984, 108.
possibly the most difficult production of my life, which cost me and the participants a lot of blood, nerves and life. I wouldn’t even talk about my main concept of Shakespeare as a profoundly realistic and generally progressive dramatist, which was accepted by the troupe immediately and without any hesitation. From Mikhoels’s original idea of Lear to his final embodiment of the character there was a great, difficult and at times agonising creative struggle. In this struggle Mikhoels had the courage to honestly and irreversibly give up most of his initial perceptions, so that he could not only entirely agree with my main concept but also bring into his image of Lear the wealth of his own personal wisdom, experience and talent. 

Radlov’s next project in Moscow was a third attempt at Othello, which turned out to be yet another media phenomenon. It has been noted that Othello was the most popular of Shakespeare’s tragedies in Russia in the 1930s, with at least one hundred more productions than its rival Romeo and Juliet. In 1935, despite the recent challenges of working with Mikhoels, Radlov took the risk of calling on another legendary actor, Aleksandr Ostuzhev, to perform the title role of the tragedy for the new production at the Maly Theatre in Moscow. Despite his many honorary titles, Ostuzhev at this time was considered a faded star and unsuitable for such a demanding role, due to his age and his deafness. But in the end, it was Ostuzhev, like Mikhoels in King Lear, who secured the place of this production in history.

Radlov took an even greater risk by deciding to work simultaneously on yet another production of the same tragedy at his own theatre studio in Leningrad. Although work at the Maly Theatre took longer, and Ostuzhev’s Othello opened about eight months after the premiere of the Leningrad production, comparisons between the two stagings were inevitable. Both used Anna Radlova’s highly disputed translation of the tragedy, as well as the stage design by Victor Basov and the music of Boris Asafiev; but the end results were radically different. Radlov naturally foresaw critics’ comparative views and had warned against them in an interview prior to the premiere of the Moscow production. He confirmed that the

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590 Ostrovsky, ‘Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare’, 61 (Ostrovsky does not provide any source for his statistics).
concept was the same for both productions – that is to interpret *Othello* not as a play about jealousy but as one about love and trusting. But he used very different means at each theatre and noted: ‘I think I would have made a very bad mistake if I had tried to copy my Leningrad production of *Othello*.’

Being aware of the Romantic tradition associated with the Maly Theatre in general, and with Ostuzhev in particular, Radlov seems to have embraced the challenge, observing that, ‘The passionate metaphor of Shakespeare is organically embodied in the romantic impulse of the actor.’ Furthermore, he realised that Ostuzhev’s powerful acting was not going to be easy to tame, and therefore tactically reassured the actor that: ‘I don’t want to lose anything from your powerful acting in this production. ... I shall regard my task unfulfilled if I am unable to help you show the whole range and force of your temperament.’

It might have been under the influence of his recent position as the director of the Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre that Radlov was quite specific about the actor’s intonations and referred to Verdi to clarify his concept. He asked Ostuzhev to speak Othello’s farewell monologue (V/2/260-280) ‘in a baritone register, trying to imagine an uninterrupted line of marching soldiers coming and going before your eyes. [...] This is how Verdi, who by the end of his life composed his genius opera, *Othello*, understood this aria – introducing the sound of marching soldiers in the orchestral part.’ Here, both Ostrovsky and Bushueva insist on Ostuzhev’s disobedience in presenting the entire role of Othello in the ‘tenor’ register: Ostrovsky interprets the terms ‘tenor’ and ‘baritone’ literally, whilst Bushueva tries to understand Radlov’s requirements metaphorically. However, an archive recording of this production, and this scene in particular, reveals no trace of any ‘tenor’ in either interpretation of the word. True, Ostuzhev’s reading is highly passionate, musical and possibly less warrior-like than Radlov would have desired, but his voice covers a range of registers and intonations, with a clear tendency towards the bass-baritone.

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594 Ibid.
595 Radlov, ‘Kak ia stavliu Shekspira’, in Gvozdev (ed.), *Nasha rabota nad klassikami*, 68.
597 Ostrovsky, ‘Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism’, 71; Bushueva, ‘Shekspir u Radlova’, 43.
In general, Radlov aimed to replace the category of the tragic with that of the heroic.\(^{599}\) This strategy would become a hallmark of his *Hamlet*, too. But if in *Hamlet* and in the production of *Othello* at his own theatre studio he was able to mould his young actors to his desired result, realising his concepts proved more difficult with established actors. For Ostuzhev he required that Othello’s costume, black with orange slings, should not distinguish him from other soldiers and that it should remain in the spirit of ‘conquistador’.\(^{600}\) After his hard experience with Mikhoels, Radlov was optimistic about his collaboration with Ostuzhev, believing him to be ‘like a red-hot, molten metal in need of a form into which this precious fiery mass could flow’.\(^{601}\) But in practice, Ostuzhev was much less flexible than Radlov had hoped: he refused to wear the assigned costume and opted for an all-white, free-flowing one to contrast with the dark colour of skin. As a result critics argued that Ostuzhev was visually and conceptually isolated from the rest of the cast: ‘Ostuzhev was only formally connected to Radlov and his production. He could easily have been acting in a different production.’\(^{602}\)

Despite the great triumph of the leading actor, who reportedly received 37 curtain calls\(^{603}\) the contradictions between Radlov’s concept and Ostuzhev’s acting were too clear to be missed. In Radlov’s interpretation and indeed in Radlova’s translation of the text,\(^{604}\) Othello was above all a soldier and warrior ‘conquering new countries with his weapon’.\(^{605}\) This reading of the tragic hero, which Radlov openly advocated, sparked off a series of discussions between the director and the critic Iurii Iuzovskii, which reached its peak in *Literaturnyi kritik* with the latter’s article ‘Is Othello a human being (*chelovek*)?’\(^{606}\) replying to Radlov’s provocative ‘Is Othello a warrior (*voin*)?’\(^{607}\)

Throughout his book, Zolotnitsky suggests that when working on productions starring great actors Radlov was unable fully to realise his own concept of the play. Hence parallel to each of these *Othellos*, for example, Radlov worked on a production of the tragedy at his studio and with his young actors, where he was able to materialise his personal reading. Such

\(^{599}\) Arkady Ostrovsky, ‘Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism’, 70.
\(^{600}\) Svetlana Bushueva, ‘Shekspir u Radlova’, 43.
\(^{603}\) ‘Uspekh Otello’, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 1936/8 (17 February 1936), 4.
\(^{604}\) Jill Warren argues that Radlova’s translation was shaped by Radlov’s theatrical interpretations – see Warren, ‘Acculturating Shakespeare’, esp. 125-156.
\(^{605}\) Radlov, *Moia rabota nad Shekspirem*, Russian National Library Archive, St Petersburg, f. 625, ed. 151/1, 7 verso.
\(^{606}\) Iurii Iuzovskii, ‘Chelovek li Otello?’, *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1936/4, 167.
generalisations could easily imply that Radlov belonged by nature to the category of dictator-directors who used their actors as puppets whenever they could. A counter-argument to Zolotnitsky’s theory would be Radlov’s post-Stalinian production of King Lear in November 1954 (without Mikhoels, who had been assassinated in 1948) with his newly adopted theatre in Latvia, which failed to surprise the critics and scholars.608

Contrary to Zolotnitsky, Berezark argues that Radlov’s Shakespearean works, prior to his 1938 Hamlet, all suffered from a tendency towards ‘over-simplification’ and that it was only working with great actors, such as Mikhoels and Ostuzhev that saved the Moscow productions from the same problem.609 By ‘over-simplification’, Berezark most probably had in mind ‘bringing Shakespeare heroes down to earth’, something that was pointed out by other critics regarding theatre studio productions of Othello and Romeo and Juliet, whether they praised the director or criticised him for it.610 As for the difference between Hamlet and his previous Shakespearean productions, Radlov himself was aware of it and explained his change of method. If prior to Hamlet Radlov’s concept was deduced directly from the text, in Hamlet, he turned for the first time to the large quantity of available scholarly studies and academic theories, particularly those of contemporary Western Shakespeare scholars.611

3.3 ‘How I stage Shakespeare’612

Throughout his work on various Shakespeare productions, Radlov published several articles in which he described his work. Similar in their content, these articles reveal that Radlov’s position was above all a positivist one, insisting that ‘the talent of a director before anything lies in reading and hearing Shakespeare’.613 He believed that there exists a single correct way of approaching Shakespeare’s works and staging them, ‘a realistic interpretation’ (realisticheskaia traktovka). And he insisted that it was only by working out this essential approach that the director would be able to present on the stage the ‘authentic-real’

608 Personal correspondence with Aleksei Bartoshevich, 24 November 2015.
609 Il’ia Berezark, Gamlet v teatre imeni Leningradskogo Soveta, Leningrad-Moscow, VTO, 1940, 21-23.
610 See for example, Iurii Iuzovskii, ‘O Dame s kameliami i krasote zhizni’, Literaturnyi kritik, 1934/6, 152; and Karl Radek, ‘Na shekspirovskom fronte’, Izvestiia, 1936/141, 3.
611 As mentioned in several articles and reports, for example Radlov, ‘Gamlet iz besedy s akterami’, Iskusstvo i zhizn’, 1938/3, 17-20.
612 Taken from the title of Radlov’s article, ‘Kak ia stavliu Shekspira’, in Gvozdev (ed.), Nasha rabota nad klassikami, 11-70.
613 Radlov, ‘Rabota nad Shekspirom’, Teatr, 1939/4, 64.
Shakespeare, which would reveal the correct reading of the play without merely reconstructing it archaeologically.614

The first stage of this process, according to Radlov, consisted of studying the time and historical situation of the England where Shakespeare lived and worked, as well as the Bard’s social profile within this context. In principle this approach was similar to that of Akimov and his dialectical-materialistic reading of the context of Hamlet.

Radlov’s experience of staging several plays of Shakespeare meant that he could compare the evolution of the playwright's ideologies and worldviews at different stages of his life. Radlov believed that the director needed to determine the one leading idea of the play, which is always clearly expressed by Shakespeare. For him, for example, Romeo and Juliet was a tragedy of young, Komsomol types, fighting for the right to love; and Othello was not a play about jealousy but a tragedy about love. He was quite confident of his own reading of each play, even if it raised mixed reactions from other authoritative figures, such as Meyerhold. In his 1936 speech, ‘Meyerhold against Meyerholdism’, the director dismissed those who claimed to have found ‘the norm’ for staging a play. Referring to the production of Othello at the Maly Theatre, Meyerhold reacted with utmost hostility towards Radlov’s reading:

Everybody said that this was an amazing show. They shouted: here is the real production – as if a new era had started and that everything was discovered. These are those norms and standards of which I have been talking. I arrived and saw that first of all there was nothing left of Shakespeare. I remember in an interview Radlov blathered (vyakal) that he was staging not a drama of jealousy but a drama of love; here Shakespeare is interested in neither drama of jealousy nor drama of love. He was interested in the intrigue spun by people and the machine under whose wheels Desdemona, Othello and others die. Here! Comrades! If this is right, and it is indeed, then the main protagonist is Iago and not Othello, notwithstanding that the play is called Othello. Shakespeare was so sorry for Othello that he felt bad about giving the name of such villain as Iago to the play.615

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614 See, for example, ‘Kak stavit’ Shekspira’, Literaturnaia gazeta, 10 February 1935, 4; ‘Kak ia stavliu Shekspira’, in Gvozdev (ed.), Nasha rabota nad klassikami 11-71; ‘Shekspir i problem rezhissury’, Teatr i dramaturgiia, 1936/2, 57-8.
For Radlov, the key to the correct staging of Shakespeare lay in the principle of contrasts. This notion gradually evolved from the physical in *Merry Wives of Windsor* to the psychological in *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, which in turn contributed to his departing from the iconoclastic towards the monumental.

In general, like Akimov, Radlov did not shy away from the comic episodes of Shakespeare’s tragedies. ‘The alternation of comic and tragic episodes was deliberately played upon, the former prevailing at the beginning of the play, the latter at the end of it. This helped heroes step down from their pedestals.’ Always in search of the true spirit of Elizabethan theatre and considering himself as a Shakespeare scholar as well as theatre director, and clearly familiar with ongoing Shakespeare studies in the west, Radlov wrote at the time of his first production of *Othello* in 1927:

Shakespeare’s tragedy is built upon a well-considered and regular alternation of tragic and comic. Of course, there are ‘snobs’ who will feel it an offence if some free and merry personages interfere with their thoughtful ‘mood’. Then I shall prompt to them the following, just in case: jokes cracked by those oddities are as ‘well-grounded scientifically’ as the tirades of the tragedians are; such is the true Shakespeare. … Certain scenes in Shakespeare are sometimes like an adventure film…. And, on the whole, a Shakespeare performance is a review rather than a mass spectacle, although – to put it more exactly - it is neither one nor the other. At any rate, it is a performance where the characters not only weep but also laugh simple-heartedy.

It was in his 1934 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, however, that he took the juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy to a new level, similar to Akimov’s aims in the 1932 *Hamlet*. Unlike Akimov’s work, this production, which preceded Prokofiev’s ballet version of the play with the libretto of Radlov and Piotrovsky, was met with positive reactions from press and scholars alike. Zolotnitsky describes how ‘the tragic grew from the comic; they would alternate; but until the very end they would not part.’ In fact Radlov was acclaimed for his success in staging an ‘optimistic Shakespeare’. Piotrovsky noted that ‘Radlov never misses an opportunity to make the audience laugh. The central lyrical heroes of the tragedy, the lovers themselves laugh, full of life-enhancing happiness.’ He approved of Radlov’s portrayal

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616 Radlov, ‘Rabota nad Shekspirom’, *Teatr*, 1939/4, 64.
of the heroes. Romeo was a brave, determined and strong-willed young man who belonged to those courageous people who realised the victory of Renaissance over old feudalism; and Juliet, portrayed as a hot-blooded, down-to-earth woman of the Renaissance, was freed from all abstract mysticism and sentimentality. Such descriptions echo Akimov’s concept of Hamlet and his interpretation of Ophelia. Indeed, Akimov was among those who praised Radlov’s mise-en-scène:

After all the trouble with Hamlet, I received a great joy. It was at the production of Romeo and Juliet at Radlov’s theatre that I saw how the seed that I had planted in the hard soil of the Vakhtangov theatre suddenly gave fruit in a small theatre on Troitskaia Street, and all this with utmost clarity and persuasiveness. I saw my seed which I could recognise from its taste, colour and smell; I was there to see the realisation of what I had striven to achieve – with Shakespeare taken down from the false classic (lozhnoklassicheskogo) pedestal, and cleared of declamations, aesthetic mise-en-scène, etc. I saw that Shakespeare was approached as an author who can stand up for himself, even if lit up with a strong lantern or considered in broad daylight.622

Zolotnitsky, with his usual optimism, regards this statement as a ‘noble gesture’ from Akimov. However, it could be argued that in these early years after the scandal of his Hamlet, Akimov was desperately seeking rehabilitation and a justification for his work, by affiliating it to a universally approved mise-en-scène such as Radlov’s Romeo. His efforts finally paid off and in 1935 he was appointed the director of the former and then unpopular Leningrad Theatre of Satire and Comedy, where he founded his successful Comedy Theatre, which is active to the present day.

Despite a few negative comments from the likes of Radlov’s unshakable critic, Iurii Iuzovskii, and the director Konstantin Tverskoi’s disapproval of the designer, Basov, the success of Romeo and Juliet was uncontested. This might be one reason why Prokofiev considered entrusting his project of the ballet on the same tragedy to Radlov. In his book on Prokofiev, Simon Morrison almost ignores the earlier production, which he simply describes as ‘a stripped-down, unsentimental version of Romeo and Juliet with young actors in his

621 Ibid., 11.
623 Zolotnitsky, Sergei Radlov: The Shakespearian Fate of a Soviet Director, 117.
624 Iurii Iuzovskii, ‘O Dame s kameliami i krasote zhizni’, Literaturnyi kritik, 1934/6, 153.
[Radlov’s] studio’. However, Radlov himself had insisted that as for the concept of Prokofiev’s ballet, ‘the starting point was my production of Romeo and Juliet (on Theatre-Studio of Radlov) which Prokofiev had seen during our Moscow tour last year.’ Indeed the idea of Romeo and Juliet as a Komsomol (Communist Youth League) tragedy was already explored in Radlov’s 1934 production, which he described as:

a play about the struggle for love, about the struggle for the right to love, by young, strong, progressive people fighting against feudal traditions and feudal views on marriage and family. This makes the entire play alive and permeated with a breath of struggle and passion; makes it, perhaps, the most ‘Komsomol-like’ of all of Shakespeare’s plays.

Despite its great influence, this production rarely features in studies of Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet. However, it seems that many of the more controversial moments of the ballet in its original version had their roots in Radlov’s concept for his theatre production of the tragedy. For example, Morrison observes in Acts I to III ‘episodes in which the drama between the Montague and Capulet factions is interrupted by processions of merry-makers’ and that in the last act, prior to the scene of the happy ending, ‘to alleviate the gloom of the scene in which Juliet drinks the “death” potion, Prokofiev composed three exotic dances, which represent the nuptial gifts that Paris had brought to Juliet’s chambers.’ The equivalent of such moments of ‘juxtaposition of counterpoints’, as Radlov called them, appeared in the theatre production: the director combined ‘the miming scene of Juliet’s death with the bustling of servants and peasants preparing for a happy wedding ceremony’; and similarly he ‘extended the same device by introducing the joyous music of a street singer while Romeo was mourning Juliet’s death. I prefaced this scene with a clown-like interlude

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626 Morrison, The People’s Artist, 32.
629 This is despite the increasing attention paid to the early versions of the ballet – see for example, Morrison, The People’s Artist, 31-40; David Nice, Prokofiev: From Russia to the West 1891-1935, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2003; Svetlana A. Petukhova, ‘Pervaya avtorskaya redaktsiia baleta Prokof’eva “Romeo i Dzhul’etta”’, Istochnikovedcheskie problemy izucheniia’, PhD dissertation, MGK im. P.I. Chaikovskogo, 1997; Deborah Wilson, ‘Prokofiev’s Romeo and Juliet: History of a Compromise’, PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 2003; issues of the journal Three Oranges: No. 8 (November 2004); No. 10 (November 2005); No. 17 (May 2009).
of an old Capulet and his servant undoing his belt. ” 631 Elsewhere he explained his concept in a very pragmatic way:

What should be done so that the Komsomol of our time, when watching a beautifully staged actor weeping, doesn’t start explicitly laughing at him. I understood that there was only way out of this situation, … that is to take the initiative of humour away from the audience and offer it to the director and actors themselves. 632

Notwithstanding such practicalities, for most critics Radlov’s concept deserved to be praised for its modernising Shakespeare and bringing his heroes closer to the audience. 633 It is only fair to assume that subsequently, by the time of his production of Othello in 1935 Radlov had become ‘the leading director in the fields of Soviet Shakespeare theatre. … His productions started a new era and have laid the foundations for a new Soviet school of theatrical adaptations of Shakespeare. ” 634

3.4 Sergei Prokofiev and the theatre

Prokofiev’s compositions for the theatre remain a relatively neglected area of study, although various articles deal with individual productions or the composer’s collaboration with Meyerhold. By virtue of the time period that they cover, the two major academic studies of Prokofiev’s works do not attempt a discrete survey of Prokofiev’s theatrical output. 635 Simon Morrison begins his account of the composer’s life and work in 1935, just before the composer’s return to permanent residence in the Soviet Union, and his book therefore only contains a single mention of the 1934 Egyptian Nights. David Nice, by contrast, ends his book at the same point. 636 Similarly, Prokofiev’s diaries stop in 1933. Elena Dolinskaia’s survey of Prokofiev’s theatre music promises much, but in fact it is mainly devoted to his operas and her coverage of the incidental music is quite cursory. 637 Accordingly there is no equivalent to Gerard McBurney’s overview of Shostakovich’s theatre music 638 or to Kevin Bartig’s account of Prokofiev’s film music. 639

632 Ibid., 28–29.
636 The second volume of David Nice’s book is in preparation.
637 Elena Dolinskaia, Teatr Prokof’eva, Moscow, Kompozitor, 2012.
The nature of the genre of incidental music in general and the time of Prokofiev’s theatre scores in particular means that any study of the composer’s output in this domain requires a multi-disciplinary approach: the evolution of Prokofiev’s personal musical style, the theatre director’s angle, the nature of the play itself and finally the underlying politico-cultural context. The four productions for which Prokofiev composed fall between 1934 and 1938, a transitional period for the composer and for the country. Preparing for his return to his homeland and already in his forties, Prokofiev was keen to show his devotion to his people and would use any occasion to publicise his music. For this purpose, theatre, cinema and radio were most attractive. Accordingly, trying to appease various popular and musical tastes, his opuses from this period include: children’s music – *Twelve Easy Pieces for Piano* and *Summer Day*, plus the suite derived from the latter (Op. 65, 65bis) and *Peter and the Wolf* (Op. 67), *Three Children Songs for Voice and Piano* (Op. 68); film music – *Lieutenant Kijé* and derived orchestral suite and songs (Op.61, 61bis), and *Alexander Nevsky*; ballet – *Romeo and Juliet* and derived suites (Op. 64, 64bis, 64ter); theatre/incidental music (see Table 3.1); as well as music ‘designed for more refined tastes of experienced musicians’\(^{640}\) – the Cello Concerto (Op. 58) later revised as Symphony-Concerto, and the Violin Concerto No. 2 (Op. 63).

**Table 3.1: Prokofiev’s music for stage and screen (1934-1938)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of composition</th>
<th>Title (Genre)</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Theatre/Studio</th>
<th>Date of premiere or release</th>
<th>Other version(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935-1936/ Op. 64</td>
<td>Romeo and Juliet (ballet)</td>
<td>Shakespeare (libretto by Radlov and Piotrovsky)</td>
<td>Radlov during composition Ivo Vána Psota for Brno premiere, Leonid Lavrovsky for Leningrad premiere (1940)</td>
<td>Intended for GATOB and then Bolshoi; premiered in Brno</td>
<td>30 Dec. 1938</td>
<td>Orchestral suites; Piano transcription</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936/ Op. 70</td>
<td>Queen of Spades (film)</td>
<td>Pushkin</td>
<td>Mikhail Romm</td>
<td>Mosfilm</td>
<td>Not realised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936/Op. 70</td>
<td>Boris</td>
<td>Pushkin</td>
<td>Meyerhold</td>
<td>Meyerhold</td>
<td>Not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With ‘popular’ music clearly outweighing serious compositions, Prokofiev seems to have been trying to prove himself ‘as a composer seeking simplicity, in order to aid the masses who wish to develop an understanding of music but are yet insufficiently experienced.’ In any case, if for Shostakovich the theatre and incidental music provided a ‘laboratory’ in which he could experiment and develop his skills in an abundance of ways, for Prokofiev composing for stage and screen offered a fine opportunity to showcase his adaptability and the range of his musical language.

In his quest for securing his place as composer par excellence, Prokofiev was helped by the fact that his collaborative projects were commissioned by the best-known cultural figures of the time: Nataliia Sats (Peter and the Wolf), Meyerhold (Boris Godunov), Tairov (Egyptian Nights and Eugene Onegin), Radlov (Romeo and Juliet and Hamlet) and Eisenstein. Notwithstanding the simplification of his musical language, Prokofiev took great care to conform to the demands of his collaborators. According to the directors’ requests, his incidental music ranged from melodeclamation for Egyptian Nights and Eugene Onegin to traditional song setting and musical numbers for Hamlet. It is tempting to explain this trend by referring to the politico-cultural context surrounding each production, notably the rise of Stalinist aesthetics and the reign of Socialist Realism. However, once specific instructions given by each director and the nature of each play and its appropriation are taken into account, it becomes clear that each work was the product of a complex negotiation between the authors, the artists and societal trends.

The Romeo and Juliet ballet project was not the first encounter between Radlov and Prokofiev, and nor would it be the last, as Table 3.1 shows. The two men had a longstanding friendship, mainly as chess partners. On 6 June 1925, in the course of a letter to Boris Asafiev

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>70bis</th>
<th>Godunov (theatre)</th>
<th>Theatre (Moscow)</th>
<th>realised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1936/ Op. 71</td>
<td>Eugene Onegin (theatre)</td>
<td>Pushkin</td>
<td>Taiov</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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641 Ibid.
from Paris, Prokofiev mentions that he met Radlov ‘fifteen years ago at a chess tournament’, and Radlov’s archive holds an early letter (most probably written in 1909) from Prokofiev addressing the director as ‘Dear Maestro’ and expressing the composer’s regret about missing their chess game. Notwithstanding their subsequent artistic collaborations, chess remained one of the main topics of discussion in their correspondence; in a postcard dated from April 1933, for instance, Prokofiev wrote how excited he was about some new chess moves and that he wanted to share them with Radlov so that the latter could study them.

Despite the rivalries between Radlov and Meyerhold, it was surprisingly Meyerhold who facilitated the creative collaboration of Radlov and Prokofiev, when he suggested that Radlov should direct the Leningrad premiere of *The Love for Three Oranges* in 1926. It was probably Meyerhold’s awareness of Radlov’s experience and success with Commedia dell’arte as practised in his Theatre of Popular Comedy that made him consider his former pupil for this task. Radlov did not disappoint anyone, least of all the composer. Prokofiev saw this production during his tour of the Soviet Union in 1927 and was completely taken by it:

> Somehow all the inventive little touches got me into the swing of the performance right from the start, and it was clear the production had been conceived with enthusiasm and talent. … I am astonished and delighted with the ingenuity and liveliness of Radlov’s production and embrace my old chess partner.

Up to the mid-1930s Radlov was never too far away from the world of opera and ballet. Prior to the *Romeo and Juliet* project he had staged two of Boris Asafiev’s ballets: *The Flames of Paris* in 1932 and *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* in 1934. Prokofiev’s music theatre career, on the other hand, was above all related to Meyerhold, with whom he collaborated and corresponded from 1916 until the very day of the director’s arrest in June 1939. Three of the composer’s seven operas were in one way or another associated with Meyerhold: He suggested that Prokofiev should compose an opera based on Carlo Gozzi’s *The Love for Three Oranges* and provided him with a translation; he made several unsuccessful attempts at

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645 NLR, f. 625, ed. khr. 465, l. 1; quoted in Wilson, ‘Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*: History of a Compromise’, 49.
staging *The Gambler*, especially in its revised version; and when arrested he was in the process of organising rehearsals of *Semyon Kotko*.

Meyerhold, who had studied music in his youth and considered his musical education as the basis of his work as a director, held a very high opinion of Prokofiev, to the point of regarding him as the future of Soviet opera. In his January 1925 speech addressing the problem of musical theatre, Meyerhold praised *The Gambler*, claiming that

> If it was published, one could close down all opera theatres for ten years. … I am convinced that after *Aida, The Queen of Spades, Eugene Onegin* finally start falling into the abyss – simply because these operas have been performed 200,000 times and the entire human race has heard them, and once everyone has heard *Eugene Onegin* then they will finally get tired of it – then they shall ask: What about opera? And then, it seems to me – I believe in it profoundly – that some new Wagner will appear – maybe his name is Prokofiev, I don’t know – who will get rid of such opera theatre and will make way for a new kind of opera.

Opera was not the only domain where Meyerhold and Prokofiev collaborated. As mentioned in Chapter 2.9.1, Prokofiev was the director’s first choice as the composer for his production of Mayakovsky’s *The Bedbug*. Working at the time on his ballet, *Les Pas d’acier*, for Diaghilev, Prokofiev had to turn down the commission for *The Bedbug*, which was subsequently offered to young Shostakovich. The other theatre project of Meyerhold and Prokofiev, the 1936 production of Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* to mark the centenary of the poet’s death, was never realised. Prokofiev had no luck either with his other two commissions for the Pushkin celebrations of 1937: a score for a filmed version of *The Queen of Spades* directed by Mikhail Romm and incidental music for a theatre production of *Eugene Onegin* directed by Alexander Tairov for his Moscow Kamernyi Teatr. For reasons unrelated to Prokofiev, who completed extensive musical scores, these projects were all censored and remained unrealised.

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649 Ibid., 70-71.
650 Prokofiev, Letter to Meyerhold, 8 January, 1929, in *Selected Letters of Sergei Prokofiev*, 76.
651 In 2007 the University of Princeton revived the production using Meyerhold’s notes and the almost complete Prokofiev score. For details, see Caryl Emerson and Simon Morrison, ‘Princeton’s Boris Godunov’, *Three Oranges*, No. 14 (November 2007), 2-4.
652 See Morrison, *People’s Artist*, 119-156.
Thus, prior to Radlov’s *Hamlet*, Prokofiev’s only theatre music to reach the stage was his score for Tairov’s 1934 *Egyptian Nights*, a production made up of a montage of three texts: an abridged version of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, with a prologue comprising extracts from George Bernard Shaw’s *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and with Pushkin’s poem, *Egyptian Nights*, as an interlude. Since the opening of his production of Vsevolod Vishnevskii’s *An Optimistic Tragedy* in December 1931, Tairov and his Moscow Chamber (Kamernii) Theatre, had been enjoying exceptional success and prestige. He presented his *Egyptian Nights* as ‘a characteristic example of the way we approach the classics’, with ‘the fundamental task’ being ‘to make it [classic drama] effective and stimulating, of real significance to the modern spectator.’ It was for such an audience that Prokofiev, as he publicly announced, was eager to compose. In order to get the best of both worlds, he opted for a similar strategy to Tairov – If Tairov alternated his epic Soviet productions with his experimental appropriations of the classics, Prokofiev categorised his works according to his intended audience: those ‘unafraid of modern idioms’ and ‘the newcomers who have not yet developed a mature understanding of music’. As Abensour and Petchenina argue, this ‘double standard’ served as a catalyst for the collaborations between Tairov and Prokofiev.

As early as 1929, Prokofiev had renounced the complexities of modern music in favour of a ‘new simplicity’ with ‘simpler means of instrumentation… simpler in form, less complex in counterpoint and more melodic’. Resonating with Radlov’s views on Soviet opera (see above), in 1934 Prokofiev suggested that Soviet music needed to be ‘above all great music, i.e. music that would correspond in form and in content to the grandeur of the epoch’. He defined such music as “‘light-serious” or “serious-light” ... It should be primarily melodious, and the melody should be clear and simple without however becoming repetitive or trivial.’

As concerns composing for theatre, Prokofiev insisted on the composer’s duty to distinguish dramatic plays from opera or ballet:

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653 Alexander Tairov, ‘How we produce the Classics’, *Soviet Travel*, 1941/3, quoted in *Three Oranges*, No. 7 (May 2004), 19.

654 Prokofiev showed his interest in several interviews, for example: ‘Soviet Audience and My Work’, *Soviet Travel*, 1934/3, quoted in *Three Oranges*, No. 7 (May 2004), 17-18.

655 Ibid., 17.


It is not for nothing that one goes to ‘hear’ an opera and to ‘see’ a drama. The composer cannot expect music in a dramatic production to play the same role as in opera or ballet. The purpose of music in a play is to enhance the impression and it should not be heard where the dramatic action can dispense with it. … Music for a play does not need to solve any special problems; it must merely accompany the performance and must above all be simple and easy to understand.\(^{659}\)

As much as these statements may be applicable to Prokofiev’s music to \textit{Hamlet}, he did not exactly follow his own advice while composing for \textit{The Egyptian Nights} or \textit{Eugene Onegin}. This may have been in response to Tairov’s idea of ‘synthetic theatre’, which advocated an organic unity of all elements of theatre.\(^{660}\) Accordingly Prokofiev worked on the text-music relationship, trying to incorporate the rhythm of Pushkin’s verse into his music. The result was neither an opera nor incidental music as such, but a ‘melodeclamation’ or ‘melodrama’ with the spoken word set to music. Although Prokofiev’s letters indicate that he had enjoyed working on the music of \textit{Egyptian Nights}, he seems to have agreed with critics who did not find Tairov’s hybrid text convincing:

\begin{quote}
However, despite the scintillating wit of Bernard Shaw, old man Shakespeare turned out to be such a titan by comparison that the desire arose to give him as much space as possible and as little as possible to Shaw. The excised Bernard dwindled down in weight and was transformed into one brief, unimportant episode tacked on to the beginning of the production.\(^{661}\)
\end{quote}

Abensour and Petchenina provide a detailed analysis of the score of \textit{The Egyptian Nights} and examples of its relationship to the text and Tairov’s concept, suggesting that the music provided the unifying element of a play made up of three different texts.\(^{662}\) However, they do not note that despite working for Meyerhold’s arch rival, Prokofiev did not shy away from referring to some of the director’s devices. Prokofiev’s scorn for the orchestra pit, for example, echoes Meyerhold’s Fuchs-inspired\(^{663}\) idea – traceable back to Wagner – of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Petchenina and Abensour, ‘Egyptian Nights In Search of the “New Simplicity”’", \textit{Three Oranges}, No. 7 (May 2004), 11-15.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
covering the orchestra pit and hence extending the stage and increasing the intimacy between the audience and the actors - an idea that Meyerhold famously employed in his 1910 production of Molière’s *Dom Juan*.664 Furthermore, Prokofiev decided to position the orchestra in two separate places, ‘to create a stereophonic effect’.665 Meyerhold had already used the idea of calling on two different orchestras in his 1917 production of Lermontov’s *Masquerade* at the Alexandrinsky Theatre, with incidental music by Glazunov.666

Glazunov supplied a possible model for another salient feature of *Egyptian Nights* – its use of the saxophone to convey an exotic atmosphere (Prokofiev seems also to have taken interest in Glazunov’s saxophone quartet, which he had heard at its premiere in Paris in December 1933). Describing cultural life in the French capital to Myaskovsky, Prokofiev wrote: ‘It was entirely obvious that with a stronger contrapuntal structure and with a greater attention to color and certain other devices, a saxophone ensemble has every right to exist and can even stand up quite well in a serious piece of music.’667 In the same letter, Prokofiev mentions that he was ‘working on music for a production at Tairov’s theatre’, which can only have been *Egyptian Nights*. Accordingly it is tempting to propose that the idea of using saxophones in his score to this play as well as in his previous film music to *Lieutenant Kizhé*, was influenced by Glazunov’s work. As well as trying out a ‘saxophone ensemble’ for its own sake, Prokofiev used it to provide an exotic touch to his incidental music depicting Egypt, to distinguish it further from Romans. For the latter, Prokofiev envisaged different orchestral timbres, using a tam-tam to depict the menace of Caesar’s force, as well as ‘an archaic *corno da caccia* for extra flavour, a modest reflection perhaps of Respighi’s six Roman *buccine* in the resplendent procession concluding *Pini di Roma*.668 The opposition of the two camps was one of Tairov’s main requirements.

Prokofiev worked similar timbral contrasts into the music for Meyerhold’s *Boris Godunov*, another commission for Pushkin’s jubilee celebration – and later into his film score to *Alexander Nevsky*. In *Godunov* the music for Russia was opposed to that of Poland: ‘Musically Russia is a world of bleak, stark contrasts, a place without musical instruments, where people hum rather than sing’, whereas ‘musical Poland is a world of tuneful melodies

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and thick, Hollywood-style orchestration." Elsewhere, Prokofiev juxtaposed diegetic (music with a visible source on the stage) and non-diegetic (here off-stage chorus) music in a similar way to his music for Eisenstein’s films. All these elements suggest that Prokofiev’s music to the productions of Meyerhold and Tairov was more than just incidental music in the way that his score to Radlov’s Hamlet represents, and indeed more than what he himself had claimed in his discussion on incidental music in general: ‘The composer will be well advised to confine himself to a few tunes frequently repeated so that by the end of the performance the audience will be humming them. It is better to have a few good tunes than many colourless or complicated melodies.’

Prokofiev’s method in the case of his pre-Hamlet theatre scores, which resembled his work on his ballets and film music, was a result of the respective directors’ extremely precise and detailed indications to him. In his letters, Meyerhold described in detail his requirements for each scene of Boris Godunov, down to the number of seconds each musical number should last. This was indeed in line with Prokofiev’s desired method of working, as he stated in an interview: ‘I prefer the playwright and the director to tell me exactly what they want. It is a great help to me when they can say, “Here I need a minute and a quarter of music” or “give me something tender and melancholy here.”’

Radlov would follow the composer’s advice and give him, in a long letter, detailed indications regarding the score of Hamlet. But Radlov emphasised the fact that he only required a few musical numbers, which he would then mix and match according to the requirements of scene and character. In compensation, he spent a great deal of time outlining the specific characteristics required for each of these episodes, as well as his understanding of Hamlet based on his extensive studies and experience with Shakespeare’s works, providing the composer with comparisons from other Shakespearean heroes, particularly from Othello. This would have relieved Prokofiev from the task of ‘visualizing’ the play:

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670 See Morrison, People’s Artist, 217-246.
673 Prokof’ev, ‘Izuchaite tekst, teatr, orkestr’ 102-103.
When I am asked to write the music for a play or film I rarely give my consent at once, even if I am familiar with the text of the play. It usually takes me five or ten days to ‘see’ the production, i.e., to visualize the characters, their emotions and the actions in terms of music. It is at this stage that the main musical themes usually suggest themselves.\(^674\)

As Deborah Wilson has pointed out, this visualisation was not limited to Prokofiev’s theatre music and could just as easily describe his approach to his ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*. Wilson argues that the earliest surviving documents regarding Prokofiev’s work on his ballet in fact show the composer trying to ‘see’ the tragedy by creating an outline of Shakespeare’s text rather than a ballet scenario.\(^675\) The document, dated January 1935, mentions none of the changes to the original tragedy that would occur later in work on the ballet score; nor does it contain the infamous ‘happy ending’. Prokofiev’s use of English for the title of scenes suggests that at the very least he had the original English text alongside the Russian translation. Given the collaboration with Radlov and his friend and colleague Adrian Piotrovsky, it is highly likely assume that Prokofiev used Anna Radlova’s translation, which was widely available following her husband’s production of the tragedy in 1935 (see above).

The similarity of working method should not be understood as the composer not distinguishing between music for opera and ballet and incidental music. However, it seems that for Prokofiev it was primarily the audience’s expectation that determined the difference, even if in all cases the music was to express what the visuals could not. Simon Morrison uses such visual-auditory relations to argue, albeit rather cursorily, that Prokofiev’s music for the original 1935 version of *Romeo and Juliet* with its controversial ‘happy ending’ made more sense than the revised 1940 version with Shakespeare’s original tragic end. According to the former ending ‘in the last act Romeo arrives a minute earlier, finds Juliet alive and everything ends well.’\(^676\) Prokofiev explained the reason for such apparent barbarism as ‘purely choreographic: living people can dance, the dying cannot’. He also referred to a more Radlovian justification based on the fact that ‘Shakespeare himself was said to have been uncertain about the ends of his plays (*King Lear*) and parallel with *Romeo and Juliet* had written *Two Gentlemen of Verona* in which all ends well.’ He also mocked the fact that the news of this change in the ballet was received calmly in London but that ‘our own

\(^674\) Ibid.

\(^675\) Wilson, ‘Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*: History of a Compromise’, 72-75.

\(^676\) Prokofiev, *Soviet Diary 1927 and Other Writings*, 299.
Shakespeare scholars proved more papal than the pope and rushed to the defence of Shakespeare. Such a reaction is of course reminiscent of Soviet critics’ responses to Akimov’s *Hamlet*, by contrast with broad Western approval and even praise for director’s controversial approach.

In his close study and reconstruction of the original ‘happy ending’ for *Romeo and Juliet* Morrison brackets together Prokofiev and Radlov (and at times Piotrovsky) without ascribing the idea to any of them individually. Alongside Radlov’s updating of Shakespeare in line with Proletarian ideas, Morrison suggests that the concept of the ‘happy ending’ was also ‘an elaboration of the central precept of Christian Science, whose teachings Prokofiev esteemed: “No form or physical combination is adequate to represent infinite love”’. The tenets of Christian Science, which Morrison later cites while discussing the emergence of a triumphant C major at the end of the final musical number of Radlov’s *Hamlet*, could also be argued to have much in common with the positive outlook recommended by the doctrine of Socialist Realism.

Contrary to received wisdom, Prokofiev and Radlov’s replacing *Romeo and Juliet*’s tragedy by transcendence had received a positive reaction from the critic and Central Committee advisor, Sergei Dinamov, who, according to Radlov’s letter to Prokofiev ‘in general approves of it, even with the happy ending, but recommends being careful naming it – adding something like “on motives of Shakespeare” or another cautious subtitle.’ But the adversaries were undeniably strong, and when facing the many obstacles regarding their ballet’s being premiered, Prokofiev and subsequently Radlov accepted defeat and changed the ending back to the original Shakespearean one.

In the intervening years between work on *Romeo and Juliet* and the premiere of *Hamlet* in 1938, much had changed in the life of the composer and in the politico-cultural climate of the country. The infamous *Pravda* article, ‘Muddle instead of music’ of 28 January 1936 attacking Shostakovich’s opera, *Lady Macbeth* was quickly followed by another condemning the composer’s ballet *The Limpid Stream* and its librettist, Adrian Piotrovsky. This marked the start of a wave of ferocious repression within cultural circles, ultimately with many

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677 Ibid.
679 Ibid.
680 Ibid.
victims, including most famously Meyerhold, who was arrested and executed in 1939. In the meantime, in January 1936 Prokofiev permanently settled in the Soviet Union but was subsequently (after a last tour to America in 1938) deprived of his external passport, with his official status changed from *vyezdnoi* (allowed to travel) to *nevyezdnoi* (disallowed).682 This meant that he was unable to attend the successful Czechoslovakian premiere of his *Romeo and Juliet* in Brno in December 1938.

It is difficult to explain why Prokofiev rather than Asafiev composed the music to *Hamlet*, given that the latter had been the composer of choice for all Radlov’s previous Shakespearean productions. It could have been as a result of the disappointments related to the realisation of *Romeo and Juliet*, or that Prokofiev had reportedly reflected on composing an opera based on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*683 and showed interest in the production of his chess partner as a stepping-stone towards this larger project. Be that as it may, following Radlov’s detailed letter (see below) in which he outlined the specificities of the music needed for his production, Prokofiev completed the score after his return from what was to be his last visit abroad on 23 April 1938. Soon afterwards he started working on the film score to Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*.684

In accordance with Radlov’s requests, and probably due to the low quality of the Theatre orchestra, Prokofiev’s music to *Hamlet* has fewer numbers and is less elaborated than his previous incidental scores. However, an account of one of the rehearsals in the presence of the composer shows that he had no less interest in the production and in the compatibility between the music and stage:

> He [Prokofiev] stopped the orchestra more than once. Rushing from the director’s table where he was sitting with Radlov, he hurried down to the orchestral rail and whispered something to the conductor [Nikolai Ershov]. When he went back, the music sounded better and more together. … A composer with an international reputation, Prokofiev had just [sic!] returned from America. He came to Leningrad and applying himself to musicians who were patently not up to what he had written for them, did not show dissatisfaction or disappointment, but worked steadily to

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682 Morrison, ‘Romeo and Juliet’, 7.
achieve what had to be achieved. Sitting at the table with a low light, Radlov kept quiet – he was grateful for the composer’s involvement.685

Although Prokofiev’s music was more modest and less strikingly original than Shostakovich’s for Akimov’s Hamlet, both scores displayed awareness of current stylistic and public demands, and both were highly praised. However, the more organic relation of Prokofiev’s music to Radlov’s staging and concept meant that the press did not discuss it separately, and it could therefore be argued that it served the foremost function of incidental music more faithfully (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Sergei Radlov’s Hamlet – Musical Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical number, title</th>
<th>Place and function according to Radlov’s letter</th>
<th>Character indication, metre and tonality</th>
<th>Remarks in published score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Ghost of Hamlet’s Father</td>
<td>Appearance of the Ghost: twice in first act, during snowstorm Third appearance: (probably) Queen’s bed&lt;br&gt;room scene, more domestic setting</td>
<td>Andante lugubre&lt;br&gt;4/4, a</td>
<td>‘After the repetition to be continued as long as the scene requires’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Claudius’s March</td>
<td>Second scene of First act as Claudius, Gertrude and the rest of court enters the stage&lt;br&gt;Beginning of second act Third act before the ‘Mousetrap’</td>
<td>Moderato con brio&lt;br&gt;4/4, Eb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fanfares / I</td>
<td>Included in the description of 2</td>
<td>4/4, Ab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fanfares / II</td>
<td>Included in the description of 2</td>
<td>4/4, Ab</td>
<td>Fanfares are played more than once. If a fanfare is required before ‘Pantomime’, play I but a tone higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pantomime</td>
<td>To replace the ‘dumb show’ of Shakespeare’s text; depicts love affair between an old queen and a young handsome man to whom she gives the stolen crown Musical accompaniment for the following spoken words in the style of Japanese or Chinese theatre</td>
<td>Allegro moderato&lt;br&gt;4/4, Eb, then a and back to&lt;br&gt;Eb</td>
<td>After the repetition, continue as long as needed or finish on the bar marked ‘for ending’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ophelia’s First Song: ‘How</td>
<td>Finish with line: ‘budto dozhnik letom’</td>
<td>Andante&lt;br&gt;4/4, g</td>
<td>Anna Radlova’s translation. Conversations between verses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **should I your** true love know? | could take place during the ‘otygrynsh’ (codetta) R3 (the last four bars) – in that case the music will be continuous. But it is also possible to have a pause if desired. It is possible after the third verse to complete or not otygrynsh R3. (Prokofiev’s remark) |
| 6. Ophelia’s Second Song: ‘Tomorrow is St Valentine’s Day’ | Finish with line ‘vot chto on mne skazal’ *Otygrynsh* to be played four times after each four lines or twice after each eight, to which she dances lightly | *Andante* D |
| 7. Ophelia’s Third Song: ‘They bore him barefaced on the bier’ | Has only four lines | *Andante* 4/4, C |
| 8. Ophelia’s Fourth Song: ‘And will he not come again’ | Has ten uninterrupted lines | *Andante* espressivo 4/4, a minor |
| ‘For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy’ | Single line | Same tone as first song |
| To be song on the motif of the first song in this way: (music) Orchestral accompaniment as in first song. |
| 9. The Gravedigger’s Song | Fifth act | *Sostenuto* 4/4, C |
| 10. The Concluding March of Fortinbras | Just before Osric’s ‘here comes young Fortinbras with victory’ The march starts from far away almost inaudible but victorious. Thirty seconds after Hamlet’s death the march expands in sound and continues two more minutes while getting louder and louder. Image of march closer to Ghost’s music than Claudius’s flamboyant mannerism. | *Andante* maestoso – *Meno mosso* 4/4, Bb, then C |
3.5 Hamlet (1938): The production as reported

For Radlov, Hamlet was a natural continuation of his work on Shakespeare’s tragedies using his wife’s new, functional and somewhat controversial translations. His theatre was now installed in larger premises and its acquired reputation as a ‘Shakespeare laboratory’ meant that every Shakespearean production was a highly awaited event with extensive media coverage both in advance and subsequently.

In a detailed account of Radlov’s Hamlet, Il’ia Berezark presents what he calls a ‘portrait of the production’, wherein he describes each scene from the audience’s point of view. A professional theatre critic, Berezark seems to have attended most of the performances throughout the two seasons preceding his book, and hence his account of the staging could be considered the closest thing possible to a video reportage of the show, albeit one that is commented and critiqued throughout. Berezark’s quotes from the now lost production book, together with several articles by critics and scholars as well some material from letters of contemporaries who attended the performances and of course Radlov’s writings and presentations (doklady), previews and correspondence (particularly with Prokofiev) are here employed as the main sources from which to analyse the production. Without a musico-dramatic synopsis of the kind that is preserved for Akimov/Shostakovich Hamlet, the place of each musical number is worked out using all the above-mentioned material, as well as Prokofiev’s manuscripts and sketchy outline of the numbers as reported in Kochurova’s 1952 letter to Prokofiev. However, given that her account was derived from materials from the time of Radlov Theatre’s residence (in reduced form) during the War in western Ukraine - materials that were at the time apparently preserved in fragmentary form - her information will be mainly used as a way of confirming hypotheses regarding the place of musical numbers (see Table 3.3).

Similarly to Akimov, Radlov tried to retain as much of Shakespeare’s tragedy as he could, keeping the cuts to a minimum, which meant including a few of the often deleted scenes. In a letter to archivist Elizaveta Konshina (1890-1972), Olga Knipper-Chekhova mentions this aspect: ‘Was at Radlov’s for Hamlet, 7:30 to 12:30 – can you imagine it? Average. Hamlet clearly enjoys his image but doesn’t bring it up to the audience. He mumbles on the stage for

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686 Zolotnitsky, Sergei Radlov: The Shakespearean Fate of a Soviet Director, 176.
687 Il’ia Berezark, Gamlet v Teatre im. Leningradskogo Soveta, 105
688 Contrary to Bereark’s account Kochurova’s notes suggests that the production was in four acts. It is possible that due to the War conditions and the reduced number of actors and crew, the production was shortened. The whereabouts of the material she refers to are currently unknown.
himself. But not too bad. There are scenes that are not often performed (in other productions). Radlov argued that as an actor, Shakespeare had clearly planned the structure of his plays according to the physical and emotional possibilities of the leading actor: ‘great tension in the first act (or first part), some rest and relative weakening in the second, huge emotional explosion in the third, almost complete rest during the fourth in order to prepare for the blow of the final and deciding fifth act.’ Accordingly, it was the second and fourth acts that would provide the easiest option for the necessary cuts. However, as Berezkin observes, such a solution would mean that the leading actors would have no chance of recovery from the great pressure of the most demanding acts. He suggests that this might explain why the reception of those Shakespearean productions with great actors such as Mikhoels and Ostuzhev surpassed Radlov’s stagings at his own theatre with his younger, less experienced actors.

As the director of a Shakespearean theatre, Radlov did not consider any of the changes Akimov brought to Shakespeare’s text and the order of scenes. Hence there is no equivalent to Akimov’s prologue being read by Horatio (see Chapter 2.10.1).

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690 Radlov, ‘Rabota nad Shekspirom’, Teatr, 1939/4, 64.
### Table 3.3: Hypothetical Musical-dramatic Scenario of Radlov/Prokofiev *Hamlet*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act/Scene (Shakespeare’s if different)</th>
<th>Music (No. in Manuscript)</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I/1</td>
<td>The Ghost Theme (1)</td>
<td>First appearance(s) of the Ghost</td>
<td>Terrace of the Castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/2</td>
<td>Claudius’s March (2) complete</td>
<td>Arrival of Claudius and Gertrude</td>
<td>Large room in the palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claudius’s speech and conversations with Hamlet, etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claudius’s March (2) ending</td>
<td>Exit of Claudius and Gertrude followed by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/3</td>
<td>Ophelia’s (second?) song (6)</td>
<td>Laertes parting with Polonius and Ophelia, Polonius’s advice to his children</td>
<td>In front of the curtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/4</td>
<td>Fanfare No. 1</td>
<td>Claudius’s celebrations heard from afar</td>
<td>Terrace of the Castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ghost Theme (1)</td>
<td>Hamlet’s encounter with the Ghost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fanfare No. 2</td>
<td>End of Act I</td>
<td>Curtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II/1 (II/2)</td>
<td>Fanfare No. 1, Pantomime (probably accompanying actors arrival) 695</td>
<td>Claudius and Gertrude are having a private dinner. They receive Rosencrantz and Guildenstern followed by Polonius</td>
<td>Interior of the palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hamlet is pretending to be mad. He teases Polonius</td>
<td>In front of the curtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hamlet receives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern</td>
<td>Gallery in the castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The actors arrive, Hamlet asks for Hecuba’s monologue, the scene finishes with Hamlet’s soliloquy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III/1</td>
<td>Polonius reveals his plan</td>
<td>Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to Be’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hamlet and Ophelia meet while being watched (the nunnery scene)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III/2</td>
<td>Fanfares</td>
<td>Arrival of the guests</td>
<td>Hall in the castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pantomime</td>
<td>Pantomime followed by</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pantomime and fanfares</td>
<td>‘Murder of Gonzago’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flute solo</td>
<td>Recorder (Flute) scene: Hamlet confronts Rosencrantz and Guildenstern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III/3</td>
<td>The King’s prayer</td>
<td>Gertrude’s closet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III/4</td>
<td>The Ghost Theme</td>
<td>Hamlet confront his Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He kills Polonius accidently</td>
<td>Gertrude’s closet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

695 Kochurova’s letter does not indicate the precise place for this musical number.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV/1 (IV/2)</td>
<td>The Ghost reminds Hamlet not to mistreat his mother</td>
<td>Semi-dark scene (a passage in the castle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV/2 (IV/3)</td>
<td>Hamlet hides Polonius’s dead body but confronts with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who arrest him</td>
<td>A room in the castle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV/3 (IV/5)</td>
<td>Hamlet is interrogated by Claudius and sent to England Claudius’s soliloquy</td>
<td>A luxurious hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V/1 (IV/6 and IV/7)</td>
<td>Ophelia’s songs</td>
<td>Ophelia’s madness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V/2 (V/1)</td>
<td>Horatio receives the news of Hamlet’s adventure with the pirates and his return</td>
<td>In front of closed curtains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V/3 (V/2)</td>
<td>Osric invites Hamlet to a duel with Laertes</td>
<td>In front of closed curtains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hamlet and Horatio enter and start chatting with them; Hamlet contemplates on death holding Yorik’s skull</td>
<td>Same big hall as I/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ophelia’s funeral and fight between Hamlet and Laertes</td>
<td>Graveyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Osric invites Hamlet to a duel with Laertes</td>
<td>Graveyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hamlet and Laertes fight to death</td>
<td>Graveyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gertrude is poisoned and dies</td>
<td>Graveyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hamlet kills Polonius but he dies too</td>
<td>Graveyard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V/3 (V/2)</td>
<td>Fortinbras’ march</td>
<td>Fortinbras arrives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5.1 Radlov Hamlet Act 1

The curtains open to the first scene set on a terrace in Elsinore, lit by a light blue colour evoking the northern sky. Believing in the necessity of differentiating between Shakespeare’s nordic tragedy and his southern ones (i.e. *Othello, Romeo and Juliet*) Berezark suggests that the stage designer, Vladimir Dmitriev and Radlov should use the blue tones of Leningrad’s White Nights as the closest thing they knew to a northern landscape. Shivering guards indicate the cold, and fear is in the air. Horatio is the only non-military person, and everyone is respectful towards him. He is in a simple student outfit. The Shakespeare critic, John Dover

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693 Berezark, *Gamlet*, 54.
Wilson, whose classic study, *What Happens in Hamlet* is extensively quoted in Radlov’s presentations and previews, explains that Shakespeare tried ‘to make the Ghost a dramatically convincing figure’ through stressing ‘its actuality by exhibiting the effect of the apparition upon characters holding different opinions about the spirit world, opinions which would be entertained by different parts of the audience’. After a thorough examination of Catholic, Protestant, and sceptical thoughts about ghosts, Wilson concludes that Marcellus and Barnardo ‘typify the ghost-lore of the average unthinking Elizabethan’, whereas Horatio ‘comes on to the stage as a disciple of Reginald Scot, or at any rate as a sceptic in regard to the objectivity of spectres’. Hamlet, on the other hand, represents the Protestant point of view, so he asks himself, ‘Is it his father’s spirit indeed, or a devil, or even possibly an angel?’ Radlov agrees that the presence of scholar Horatio might be a result of soldiers asking for him, believing that his university education allows him to judge the nature of the wandering ghost. In Radlov’s production, the first appearance of the Ghost is not visible to the audience and is merely evoked by the reaction of the soldiers, the ranting words of Horatio in their defence, and, most probably, the Ghost’s musical theme. Soon the Ghost reappears, this time to the audience as well, walking past everyone to the accompaniment of his music and exiting from the gate.

In his detailed letter to Prokofiev, Radlov indicated that the Ghost of Hamlet’s father makes three appearances. It could be worked out that these were the Ghost’s appearance to the soldiers, and his reappearance to Hamlet in Act 1, and his return or evocation in Act 4 (Act 3 in Kochurova’s letter) during the closet scene, where he reminds Hamlet that his mother was not to be mistreated. The two appearances of the Ghost in the first act were to take place during ‘a stormy, dark night, while the wind is whistling and autumn leaves are swirling around, even maybe a snowstorm / these are all not for the music, I shall be in charge of them independently: that is to say with the help of sound-montage machines (*zvukomontazhnie mashini*)’. Radlov insists that Prokofiev’s music should make the appearance of the Ghost

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696 Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, 59-60
697 Ibid., 66, 70, 71.
699 Radlov, ‘Letter to Prokofiev’, 1
‘incredibly significant, ceremonial, the royal entrance of a true hero, a warrior, a loving and awe-inspiring father’. 700

Following Radlov’s instructions, an important characteristic of Prokofiev’s music for the Ghost is the absence of ‘any mysticism’. This aspect has been explained, particularly in Western studies, as Radlov’s recognising that mysticism was ‘anathema to Stalinist-era aesthetics’. 701 On the surface this is not implausible. However, a close study of Radlov’s previous writings on Shakespeare, his references to the likes of Dover Wilson, and his instructions as they appear in the letter to Prokofiev, suggest that the non-mystical interpretation of the Ghost could have been sincerely and independently conceived by the director as being the most truthful to Shakespeare. Indeed he writes: ‘And least of all, there must be nothing mystical in the appearance of the Ghost; not because this is what our materialist era requires from us, but because this is how Shakespeare thinks and feels’. 702

In a related way, Akimov’s non-ghost solution was also the result of a close reading of Elizabethan theatre traditions and a perception that the appearance of a ghost was a usual feature of that time, which could not be thoughtlessly transferred to contemporary theatre because of the very different expectations of the modern audience. 703 From similar reasoning Radlov chose a different solution, which emphasises the mission of the Ghost rather than its metaphysical nature:

Clearly, the ghost of a murdered person does not reappear in the light of day for nothing. He has come to earth in order to tell his son the reason of his death; and for Shakespeare this is absolutely natural. That is why the characteristics of Hamlet’s father and the aspects of his entrance on the stage are a sort of depiction of the nature of this magnificent, severe, brave and straightforward person and certainly have nothing to do with the characteristics of being surprised at seeing a dead person coming back from grave. This [event] is unusual mainly because of its being ceremonial and majestic rather than because of reversing the laws of nature. 704

The Ghost’s musical theme (first musical number in the score) reappears in a fuller version later in this act (Scene 4). While the stage is changed for the second scene, the second main

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700 Ibid.
701 Simon Morrison, The People’s Artist, 83.
703 Akimov presents this theory in most of his pre-premiere writings and presentations (doklady).
musical theme of the play is heard; this is Claudius’s march. Berezark describes this music as a ceremonial, bravura ‘Danish march’, though he understandably does not attempt to put his finger on any specifically Danish qualities in it. The main theme, like the Ghost theme, would come back throughout the play to depict the entrances of Claudius, the Queen and the rest of their court. According to Radlov’s letter, this musical number (to which Radlov adds ‘fanfares’) was to recur ‘at the start of the second scene of the first act, and then at the beginning of the second act and most probably in the third act before the “Mousetrap” scene’. This theme, which Berezark qualifies as ‘mincing’ (zhemanniy) is in fact a musical portrait of Claudius, as Radlov describes to Prokofiev:

How should Claudius be depicted? He is a clever monarch of a new Machiavellian type, stronger in diplomacy and courtly intrigues than in military cases, insolent, handsome, in his own way bright, who can speak well and seduce women. With him, the Danish Royal court forgets about the somehow severe simple-mindedness (prostovatost’) of morals [which were] so essential to Hamlet’s father. And in general Claudius creates around him that atmosphere of court luxury, ceremony, bows, reverences, exquisite turns of phrase, mannered obsequiousness (slashchavost’) and etiquette in every aspect of life, whose generation consists of Osric, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: the atmosphere of lies and pretension which Hamlet hates and which is suffocating him. That is why it seems to me that Claudius’s march is at the same time elegant, mannered, self-pleased, and self-confident; in it, it’s as if the image of the courtly life of the last years of Elizabeth’s reign is depicted.

Prokofiev’s vivid music echoes Radlov’s reading of Claudius as a cunning leader, refraining from the traditional evil portrait of the ‘usurper king’. Claudius’s refined manners are depicted in a balletic musical number which is close Prokofiev’s music to ‘The Minuet’ in Romeo and Juliet, having very few march-like characteristics, despite the title. Several solo instrumental episodes could be interpreted as representing different members of Claudius’s flamboyant court. Prokofiev takes extra care to mark the irregular accentuations that subvert the indicated 4/4 metre (Ex. 3.1). The middle section of this number becomes more reflective and acquires a darker atmosphere, in accordance with Claudius’s evil deeds and the tragic

705 Berezark, Gamlet, 106.
706 In Radlov’s letter, ‘fanfares’ is added by hand to the description of this number, but the word does not appear in Kochurova’s list.
708 Berezark, Gamlet, 54.
events to come. Furthermore, in order to symbolise the contrast and opposition, Claudius’s music is set in E flat major - that is, a maximally distant tritone away from the Ghost’s A minor march.

Ex. 3.1: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Claudius’s March

![Ex. 3.1: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Claudius’s March](image)

The contrast between the world of Claudius and his men and that of Hamlet and his father’s ideals is visually emphasised too. The second scene is set in a cosy, colourful room of the palace; the entire decor is opposite to the previous scene (see Plate 3.1). Here a big hall is decorated with green curtains and family portraits, and a red podium with two steps leads the eye to where the King and Queen are sitting in their chairs, surrounded by the courtiers standing in a straight line parallel to the ramp. On the left is Laertes and on the right Hamlet in his traditional black mourning clothes, like ‘a black stain on the background of the courtiers’. ⁷¹⁰

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Being an actor of Stanislavsky’s school, Dmitri Dudnikov\textsuperscript{711} applied ‘the system’ rather directly and hence required from Radlov some slight psychological and biographical details about Hamlet’s background story. Radlov for his part believed that such a system, while appropriate for Chekhov, Gorky and Ostrovsky, was out of place for Shakespeare’s tragedy, where even the geographical and historical context is debatable (\textit{uslovna}), and he refused to provide the information Dudnikov sought. This is where, according to Berezark, the collaboration between the actor and director underwent serious challenges. For Radlov the psychological and sociological truth were more important than trivial, everyday (\textit{bytovaia}) details. However, the Stanislavsky ‘method’ constituted the backbone of Dudnikov’s creative work, and hence he invented a background story from his own imagination, thereby creating divergences from Radlov’s more scholarly reading of the character. For example, Dudnikov imagined the arrival of Hamlet at Elsinore (which would precede the second scene of Act 1) in the following way: Hamlet is on board a sailing ship approaching the Danish coast. In the light of the setting sun he sees the towers of the castle and on them celebratory flags instead of the mourning ones he had expected. An old servant tells him about the wedding of his mother, and Hamlet enters the castle with great shame and finds himself in the middle of a celebratory reception at court. This back story determined the actor’s crucial opening pose on

\textsuperscript{711} Dmitri Dudnikov (1895-1964), theatre and cinema actor.
the stage: lowered head, right hand on the hilt of his sword, wandering eyes, giving answers to the first question that are sharp, dull, almost irrelevant.\textsuperscript{712}

After his first ceremonial speech and having faced Hamlet’s dry and official response, Claudius hurries to save the celebratory atmosphere, inviting everyone to a feast, and with the same ‘Danish march’ the King and Queen leave, followed by the courtiers, among them Polonius and Laertes, who are discussing and thus preparing the audience for the scene at Ophelia’s chambers.\textsuperscript{713} This balletic and almost artificially refined exit music, in perfect harmony with Radlov’s reading and with the setting, is very different from the same scene in Akimov’s production, where, with the help of Shostakovich’s grotesque and coarsely festive music, the King and Queen were presented in caricaturish fashion.

After the regal exit, in a short episode reminiscent of Akimov’s ‘wine cellar’ scene, Hamlet approaches the throne that has been left behind. But unlike Akimov’s Hamlet, who is determined to regain what was is legally his, Radlov’s prince looks troubled and confused and delivers his first monologue ‘Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt’. The two actors who alternated in the title role took different approaches here. Dudnikov delivered the soliloquy with a mixture of shame and sadness, while Boris Smirnov’s prince was more emotional and suggested Hamlet’s desire to fight. Here Horatio and the soldiers arrive. Hamlet is genuinely happy to see them. ‘These are people he trusts and with whom he does not need to pretend.’\textsuperscript{714}

In his quest to focus the audience’s attention on the actors and the ongoing action rather than on distracting special effects and stage tricks, and also to allow smooth transitions, Radlov chose to have several scenes realised in front of the curtains in foreground (\textit{krupnyi plan}). The next scene (III/3) is one of them. Laertes’s parting with Polonius and Ophelia takes place in front of a small yellowish curtain. The scene is acted in a fast tempo, with Ophelia blank and submissive, and Polonius and his teachings assuming the centre of attention. Berezark notes that this scene is accompanied by a gentle, lyrical, and at the same time mincing (\textit{zhemannaia}) music which points towards Ophelia’s future theme.\textsuperscript{715} However, it is not clear from the score which musical number he is referring to. From Berezark’s description it could have been one of Ophelia’s songs, most probably the first, which is also used for the little

\textsuperscript{712} Ibid., 59-61.
\textsuperscript{713} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{714} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{715} Ibid., 108.
'Robin’ song; Kochurova’s letter suggests that it might have been either the first or the second song (see below for discussing of Ophelia’s songs).

The fourth scene goes back to the terrace of the castle. It is night time, cold and snowy. Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus, all shivering, hear from the distance the continuation of Claudius’s celebratory feast. Unlike Akimov’s production, which used an elaborate number by Shostakovich specifically composed for this purpose, Radlov only subtly suggests the ongoing party, using offstage timpani and trumpets - most probably a mix-and-match from Prokofiev’s fanfares. This turns out to be an effective dramatic strategy as Radlov keeps the most powerful element of Prokofiev’s score for the following episode of the appearance of the Ghost of Hamlet’s father. In the midst of a furious snowstorm and frenzied wind, from the left of the stage the silhouette of the Ghost appears as a black shadowy figure dressed in knightly armour. He passes across the stage, lifting his arm as if beckoning the Prince. Despite his friends’ warning, Hamlet starts following the Ghost, with his hands stretched out in front of him and with uneven steps, as if sleepwalking. Prokofiev’s music here anticipates his score to the famous ‘Battle on the Ice’ for Eisenstein’s Alexander Nevsky, in that the bass line consists of repeated notes followed by a motif within a narrow range which references the symbolic ‘Cross’ figure from J.S. Bach (see Ex. 3.2). In the score of Nevsky, similar motifs are assigned to the Teutonic knights, explained by Prokofiev as ‘sing(ing) Catholic Psalms as they march into battle’. 716


a)

Andante lugubre \( \dot{\text{=} 68-72} \)

b)

[Allegro moderato \( \dot{\text{=} 112} \)]

Berezark describes the music of the Ghost scene as evoking ‘gust, …storm, unrest’.\(^{717}\) Employing his favourite tick-tock accompaniment, as if echoing the rhythm of heartbeats, Prokofiev stresses the uneasy walk of the Ghost and Hamlet through the snowstorm, tenuto articulation evoking their heavy footsteps. By adding his signature sharpened fourth degree to the harmonic palette, the composer creates a tritone between the tenuto line and the bass, further emphasising the troubled atmosphere of this scene.

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The stage is empty for a moment, with the snowstorm and the music as the main protagonists. Then the Ghost reappears, now walking steadily but tired, followed by Hamlet who is out of breath and hence refuses to go on. Then the storm calms down and the Ghost delivers his solemn speech, during which Hamlet reacts with a mixture of emotions ranging from anger and rage to shame.

### 3.5.2 Radlov Hamlet Act 2

Despite his efforts to include as much of Shakespeare’s text as possible, Radlov had to cut out several scenes, including the first of the second act, which is indeed often omitted as it does not directly impact on the general line of the tragedy. The second act of Radlov’s production therefore opens with Shakespeare’s second scene, which is set in the intimate, peaceful interior of the palace. The cosiness and comfort are underlined by the green velvet, gold-plated tables of meat and fruits. The King and Queen are having a private dinner, and lovingly they drink from the same cup. Here Radlov takes advantage of this short added episode in order to establish the nature of the relationship between Claudius and Gertrude as one based on love and not simply a thirst for power. The theme of the cup is subtly planted in the audience’s subconscious, as the same cup and the Queen’s trust in her husband will later lead to her poisoning in the fifth act. In this opening of the second act, Radlov introduces the mute character of the court fool, which he adds to Shakespeare’s tragedy. It is hard not to associate this added character with the concept of the ‘holy fool’ or ‘Iurodivyi’, as employed, for example, in Musorgsky’s opera, *Boris Godunov*. Radlov’s fool is constantly around the King, sometimes suddenly sitting on his chair. The King is sometimes kind to him but sometimes pushes him away and punishes him. All this may well have been inspired by Radlov’s work on *King Lear* in 1935. Although it seems that Radlov added the character to suggest a materialisation of Claudius’s inner world and consciousness, Berezark believes that the idea was not very successful and that it was not clear what the director wanted to prove.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive (probably after Fanfare No. 1) and pay their respects to the royal couple. Soon Polonius enters and loudly declares his discoveries regarding the real reason behind Hamlet’s madness. Radlov, clearly sympathetic to Gertrude, continues developing the tragic line of the Queen, in that she is caught between her love for her new

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719 See Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 75.

720 Berezark, *Gamlet*, 103.
husband and her affection for her son, realising gradually the intractability of such a love triangle: She seems sincerely saddened by the issues surrounding Hamlet.

The continuation of the scene takes place in front of closed curtains: this is the arena for Hamlet’s apparent madness and his mocking of Polonius. Far removed from Akimov and Shostakovich’s slapstick staging of Hamlet’s madness, Radlov’s prince enters reading a book while Polonius is watching him from a corner. Polonius starts a conversation with Hamlet in a tone clearly meant for talking to a mad person, while Hamlet calmly replies in an increasingly sarcastic tone. Berezark quotes from Radlov’s rezhisserskii ekземпляр (now missing) on the director’s idea of each character; when talking of Polonius’s image, Radlov warned against turning the character into a joker and overdoing the funny side. ‘Joking (шутовство) in the image of Polonius has become some sort of theatrical tradition. Even Shchepkin, 721 who is the founder of realism on Russian stage, kept the joker image of Polonius in part. We know this from writings of Belinsky.’ 722 This is why Radlov asked the actor playing Polonius to remember that Polonius is above all a ‘барыня’ (gentleman) and ‘сановник’ (dignitary). Polonius is wise in his own way. True, he is sometimes laughed at and mocked, especially by Hamlet, but this applies to all the court people. Radlov did not deny that Polonius has some comic features of his own - fussiness and extreme self-liking - but merely required that these should not predominate (see Plate 3.2). Berezark, however, considered that the actor of Polonius failed to realise Radlov’s concept, and that comedy remained his salient feature. 723

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722 Berezark, Gamlet, 35.
723 Ibid.
Soon Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear on the stage, whilst the curtains slowly open onto a gallery of the castle. The two approach Hamlet carefully and start a conversation, in which they seek to gain the prince’s trust. Hamlet, however, appears strange and makes unusual remarks, whilst trying to discover the real reason behind the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They finally change the subject by announcing the arrival of the wandering actors, news which results in a gust of happiness and excitement in Hamlet.

Throughout the production, Radlov was careful to demonstrate the individual features of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, avoiding what he saw as the common mistake of representing them as twins. In Radlov’s reading, Rosencrantz, played by Evgenyi Zabiakin, is soft and gentle, with lyrical and subtle movements, and he approaches Hamlet affectionately, trying to gain his trust. On the other hand Guildenstern, played by Kirill Ussakovskii, is much rougher, more direct and even as Berezark puts it ‘course’ (grubyi), conversing in a dry and almost official tone. He feels humiliated and is enraged by each harsh word of Hamlet. They are even distinctive in their appearances: Rosencrantz has a constant fake smile and is dressed simply but ceremonially, whereas Guildenstern barely smiles, wears sumptuous clothes and always has a hat with a feather on his head. In this way Guildenstern mirrors part of Claudius’s personality, his delicate manners and manipulative strategies, as well as his cruel

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724 Ibid., 97
725 Ibid., 98.
intentions and deeds. In his Rezhisserskii ekzempliar, Radlov apparently insisted:

‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are little Claudiuses. Fate has brought them together. They decided to work together even though they might have hated one another. In fact they are afraid that one would get ahead of the other (in serving the King). At the same time these are smart people, not stupid ones; they have noble looks and charm.’

Soon after the flourish of trumpets for the actors (one of Prokofiev’s fanfares, probably No. 1), Polonius comes bustling in to tell the Prince the news of their arrival (probably to the ‘Pantomime’ music number).

The actors are received warmly and sincerely by Hamlet who addresses them in friendly tones (see Plate 3.3). Radlov used every opportunity to stress those features of Hamlet’s character that he claimed had been left out of many older productions. Above all this concerned what he called Hamlet’s ‘democracy’, which he believed was ‘not only in that he hates the King but in that he loves simple people: soldiers, actors, students, these are his friends and his teammates.’ Hamlet also feels that their art might provide him with a useful weapon for his fight. Hence he approaches the first actor and asks him to prepare ‘the Murder of Gonzago’, with a few added lines provided by the Prince himself. Finally Hamlet is alone, and moved by the actors’ sincerity, delivers his second soliloquy, often known as ‘O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I’, which features Hamlet’s anger at himself for his lack of action. In Russian appropriations of Hamlet this monologue, known as ‘Hecuba’, is particularly famous for its focus on Hamlet’s observing the First Actor’s powerful emotions when delivering Hecuba’s lament at loss of her husband, King Priam. Hamlet’s phrase: ‘What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba’ (II/2/494) has entered Russian literature in a way unknown to its English counterpart.

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726 Ibid., 34.
727 Ibid., 33.
728 Ibid., 112.
729 Shakespeare never reveals what these lines might have been.
730 For example, it features in Anton Chekhov’s short story, ‘Kniaginia’ – see Chekhov, Khmurye liudi: Rasskazy, St Petersburg, Izdanie A.S. Suvorina, 1890, 64-84.
3.5.3 Radlov Hamlet Act 3

The central act of the tragedy contains Hamlet’s famous ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy, at the end of which he notices Ophelia who is acting as Polonius’s agent. The entire scene, which takes place in a peaceful corner of the palace with red curtains and a big black door, is set for spying on Hamlet and watching him closely. The Prince is at first gentle and affectionate to Ophelia, but then he notices Polonius’s feet from behind the curtain and realises he has been deceived and harshly sends Ophelia off. Berezark finds Radlov’s solution for explaining Hamlet’s sudden change of attitude towards Ophelia ‘oversimplified’. 731 However, Radlov was far from alone in seeking a rational explanation for Hamlet's behaviour. Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli, and indeed Akimov, adopt the same strategy, and interpret the final words of Hamlet to Ophelia as addressed to those spying on him, too.

Apart from ‘democracy’, another trait of Hamlet that was particularly important to Radlov was his artistic nature, which characterised him as a man of Renaissance. 732 It seems somewhat surprising, therefore, that Radlov should have chosen to cut out the episode

731 Berezark, Gamlet, 39.
732 Ibid., 34.
containing Hamlet’s advice to the actors, featuring the famous phrase: ‘to hold up, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature’ (III/2/21-22). Radlov, however, explained this decision by claiming that preserving Hamlet’s advice would have encouraged the audience to expect its realisation in the acting of participants of ‘The Mousetrap’; whereas, as we shall see below from his letter to Prokofiev, Radlov had intended a different non-realist and ‘marionette-like’ interpretation of the play-within-the play. This might have been yet another strategy for reinforcing, by juxtaposition, the realism of the surrounding drama. Berezark, unsatisfied with Radlov’s justification, argues that Hamlet’s advice to the actors presents Shakespeare’s image of an ideal theatre and does not apply to the immediately following scenes; in this sense it is addressed to the audience or readers than to the actors themselves.  

In his letter to Prokofiev, Radlov describes a reading of the ‘play-within-the play’, which, although seemingly less creative than Akimov’s interpretation, bears witness to his in-depth study of Shakespeare’s text and Western scholarly investigations. The main issue here was that following Shakespeare’s text prior to the actual ‘Murder of Gonzago’ there is a ‘dumb show’ in the form of a ‘pantomime’, where the poisoning of the old King by Claudius is acted out. However, it is only during the actual spoken play that Claudius loses his temper at the sight of the actor-killer, Lucian, and halts the show. Radlov wondered why Claudius had not guessed the performance was all about him during the dumb show when the poison is poured into the ear of the sleeping King. Here, too, it was not only Radlov who struggled with an apparent implausibility: Akimov, as we have seen, chose to separate the two performances by presenting the one as a rehearsal for the other; Kozintsev’s 1964 film would omit the ‘dumb show’ all together; whilst Sergei Slonimskii would use it as a pretext for a ballet scene prior to his opera-within-an-opera rendition of the actual ‘Murder of Gonzago’ (see Chapter 5.2). Apart from artists and directors, scholars have also struggled with this double show. Radlov himself refers to a few classic critics (without naming them) and outlines their reasoning in his letter to Prokofiev:

One cunning English Shakespeare scholar of recent years thought of this simple explanation: the Ghost lied to Hamlet and Claudius never poured poison down the ear of Hamlet’s father. This [solution] is, of course, very clever, but in that case there is no point in playing or even reading such an outlandish tragedy of Shakespeare. I’ve encountered more perceptive English critics who suggest the following: while busy

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733 Ibid., 42.
discussing with Polonius and the Queen about the reason behind the madness of Hamlet, Claudius did not watch the presentation of the pantomime that was happening before him; he only started paying attention as the texted play about Gonzago began. This also does not satisfy me, because the tension of the way Claudius perceives the entire show and how Hamlet watches him closely should grow steadily and continuously as each scene unfolds.\textsuperscript{735}

Surprisingly, Radlov declares that the content of the ‘dumb show’ is not even authored by Shakespeare and is:

As untrue and arbitrary as most other remarks that have ended up in Shakespeare editions. That is why I feel I have the right to replace this pantomime by another one, which has a much less distinct content and which does not immediately give away the purpose of the mousetrap prepared by the prince for Claudius; instead it would act as a hidden threat, alluding rather to motives of deeds done by Claudius and Gertrude, but without reproducing these deeds with a protocol-like clarity.\textsuperscript{736}

In order for Prokofiev to compose the music that accompanies this pantomime, Radlov then tries to describe its themes and objectives: ‘To me this pantomime represents motifs (themes) of passionate and shameful love between an old queen and a young insolent handsome man to whom she gives the stolen crown and servility: the low and limitless surrounding courtiers of this new king and his loving queen who is as loyal as a dog’. According to this letter, the required duration of the musical number is two or two and a half minutes.

Radlov required that immediately after his substitute pantomime the dialogues of the ‘murder of Gonzago’ should begin, albeit in an abridged form, as he planned to cut almost half of the 76 lines comprising this scene. He then explained how he imagined the delivery of the text in order to differentiate between the ongoing play-within-the-play and Hamlet’s commentaries:

I’d be very pleased if you could possibly help me here by composing a particular accompanying support while the text is being read in the style of Japanese or Chinese theatres. In other words I wish to stress (underline) the fact that we are observing a voluptuous, old fashioned, almost medieval theatre pageant, to a certain point

\textsuperscript{735} Radlov, ‘Letter to Prokofiev’, 3-4.
\textsuperscript{736} Ibid., 4.
marionette-like. As for the movements, it seems to me that actors should be reminders of medieval village sculptures rather than adopting natural and simple gestures that ordinary people take.  

Prokofiev chose his favourite dance genre, the gavotte, to accompany the pantomime and the play-within-the play scene. The ironic, playful musical number has little to do with traditional baroque Gavottes, however, and instead resembles the dance numbers from *Romeo and Juliet*, including the one directly lifted from his ‘Classical’ Symphony. But the overall character is in accordance with marionette style as intended by Radlov thanks to the teasing harmonic shifts and pointedly articulated texture. The outer sections in E flat major hark back to Claudius’s march, with the constant wrong-footing shifts of the upbeats (Ex. 3.3a), while the darker middle section in A minor evokes musical ideas from the score to the Ghost’s appearance (Ex. 3.3b). This section may well have corresponded to the evil deed committed by the young King, since the descending passages could suggest the pouring of poison in the old King’s ear. Prokofiev was evidently fond of this Gavotte, since he would also transcribe it for piano solo, as Op. 77bis (1938-1939).

**Ex. 3.3:** a) *Prokofiev, Hamlet*, No. 4 (Pantomime); b) *Prokofiev, Hamlet*, No. 4 (Pantomime), R15

a)

![Allegro moderato](image)

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737 Radlov, ‘Letter to Prokofiev’, 4-5. It is not clear which parts of the score, if any, were designed for the accompaniment that Radlov required here.
The scene of the performance was set as a big platform covered with red cloth. Facing the audience on the platform were the courtiers, and in the centre the King and Queen watching the show alongside Hamlet sitting in front of Ophelia (see Plate 3.4). As the performance continues, Hamlet loses his patience and rushes the actors to get to the crucial scene of the ‘Mousetrap’. Here on the stage, Lucian, the fictional villain, pours the poison in the ear of the King, at which point Claudius jumps up, plunges towards Hamlet and leaves the stage in a fury, followed by everyone else, including Guildenstern who on his way out beats up the actor-King. Hamlet and Horatio remain, the former in a stormy and victorious mood. In another image that points back to Akimov’s production, Hamlet wears the theatrical crown left by the actors and runs around the stage screaming.
Next comes the flute scene, which is again set by Radlov in front of closed curtains to help keep the focus on the actors. Here Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trying to make Hamlet see how he has hurt his uncle and mother, but instead Hamlet mocks them. At this moment Radlov has the Fool reappear with a flute in his hands (instead of Shakespeare’s stage direction noting that the flute belonged to the actors). Hamlet takes the flute and plays it, before sticking the instrument in Guildenstern’s face and asking him to play. Kochurova’s letter notes a musical number entitled ‘Flute solo’ for this scene. Unfortunately it is not clear what music if any was destined for this scene, though Berezark cryptically remarks that ‘the rhythmic design of this episode follows the music’. It could be that this was a mere improvisation by the actor or a member of the orchestra.

Next Polonius appears on stage and after being mocked by Hamlet tells the latter of his mother’s ordeal and her desire to see her son, to which Hamlet gives his accord. When everyone finally leaves, Hamlet delivers the most Macbethian of his monologues (III/2/378-380)

738 Berezark, Gamlet, 51.
’Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood, …

Radlov and Dmitriev’s faint, purple lighting and dark background curtains emphasise the gloomy nature of this monologue, which serves as a prelude to the next two scenes. The first of these is the King’s prayer (see Plate 3.5). Radlov’s understanding of this scene came from his belief that despite his Machiavellianism, the King still possessed inner nobility. He chose a dark, quasi-Gothic setting, with narrow windows and church walls, in clear contrast to the cosy intimate chambers where Claudius had been seen previously. Unlike Hamlet’s well-constructed soliloquys, Claudius’s prayers and remorseful monologue were delivered in broken phrases, as if he himself was finding them difficult to remember.

Plate 3.5: Radlov Hamlet (1938), Claudius’ prayer scene

The following episode sees Hamlet walking in on Claudius and contemplating murdering him, but then deciding not to do so while the latter is at his prayers. This is a difficult scene to make convincing, and each of the two actors of the title role chose a different approach: Dudnikov here walked slowly towards the King, as if thinking and trying to make a decision at the same time; Smirnov, by contrast, energetically took off his sword, as if determined to

739 Ibid., 87.
complete the deed but suddenly realising that he should not kill the King as the latter was praying, since this state of grace would enable him to ascend to the heavens.

The last scene of this act, which takes place at the Queen’s closet, seems to have been the climax of Radlov’s production (see Plate 3.6). It is set in the intimate domestic atmosphere of the Queen’s bedroom, where there is a huge bed with curtains in the centre. There also hangs a red curtain from behind which the audience can easily observe the actions. This is where Polonius is hiding. The gloomy purple light points back to the previous monologue of Hamlet, underlining this scene as a continuation of Hamlet’s decisions made during his Macbethian soliloquy. Berezark believes this scene to have been the most successfully staged and acted, with the Queen’s image being particularly powerful.  

Plate 3.6: Radlov Hamlet (1938), Hamlet confronting his mother

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740 Ibid., 117.
Varvara Soshalskaia as Gertrude presented a feminine, charming and beautiful Queen who loved her son dearly and with most sincere motherly feelings, despite finding his behaviour incomprehensible. At the same time she loved and almost worshipped her new husband. This is where her tragedy lies, which completes and sharpens the main plot: her great love for her husband and son creates a contradiction and she knows that a reconciliation is impossible. This reading of Gertrude indicates that Radlov believed in her innocence and that he was using what he saw as her true passionate love for Claudius in order to justify her actions. This echoes Shostakovich’s justification of the violent (re)actions of the heroine of his doomed opera, *Lady Macbeth*. Furthermore, by placing the closet scene as the climax of the tragedy, Radlov stressed the importance of the tragic line of the Queen as a parallel plot to that of Hamlet, yet one that was unknown and would be incomprehensible to the young Prince, who has rejected his mother’s love.

Soshalskaia delivered this scene with a mixture of tenderness, love and some inexplicable fear. Hamlet tried to open her mother’s eyes by showing her the pictures of her two husbands. Radlov’s rendering of this scene differs from Kozintsev’s film, and many productions and adaptations, where the picture of Hamlet’s father is in a locket that he wears and that of Claudius in a locket that Gertrude wears. According to Berezark’s description of this scene, here Gertrude stared intensely at Claudius’s picture in her locket whereas Hamlet looked into distance as if seeing an invisible portrait of his father. In the absence of definitive documentation, it seems plausible to assume that Radlov combined the picture of Hamlet’s father with the final reappearance of the Ghost, and that Hamlet was therefore describing the image of the deceased King while communicating with the Ghost. Radlov’s letter to Prokofiev mentions a third appearance of the Ghost in this act, which would logically be during this scene, when the Ghost asks Hamlet not to mistreat his mother.

3.5.4 Radlov *Hamlet* Act 4

With Polonius’s accidental murder ending Act 3, the first scene of the fourth act shows Hamlet slinking by the semi-dark stage, trying to hide the corpse, when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive loudly. It seems they have been looking for Hamlet for quite some time. They take his sword, arrest him, and take him to the King.

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741 Ibid., 87-88.
742 Ibid., 75.
743 Kochurova’s letter confirms this theory.
Radlov sets the scene of Hamlet’s interrogation (dopros) in the presence of the King and a few of his important advisors. The King, acted by Pyotr Vsevolozhskii, appears calm and even friendly at first. However, it is clear to the audience that he can barely control his anger. When the interrogation is finished and Hamlet is taken away, Claudius abandons the mask of calmness, and concentrating all his hatred for Hamlet he delivers his ominous monologue. This scene reveals different layers of Radlov’s reading of Claudius: his cleverness, his subtle political game, his weakness and fears, and his efforts to maintain a proper tone.

One of the important scenes that Radlov completely left out of his production was the fourth scene of the fourth act. This shows Fortinbras and his army on the march to Poland, crossing Danish territory. After they leave, Hamlet stops the Norwegian captain and questions him. He learns that in Poland, Fortinbras’s army was going ‘to gain a little patch of ground, / That hath in it no profit but the name’ (IV/4/17-18) and that thousands of lives were going to be lost for that reason. This makes Hamlet ponder Fortinbras’s action and his own lack it; he voices his soliloquy: ‘How all occasions do inform against me / And spur my dull revenge!’ (IV/4/32-33). Apparently Radlov’s excuse for cutting this important scene was that there was not enough room on the stage to depict the grandeur of Norwegian army, to which Berezark bitterly objects, suggesting that the director could have simply staged the scene without showing the entire army.\(^744\) There might be a more subtle reason for this cut, however. Radlov’s reading of Fortinbras as a positive hero who emerges at the end of the tragedy to give it an optimistic conclusion, and as a more suitable ruler of Denmark than Hamlet and a natural successor to Hamlet’s father,\(^745\) suggests that Radlov found the meaningless war mentioned in Act 4, Scene 2 contradictory to his intended image of Fortinbras. As logical as it seems, cutting out this scene as well as the previous ones with Norwegian ambassadors, meant that the appearance of Fortinbras at the end of the play was unexpected, as the audience had already forgotten about this dramatic line that had only been mentioned once in Act 1, Scene 2. Berezark asserts that the downplaying of Fortinbras’s role ‘seems to have impoverished the whole production to certain extent.’\(^746\)

The next scene of this act takes place in one of the luxurious halls of the palace, decorated with heavy green curtains, a big black door and a divan on the proscenium where the Queen is surrounded by her maids and attendants. Then the mad Ophelia appears. In general,

\(^{744}\) Ibid., 41.
\(^{746}\) Berezark, *Gamlet*, 42.
Berezark does not approve of Ophelia’s rendering in the production and blames the failure equally on the actress(es) and the director. He dismisses Radlov’s comparing of Ophelia to Desdemona and Juliet, arguing that the circumstances surrounding Ophelia’s life and tragic destiny are very different from theirs:

Radlov says ‘Ophelia is a daughter of her time…a lady of her milieu. She loves truly, but what can she do if the social surrounding in which she lives is much stronger?’ … This means Radlov hasn’t considered the whole situation of the play. … Ophelia’s situation is very different from that of Desdemona and Juliet: her situation is tragic from the start of the play. She cannot be with her beloved man, cannot change the norm…

Berezark goes on to quote Belinsky’s 19th-century reading of Ophelia as a simple-hearted (prostodushnai), pure girl, who does not suspect any evil in the world and sees the good in everything and everywhere, even where there is none: in other words, the traditional depiction of Ophelia as a delicate creature and the victim of life’s contradictions. This is the interpretation that Berezark prefers, and he claims it goes deeper than Radlov’s. This suggests that despite the fact that Radlov’s reading of Ophelia – which compared to that of Akimov’s may have seemed tame – had great scholarly value, the Russian mentality had its own canonic image of this character, so deeply rooted that the slightest diversion from it could verge on the incomprehensible.

Later in his book, Berezark describes in detail how the actresses of Ophelia reinforced the weak image of the heroine and contributed to the audience’s not sympathising with or understanding her madness. Tat’iana Pevtsova, the first actress to play the role, apparently did so subtly and with a certain lyricism, but rather monotonously: ‘Ophelia’s role requires many different tragic colours. Pevtsova plays it in a rather watercolour (aquarelle) tone, as if she only draws the contours of the role, but there is no wholeness to the image.’

The second performer, N. Vladimirova, created the image of an inexperienced, very young girl who knows nothing about life. Her lack of experience in acting, however, resulted in the director’s input being too clearly felt, and the audience was not convinced by her performance. Regarding the scene of Ophelia’s madness, Berezark could only praise

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747 Ibid., 36.
748 Ibid., 36-37.
749 Ibid., 90-92.
750 Ibid., 90.
Vladimirova’s rendering of the end of the scene, where she spreads flowers around swords, screams and runs off. However, he found the performance of Ophelia’s songs uneven, weak and even unprofessional. In the 1939/40 season, as the image of Ophelia was clearly incomplete, a third actress was brought in: Tamara Iakobson. Her acting was stronger and clearer, creating a specific depiction of Ophelia as a worldly girl who is submissive to her father’s will. This image of Ophelia is a reminder of the main traits assigned to her by Akimov, who in a more exaggerated reading believed Ophelia’s main function was in spying on Hamlet for her father (see Plate 3.7).

Plate 3.7: Radlov Hamlet (1938), actors of Ophelia (from left) - T. Pevtsova (1), Y. Iakobson (3) and N. Vladimirova (2)

In Radlov’s production, and particularly in the nunnery scene, Ophelia again becomes ‘a weapon for legitimate spies’. 751 But the difference with Akimov’s reading is that Radlov’s Ophelia at the same time loves the Prince and sometimes lets slip these hints of her true feelings, which frightens the well-mannered girl. ‘She is afraid of her own feelings - of her sincerity. Hamlet is also frightening, as he destroys all the secular (svetskie) rituals. She loves the Prince but she doesn’t understand him. In the scene with Hamlet, we feel for the first time the future tragedy of Ophelia’. 752 Only in madness does she become sincere and do what she

751 Ibid., 91.
752 Ibid.
thinks – in effect, she is unchained. The strange tricks of her beloved and the death of her father appear to be too strong a blow for her.\textsuperscript{753}

Describing the actual madness scene, Berezark writes that Ophelia’s first songs are gentle and lyrical; she is mad but she still has some glimpses of consciousness.\textsuperscript{754} According to Radlov’s letter to Prokofiev, this is exactly what the producer had intended. For Ophelia’s songs in this scene Radlov gave precise instructions, insisting on their folk-like character:

Altogether there are four of them, not counting the single line of ‘moi milyi Robin, vvia radost’ moi’ (For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy), which she remembers from a fifth one which is also a folk song. Substantially, and by their characteristics, these songs - similar to Desdemona’s before her death - are full of Shakespeare’s unexpected surprises both in their contents and in their so-called social background, and they are certainly not suitable for a ceremonial, well-mannered and timid Ophelia. Even Desdemona remembers the simple (demotic) folk song of her maid, Barbara, whose text starts very poetically but finishes with unambiguous words…. And it is Desdemona who is singing these, upset and aggrieved, but in sound mind and with good memory. In the same way the mad Ophelia remembers random songs, folk songs that she had heard accidentally somewhere some time, and she doesn’t even try to remember them, in fact probably tries not to remember, since they don’t correspond to her taste and her education. These are authentic folk songs, and if my memory is right, Shakespeare chose them from a collection of folk songs published not long before in London.\textsuperscript{755} I value highly this pure folk character of the songs that Ophelia sings; she, who is an educated and I’d even say a rather too well-mannered girl and obeying her father and brother, was perhaps the main reason of her death and her tragedy. I also find estimable the kind of roughness and indecency of some of the words escaping from her pure mouth. One German Shakespeare scholar is right in pointing out that this is exactly where Ophelia is saved from being depicted with a sentimental and syrupy image. He is also right in alluding to psychological observations which often notice the appearance of coarse and impure sensuality in mentally ill girls whose previous life has been flawless in every way.

\textsuperscript{753} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{754} Ibid., 118.
\textsuperscript{755} Radlov’s assertion is debatable.
So, all four songs of Ophelia are very folk-like in the character of their melodies. I don’t think that Ophelia’s madness should affect her correct interpretation of these melodies, as, according to Gaovskii, Il’ia Sats tried to do so in the MKHAT production of *Hamlet*. I believe that the mad Ophelia remembers both the text and melody of these songs with utmost and even astonishing precision. To me, her madness is expressed in the very fact that she sings these songs in the palace and not in that she sings them in an especially crazy way.  

These thoughts suggest that it was Radlov’s intention not to depict Ophelia’s madness by means of her music. Simon Morrison states that Radlov ‘did not want these (Ophelia’s) songs to be irrational… anathema to Stalinist-era aesthetics’ - a plausible assumption, given that in 1937-8 the fear of purges was still in the air. But it could also be argued that Radlov’s other productions and his writings on Shakespeare already demonstrate a preference for realism, and that his logic (in this instance) is in complete accordance with now accepted scholarly views of the nature of these songs (see Introduction above).

There are four songs for Ophelia, with spoken words integrated into the codetta and/or instrumental sections. The first two songs are more or less strophic and come before Laertes’ breaking in. The third and fourth, which are sung during the second appearance of Ophelia, and this time in the presence of her brother, are more musically developed and quasi through-composed. Here Ophelia is clearly out of her mind and can no longer control her deranged thoughts. Radlov insisted on the fact that the texts of the songs are ‘contrasting from one another’, thus requiring different approaches for each.

The first of Ophelia’s songs, ‘How should I your true love know?’, following Shakespeare’s indications, is addressed to the Queen, though the text summarises all of Ophelia’s tragedy from her deception in love to the lonely grave (either of her father or anticipating her own fate). Prokofiev’s music is a tender lullaby, set to his favourite tick-tock accompaniment. The musical language is quite impersonal, which could suggest the composer’s intention to imitate anonymous folk ballad tunes according to Radlov’s prescription. However, according to the composer’s letter to Radlov, this song (unlike the other ones) does not contain actual traditional material.  

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755 Morrison, *The People’s Artist*, 83.  
stretches the second and fourth feet of the first two lines the poem, thus contributing to the tension between folk and art melody (Ex. 3.4).

Ex. 3.4: Prokofiev Hamlet, No. 5 (Ophelia’s first song), opening

The second song is addressed to the King and comes after Claudius’s attempt to understand the meaning of Ophelia’s first one. Shakespeare’s text here is one of sexual suggestion and deception and has resulted in much hypothesis regarding the nature of Ophelia’s madness and her relationship with Hamlet. In Akimov’s production, Shostakovich employed a musical motif used for his lustful heroine, Katerina Izmailova, and the result was a cabaret-style number in tune with Akimov’s reading of Ophelia as a flirty, full-breasted (polnogrudnaia) woman (see Chapter 2.10.4, Ex. 2.15). Prokofiev’s music is quite different, adopting the style of a Scottish gigue (see Example 3.5); the gentle dance music could easily be used for the scene of the young Juliet dancing. The inverted pedal-point is given edge by a combination of natural and flattened auxiliaries, adding a touch of weirdness appropriate to Ophelia’s mental decline. Radlov specified to the composer here:

I would prefer if in the second song about Valentine’s day the codetta (otygrysch) is played either four times after each four lines or twice after each eight, so that during it
Ophelia could dance lightly in a crazy way. The real-life motivation for this tune - that is, whether she hears it in her head or is humming it with closed mouth - seems to me not essential.\textsuperscript{759}

Curiously, the score contains Prokofiev’s indications for this scene, which are slightly different: ‘During the songs Ophelia dances, and during the \textit{otygrysh} she mimes (\textit{mimiruet}) … The last eight bars of the second couplet are repeated several times, so that with them in the background Ophelia manages to say everything before leaving.’\textsuperscript{760} All the transitional sections have minor-mode inflections, perhaps in order to mirror the deeply tragic atmosphere of the scene (Ex. 3.5).

\textbf{Ex. 3.5: Prokofiev, \textit{Hamlet}, No. 6 (Ophelia’s second song)}

From Berezark’s descriptions it seems that Radlov transferred the words of the scene of Claudius and Gertrude from the first scene of this act to here, as an intermission between the two appearances of the mad Ophelia. Berezark writes: ‘The feeling of unrest grows as


\textsuperscript{760} Prokofiev, ‘\textit{Vtoraia pesenka Ofelii}’, in \textit{Hamlet} (full score), Moscow, Sovetskii kompozitor, 1973, 127.
Ophelia leaves and the king sitting by his wife tells her of his troubles…

In the absence of the production book it is not possible to verify this change, however.

Ophelia’s next appearance is quite different, and Prokofiev’s music faithfully depicts her final descent into madness and a tragic end. As Berezark writes, the tragedy has become stronger and there is no trace of lyricism in her songs. Now she is not only mad but also doomed. Terrible visions follow her; she creates something resembling a coffin from flowers before she runs away with a frightening scream. Her third song, which starts with ‘They bore him barefaced on the bier’, has only four lines. The vocal line illustrates how her thoughts are becoming fragmented as she regresses into the innocence of girlhood with her childlike melody in C major (Ex. 3.6).

Ex. 3.6: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 7 (Ophelia’s third song), opening

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761 Berezark, *Gamlet*, 118.
762 Ibid., 119.
The fourth of Ophelia’s songs is the most folk-like; It is tonally dual-centred (A minor and C major) with a tonal/modal mutability (peremennost’) that is characteristic of folk music. Once again Prokofiev evokes the style of Scottish folk song, in particular with its short-long rhythms (‘Scotch snaps’) (arrowed on Ex. 3.7).

Ex. 3.7: Prokofiev, Hamlet, No. 8 (Ophelia’s fourth song), opening

Radlov’s letter mentions a final one-line song, which Prokofiev sets to the same melody as the first of Ophelia’s songs, thus creating an arch-like structure for this mini-cycle. To assure the dramatic climax created by Ophelia’s madness, Radlov chooses to finish Act IV with Laertes’ painful observation of his sister, with his arms raised to the sky.

3.5.5 Radlov Hamlet Act 5

The final two scenes of Act IV four (in Shakespeare’s text) are grouped into the first scene of Act V of Radlov’s production. They are once again presented in front of the closed curtains, in krupnyi plan. Here sailors hand Horatio a letter from Hamlet that tells of his imminent return to the castle. At the same time on the avant-scene, beside a small yellow curtain,

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discussions between Laertes and Claudius are taking place while they learn about Ophelia’s tragic end. Here Radlov decided to cut Hamlet’s telling the story of his altering Claudius’s letter to the King of England and causing the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Radlov justified this decision by stressing that this deed in the eyes of contemporary audiences does not appear ethical or noble. Radlov’s modification and his explanation for it again recalls Shostakovich’s change of a similar nature to Leskov’s Lady Macbeth, when the composer decided to leave out the cruellest of Katerina’s crimes, the murder of her infant nephew. Berezark argues that Radlov’s change was not necessary, as everyone knows that ‘Hamlet was a person of his own time’, and that:

Shakespeare’s Hamlet is not leading a battle for life but one for death, and in such circumstances Shakespeare himself counted this act as just and righteous. This should have been staged in a way that the audience comprehends how the noble Hamlet had to act in such evil ways because of the conditions of his time.

Be that as it may, Radlov’s decision can certainly be faulted logically, as without clarification that Hamlet has murdered them, the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern remains unknown.

Then the curtain opens and the audience sees the graveyard hill with crosses, wet ground, and the yellow, autumnal rays of the setting sun barely piercing through the leaves. In the midst of all this two gravediggers are working hard. The ironic music of the gravedigger’s song, with its exaggerated folk-like vocalises at the end of each verse, stands in stark contradiction to the gentle lyricism of Ophelia’s songs. Yet Berezark writes that like all folk characters of Shakespeare’s plays, the gravedigger’s trivial appearance is decorated with the philosophical thoughts and accordingly the music contained poetic elements. It is, to be sure, quite difficult to find anything especially poetic in Prokofiev’s setting, unless the actor’s singing or indeed the staging gave it extra colours. In his letter to Prokofiev, Radlov writes:

I can’t pass by the marvellous song of the gravedigger in the fifth act, although I am also perplexed by the surrounding circumstances, as my best comedian (and he is indeed an extraordinary comedian) is tone deaf. Nevertheless if this song appeals to you, I could pass it on to the second gravedigger, for whom I have found an actor with an exceptional musicality. The characteristics of the song seem to be completely

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764 Berezark, Gamlet, 42.
765 Ibid., 42-3.
766 Ibid., 102.
explained within its text. [The next phrase is handwritten] So – please do write it and we won’t disappoint you!\textsuperscript{767}

In the manuscript this is the only musical number for which Prokofiev does not use abbreviations or shorthand notation; indeed, he even writes out each stanza separately. The vocal line is quite simple, mainly consisting of ascending and descending scales, perhaps intended for the ease of the non-musical actor mentioned in Radlov’s letter (Ex.3.7).

Ex. 3.8: Prokofiev \textit{Hamlet}, No. 9 (Gravedigger’s song) complete

Berezark compares the characteristics of the (first) gravedigger to those of the first actor from the wandering troupe in Act III, arguing that both of them are shown as folk (narodnii) characters in the production, in line with the production’s plans to show how all of these people are close to Hamlet, and to explore other aspects of the title character - his love for the people, his ‘democracy’, and his true artistry (see Plate 3.8). Of course the final outcome of the scene also depended on the actor’s choices. Berezark describes two slightly different approaches: in Dudnikov’s performance, Hamlet is thoughtful, and standing by the grave he lifts the skull in a gesture familiar from celebrated prints, whereas Smirnov is sitting at the edge of the grave and is chatting to the gravediggers, appearing more amused than thoughtful, hence somewhat downplaying the philosophical depth that, according to Berezark, was intended for this scene.

Plate 3.8: Radlov Hamlet (1938), the first gravedigger with Hamlet and Horatio

Like most of the other important transitional episodes, Hamlet’s invitation to the fencing match takes place in front of closed curtains, a strategy that would also allow a quick change of setting for the final scene of the tragedy. It seems that Radlov, unlike Akimov who set this scene in a bathroom, did not make too much of the witty conversation between Hamlet and Osric.

768 Berezark, Gamlet, 102.
769 Ibid., 75.
Radlov sets the last scene in the same big hall with the family portrait that was used for the second scene of the first act, except that it is now arranged for the competition, with seats for the King and Queen and a few other necessary objects for the contest (see Plate 3.9). The fencing itself happens diagonally from right to left, with Hamlet fighting while facing the audience. Noting that for the crowd scenes Radlov referred not to theatrical traditions but to the great masters of the Petersburg ballet, such as Petipa and Ivanova, Berezark believes the placement of the protagonists in the scene of the fencing match followed the principles of ballet composition. Of course Radlov had his recent experience of the duel scene in *Romeo and Juliet* to go on. But this arrangement of the scene also has logical reasons that resolve certain ambiguities of Shakespeare’s text. For instance, when, in the middle of the bout, Hamlet tires and is offered a drink, the Queen quietly crosses over to the opposite side from Claudius; she is now separated from the King by the fighters, and hence when she drinks from the poisoned cup, Claudius simply cannot reach to stop her. This idea not only follows Radlov’s reading of the relationship between Gertrude and Claudius as true love, but also removes any question regarding Claudius’s thoughts and intentions in this scene. Berezark believes that the Queen’s death here is also connected with her remorse (*raskaianie*), as she finally realises that her beloved husband is the arch-enemy of her son and involuntary assassin of herself.\(^{770}\)

\(^{770}\) Ibid., 120.
As Laertes falls, he tells Hamlet of the poisoned sword. Turmoil grows and the courtiers run away, while Hamlet feels death approaching. But before he dies he stops Horatio from killing himself by stealing the poisoned cup away and asking him to stay and tell the truth about this story. Berezark writes: ‘He not only killed the King but also fought for the future… He dies a thinker, fighter and a statesman’ (see Plate 3.10).  

771 Ibid., 121.
As Radlov describes for Prokofiev’s benefit:

Following Shakespeare’s remark before Osric’s line: ‘here comes young Fortinbras with victory’, this march of Fortinbras starts first from far away, almost inaudible but very victorious. Thirty seconds after Hamlet’s death the march expands in sound and continues a further two minutes, while getting louder and louder.\(^{772}\)

Accordingly the sound of the majestic march gradually fills the stage. In the meantime the big gate of the castle opens and two rows of soldiers enter. They place their banners over Hamlet’s body. Among these rows of soldiers, Fortinbras passes triumphantly, almost like a sculpture figure.\(^{773}\) He puts his sword beside Hamlet’s body. Four of his captains raise the body of Hamlet to the ongoing ceremonial music and carry him on their arms. As they arrive at the gate, the curtain falls.

Berezark complains that Fortinbras’s ‘words get lost in the music and don’t project properly, as if Radlov intended to merely display this character and finish the play right away, without explaining his place in the tragedy.’\(^{774}\) The overwhelming effect of the music also somehow contradicts Prokofiev’s own advice for theatre composers: ‘The music must on no account

\(^{773}\) Berezark, Gamlet, 121.
\(^{774}\) Ibid., 103.
drown down the voices of the actors. ... In drama theatres orchestras tend to be dreadfully noisy and one waits impatiently for the music to cease. But this effect might equally have been the result of the acoustics and/or quality of the orchestra, which according to the Theatre’s letter to Prokofiev was made up of ‘final-year students’.

Berezark also observes that the setting of the scene, like most of other group scenes of this production, has the stamp of musical theatre all over it. ‘The movement here is determined by the rhythm, dictated by the triumphant music of Prokofiev: the courtiers, slowly and in the tempo of this music, approach Hamlet’s body, and four captains carry it … to this music. This is the ending of a heroic performance.’ The choreographic traits of this scene echo Radlov’s instructions to Prokofiev: ‘And it is your music, dear Sergei Sergeevich, that determines the true, brave and bright ending of the play.’

Despite the slow tempo of this concluding march, and the fact that it accompanies Hamlet’s body being carried off the stage, Radlov insisted that:

Fortinbras’s march represents Shakespeare’s constant, peaceful, trusting and almost far-fetched optimism. Heroes die, villains die; nevertheless at the very moment of the entrance of coffin (u grobovogo vkhoda) ‘young life carries on’ (mladaia budet zhizn’ igrat’, literally: young life will play). And this is the life that Shakespeare loves and has confidence in. And the handsome young Horatio will tell the young Norwegian hero the wonderful truth about Hamlet.

In view of Radlov’s instructions and Berezark’s account, Simon Morrison’s description of Prokofiev’s score seem less than wholly convincing. Morrison comments that the final march ‘reverts back to the chromatic strains of the opening ghost music’ in order to suggest that ‘the opening and closing numbers in the score, which resonate with each other, find Prokofiev focusing on the theme of death.’ In reality, apart from the slow tempo, it is hard to detect anything in Fortinbras’s march that would qualify as musical rendering of death, not to mention that Morrison’s interpretation is wholly incompatible with Radlov’s expressed intentions. Fortinbras’s march is in Bb, ending in C, whereas the Ghost’s was in A minor.

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776 The same note outlines the available instruments, particularly pointing out that there was no saxophone available (probably in view of Prokofiev’s use of the instrument in his music of Egyptian Nights) - RGALI, f. 1929, op. 1, ed. khr. 837, 4 (undated, but most probably 10 June 1938).
777 Berezark, Gamlet, 48.
779 Ibid.
780 Morrison, People’s Artist, 84.
Radlov, in a footnote added by hand to his typed-out letter to Prokofiev, required some similarity to be worked into the music of Fortinbras and the Ghost, with neither of them having anything to do with death. Rather the contrary: ‘In his character (personality), the young Fortinbras is of course closest to Hamlet’s father and appears to be the most natural continuation for his work. Hence the image of his march is closer to the action of the Ghost rather than the flamboyant mannerism of Claudius.’

Fortinbras’s march, which is the most elaborate musical number of the entire production, indeed goes through different keys, which might be read as symbolising the freedom that is acquired at the arrival of the redemptive figure of Fortinbras. Morrison explains the ‘discord that Prokofiev builds into the march’ as a comment ‘on the terrible cost of this restoration’. Be that as it may, the march certainly contains much more dissonance and complexity than Radlov’s description would seem to allow, and to capture the dramatic tension and evolution of the play the march does not modulate back where it had set off from. Thus it diverts from the expected symphonic ploy, searching for an alternative solution, which is found in the final sunny C major section – a breakthrough gesture characteristic for Prokofiev’s music such as his soon-to-be-written paean to Stalin, Zdravitsa (Op. 85, 1939). This C major coda is indeed a moment of complete harmony between the directorial and musical interpretation of the scene (see Ex. 3.9). The ‘uplifting apotheosis’, as Morrison describes, is in tune with Radlov’s belief in Shakespeare’s optimism and love for life; as for Prokofiev, Morrison argues that ‘in keeping with the precepts of his chosen faith – Christian Science - Prokofiev wittingly or unwittingly devised an apotheosis for the score that serves as a paean to the human spirit, the manifestation of divine.’ The abiding impression is of Hamlet as a positive hero without any ambiguity, who fought for a higher purpose and who enabled the evolution towards the political and social ideal by opening up the path for the ‘young’ Fortinbras. This is the exact opposite of the 1991 opera by Sergei Slonimsky, who viewed Fortinbras as yet another tyrant similar to Claudius, and for whom the tragedy of Hamlet had no notion of optimism nor any glimpse of hope (see Chapter 5.4.3).

782 Morrison, People’s artist, 84.
783 For more on the symbolic associations of C major in the music of Prokofiev, Shostakovich and others, see David Fanning, ‘Shostakovich: “The Present-Day Master of the C major Key”’, Acta musicologica 73 (2001), 101-140.
784 Morrison, People’s Artist, 84.
Ex. 3.9: Prokofiev, *Hamlet*, No. 10 (Fortinbras’s March) R8-11

[Andante maestoso \( \frac{d}{3} = 68 \)]

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[Andante maestoso \( \frac{d}{3} = 68 \)]
3.6 Radlov’s *Hamlet*: Conclusion

While from a distance Radlov’s *Hamlet* might seem to be in accord with the tenets of the Socialist Realism, this is more a matter of reception than intent. Radlov’s own expressed starting points were much more to do with his knowledge of Western scholarship, his proximity to the text as a translator, and his desire to showcase what he considered to have been neglected, all this in order to stage an authentic and true Shakespeare. All the same, it is clear that his production achieved a convergence - if not harmony - between conception, realisation and acceptability within fraught ideological conditions, of a kind that had eluded Akimov seven years previously.

Radlov was soon to pass on the torch of the Soviet Union’s most prominent Shakespeare scholar-practitioner to Grigori Kozintsev. In both of the latter’s *Hamlet* ventures – for the stage in 1954 and for the cinema in 1964 – there was a different act of negotiation to perform, one which arguably would allow the director to realise his ideals more completely, albeit still partially in coded form (see Chapter 5.2). Meanwhile Radlov’s production enjoyed success up to the point of Russia’s entry into the Second World War in June 1941 and – according to some sources - even beyond, despite the capture or evacuation of his troupe. As for Prokofiev, *Hamlet* was his last encounter with Shakespeare. However, it could be argued that the experience stayed with him as he embarked on a series of works on a more epic scale and with more profound content than he had previously attempted (the film score and cantata *Alexander Nevsky*, the opera *War and Peace*, the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Piano Sonatas Nos. 6, 7 and 8 and the Violin Sonata No. 1).
Chapter 4

Hamlet in Crisis

4.1 Introduction: Hamlet and Stalin

It has become received wisdom that Stalin hated Hamlet and its hero and accordingly banned any production in the Soviet Union. \(^{785}\) Whilst some scholars have nuanced this notion by referring to a ‘tacit ban’, \(^{786}\) others – and not only in the West (see 4.4 below) – have exaggerated its the impact, claiming, for instance, that ‘[in 1954] the play [Hamlet] had not been produced in the Soviet Union since Akimov’s zany version of 1932.’\(^{787}\) Such statements disregard not only the provincial productions of the 1940s (for instance two Belorussian productions by Valeri/Valerian Bebutov: 1941 at the Voronezh State Dramatic Theatre and 1946 at the Iakub Kolas Theatre in Vitebsk) but also Radlov’s 1938 staging, which due to its great success had toured widely beyond Leningrad and Moscow, as far as the Urals, Sochi and Belorussia, to almost unanimously positive reviews.\(^{788}\) Of course given Radlov’s subsequent fate, his and his wife’s names had disappeared from Shakespeare studies and criticism until well after their rehabilitation (in Anna Radlova’s case posthumous) in 1957;\(^{789}\) but that hardly excuses such an oversight.

Although it seems logical to assume that Stalin would not have sympathised with the Danish prince - and he would not have been the first political leader to have such an attitude\(^{790}\) - in the absence of any official documentation the so-called Hamlet ban has no factual backbone. The source of this Soviet ‘Chinese whisper’ is not easy to pin down. However, an overview of the status of Shakespeare in the Soviet Union just before the outbreak of the War, incorporating official reports, popular reminiscences, Soviet Shakespeare studies published

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\(^{786}\) See for example Makaryk, ‘Wartime Hamlet’, in Makaryk and Price (eds.), *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*, 120.


\(^{789}\) Copies of documents confirming their rehabilitations are in the possession of their grandson Sergei Dmitrevich Radlov, St Petersburg.

during the War and after (even up to the 1960s), and reports and articles published by Russian émigrés in the West, proves beneficial in identifying the context which facilitated the dissemination and persistence of the myth.

4.2 Radlov’s *Hamlet* and the Shakespeare celebrations of 1939

Although Radlov’s Theatre was more than once upbraided for not including in its repertoire enough contemporary Soviet plays, the accounts of the official discussions of his 1938 production of *Hamlet* show ‘that the common opinion was that the production of Hamlet in Radlov’s theatre is a very important theatre event, a real victory not just for the Leningrad theatre front but for the theatre front of the entire Soviet Union.’ It was not surprising that soon afterwards, ‘on the order of Supreme Council (*Verkhovniy Sovet*) RSFSR, Radlov’s troupe was promoted from Radlov’s Theatre (*Teatr pod rukovodstvom Radlova*) to Lensovet Theatre (*Gosudarstvenyi Teatr Leningradskogo Soveta*). It was yet further proof of the importance of the Lensovet *Hamlet* that in 1940, not only did *Hamlet* opened the Theatre’s season, but also the theatre critic, Iliia Berezark, published a book entirely dedicated to this production (see Chapter 3), the book itself being subject to intense discussions and scrutiny the following year. The mixed reaction to Berezark’s *Hamlet* book had nothing to do with the play’s lack of affinity with the doctrines of the regime, as the myth of Stalin’s ban might imply. On the contrary, the participants at the discussions mainly complained about Berezark’s ignoring of scholarship surrounding *Hamlet* [*Gamletovedenie*] and his book’s lack of theoretical backbone and analysis of the creative methods of the Theatre.

The esteem accorded to theory and scholarship was nothing new. Ever since the equation of Shakespeare with Soviet writers at the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, the status of Shakespeare as one of the models for Socialist literature was continually reaffirmed. However, the Soviet Shakespearean celebration of 1939 had provided this trend with a renewed impulse, attempting to establish a direct relationship between scholarship (*Shekspirovedenie*) and performance. From this year the Shakespearean

791 ‘*Gamlet v teatre pod ruk. S.E. Radlova: Obsuzhdenie spektaklia*’, 29 May 1938, Stenographic reports, All-Russian Theatre Society – Leningrad Department, NLR, Manuscripts, f. 625, op. 226, del. 58.
792 ‘*Teatr imeni Leningradskogo soveta*’, *Leningradskaya pravda*, 4 May 1939.
793 ‘*Sezon v Teatre imeni Lensoveta*, *Leningradskaya pravda*, 2 November 1940.
794 ‘*Zasedania otdeła teatrovedenii, 11 March 1941*, *Protokoli i stenogrammy zasedanyi muzykal’nogo i teatral’nogo otdeloi i uchenogo soveta* (January 1941 to 16 July 1941), TsGALI, f. 82, Op. 3, del. 128, 90.
Department, which had been set up in 1934, organized annual conferences on Shakespeare, and by 1939 ‘mass Shakespearization was in full swing.’

The Soviets were among forerunners in celebrating the 375th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth in 1939. Even ‘the cover of the fourth number of the journal Teatr of 1939 looked different’: this issue was almost entirely dedicated to the Bard and his presence in the Soviet Union, and the traditional portraits of Soviet leaders and Party announcements were replaced by Shakespeare himself. The central topic of this issue was formulated in Iurii Spasskii’s article: ‘Why do Hamlet and Romeo, Lear and Prospero, Cordelia and Desdemona, Ophelia and Rosalinda speak so eloquently to the consciousness of people of the great Soviet era? Why are the ideas and passions of Shakespeare so close to the generation who achieved communism?’

This was not an isolated case. A glance at the Shakespeare bibliography compiled by Inna Levidova shows a significant influx of Shakespeare-related articles in 1939 throughout most major publications. On 21 April half of the official newspaper of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, Sovetskoe Iskusstvo, contained articles on Shakespeare’s anniversary year, his works on the Soviet stage, Shakespearean actors of both the Soviet Union and England, and the history of Shakespeare’s arrival in Russia. Shakespeare’s portrait was accompanied by those of Mikhoels as Lear and Ostuzhev as Othello, with Sergei Radlov’s production and the recent Shakespeare conference at the All-Russian Theatre Society (VTO) featuring widely in the texts. The latter Society, headed by the Shakespeare scholar, Mikhail Morozov, created the first bulletin of the Shakespeare and Western European Classics Cabinet (Kabinet Shekspira i Zapadno-evropeiskoi Klassiki), which would become an established organisation with annual conferences and proceedings, running even throughout the Great Patriotic War.

These celebrations were not a new phenomenon but came as an apotheosis of the ongoing Sovietisation of Shakespeare and his systematised appropriation during the 1930s. This trend may be traced through the two productions of Hamlet already examined. Despite the aggressive attitude towards Akimov’s production, it ignited heated discussions and manifestos regarding the appropriation of Shakespeare in the Soviet Union (see Chapter 2.7).

796 Ostrovsky, ‘Shakespeare as founding father of Socialist Realism’, 58.
In line with Akimov’s own writings, the dominating factor in 1932 continued to be ideological slogans, humanism and dialectical materialism and such readings, applied not only to Shakespeare’s works but also to Shakespeare scholarship, as could be detected from the first Soviet Russian monograph on Shakespeare, published in 1934. The campaign against Goethe’s ‘bourgeois’ interpretation of Hamlet was just one example of such attempts. The ‘vulgar sociologist’ approach, however, gradually gave way to accommodating the Socialist Realist agenda, and praising Shakespeare for his celebration of life. The final scene of Radlov’s 1938 Hamlet, with Prokofiev’s radiant final C major chord, resonated with this utopianised Shakespeare.

It was hence not surprising that Radlov and his Shakespearean productions featured largely in the anniversary celebrations. In a recall of Tairov’s (and Prokofiev’s) 1934 project, Egyptian Nights, one centrepiece of these events was a hybrid production made up of single acts from Radlov’s Hamlet and the other two major Shakespearean productions of his theatre (Romeo and Juliet and Othello). This was accompanied by a booklet containing programmes, several photos of the cast and crew, and stills from the productions, a foreword by the director of Radlov’s Theatre, Ia. Olesich and an article by Radlov himself. Outlining the main achievements of the Theatre, particularly its Shakespearean productions, in the ten years of its existence, Olesich made sure to point out its weakness and the next important task. With a nod to the official discussions of the Theatre’s Hamlet and the criticism of Radlov for not including enough Soviet plays in their repertoire, Olesich required that ‘the Theatre should not only expand the quantity of its contemporary productions, but also pay special attention to elevating the ideological-artistic (ideino-khudozhestvennogo) quality of its output to meet the requirements of Soviet culture and the growing culture of our country’s spectators.’

Unlike Olesich’s statements alluding to future restrictive agendas, Radlov’s article in the same booklet concentrated entirely on his work on Shakespeare. Evidently not inclined to engage with Olesich’s criticism, Radlov instead explained his Theatre’s growth above all as a result of working with the Bard’s tragedies. Defending his methodology, he insisted that ‘we need to believe that the poetic image of conception (poeticheskii obraz myshleniia) has a right to existence and does not in any way contradict the great ideas of Socialist Realism’.

802 K Shekspirovskomu festivaliu: Otello, Romeo i Djulietta, Gamlet, Leningrad, Moscow, Iskusstvo, 1939.
described the main goal of his Theatre as ‘trying to bring together the truth of the great Russian realism with the poetry of great European dramaturgy’.  

The coexistence of such conflicting opinions was by no means exclusive to this booklet or to theatre. As Marina Frolova-Walker observes, the same dichotomy applied to Stalinist opera: ‘On the one hand, there were demands for realism and contemporary topics, and on the other, for monumentality and elevated musical language; these demands proved to be in deep conflict with each other.’  

Having been actively involved in the discussions leading to the inauguration of the ‘Stalinist Soviet opera project’, Radlov knew only too well that ‘any treatment of a contemporary topic was bound to become unacceptable before long, given the ever-shifting political landscape.’ Hence his attempt at appropriation of Shakespeare alongside already accepted Russian classics might have been prompted by the success and official approval of the Sovietised production of Glinka’s A Life for the Tsar as Ivan Susanin, which took place in the same year as the Shakespeare celebrations. Indeed, as Irena Makaryk comments: ‘if in the early 1920s the utility of Shakespeare was very much debated, by 1939 it was unquestioned.’ However, in the months leading to the Soviet-German anti-aggression pact of August 1939, it was ‘nationalism’ rather than ‘universalism’ that was sought.

Appropriation of Shakespeare as a national hero was of course by no means a peculiarly Soviet trend. The cult of Shakespeare in Germany and ‘his annexation as a “German Classic”’ have been widely studied and provide a useful comparative case to Russian and Soviet Shakespearisation. As Werner Habicht observes, ‘by common conviction [the German appropriation of Shakespeare] had, ever since the eighteenth century, been instrumental in forming the German spirit, imagination, literature and drama.’  

If ‘Germans in the Weimar Republic embraced English writers, including Shakespeare, as a means of

808 Frolova-Walker, ibid.
812 See, for example, Peter Holland, ““More a Russian than a Dane”: The Usefulness of Hamlet in Russia,” in Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead (eds.), Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 1999, 315-338.
813 Werner Habicht, ‘Shakespeare and the Berlin Wall’, 158.
opposing France after the First World War’, the authorities of the Third Reich ‘took particular care to employ’ and manipulate Shakespeare ‘in the service of dominant ideology’. In this regard, productions of *Hamlet* are particularly revealing, as ever since its appropriation by Goethe it had become ‘a vehicle for staging German desires and anxieties, psychological or political.’ It suffices to consider the fate of a production of *Hamlet* at the Kammerspiele in Munich, which was to open the playhouse’s season in September 1939. The director, Otto Falckenberg, who had been at the head of Kammerspiele ever since 1917, cultivated a distinctive style, incorporating musicality, rhythm and ‘imaginative potential of the text’, turning the theatre into ‘a centre of progressive art theatre’. All this had much in common with Meyerhold’s efforts in his own theatre in Moscow. But Falckenberg’s arrest at the hands of the Gestapo in 1933 had a better ending than that of Meyerhold by the NKVD in 1939. So did his *Hamlet* compared to Meyerhold’s never-realised plans. With the outbreak of War in Germany, and the banning of plays by enemy dramatists, Falckenberg’s *Hamlet* was in danger of being cancelled. However, when the not entirely persuaded director decided to check the affair with the Reichsdramaturg, he was ‘assured that Shakespeare was to be treated as a German author[!]’. Applying the German analogy further, the highlight of the Soviet 1939 Shakespeare celebrations, in the form of a conference and its report published in the first bulletin of Shakespeare cabinet edited by Morozov, is comparable to the 1937 annual meeting of the German Shakespeare Society in Weimar to mark Shakespeare’s birthday but also to ‘complete the Bard’s Nazi canonization’. The German meeting, with its inaugural speech ‘Shakespeare Maidens and Matrons: a Practical [lebenskundlicher] Perspective’, published

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817 Falckenberg was cleared of accusations and was allowed to resume his work at the Kammerspiele - see ibid., 22.
818 Rainer Schlösser, head of the theatre department of the Ministry of Propaganda.
819 Habicht, ‘German Shakespeare, the Third Reich, and the War’, 22.
in the Society’s Jahrbuch of that year, is said to have ‘foreshadowed and facilitated Germany’s deadly eugenic experiment’.  

In the case of Soviet Shakespeare, it could be argued that his place as ‘the founding father of Socialist realism’ was already secured as early as the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. Shakespeare had a primary position among the great treasures that Andrei Zhdanov, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, enumerated as having been inherited by the proletarians.  

The 1939 conference, which in many ways affirmed the cult of Soviet Shakespeare, brought together practitioners such as Mikhoels, Aleksei Popov and the Radlov as well as scholars such as Iuri Spasskii, whose speech summed up the Sovietisation of Shakespeare:

> a great thing is happening: two different currents (vstrechnikh potoka) are flowing into each other. Shakespeare is being poured, through theatre, into our people’s consciousness, into the culture of our Soviet nation. And vice versa: the flow of Soviet culture obliges a new and different approach to the world of Shakespearean images.

Although it already featured briefly in some of the 1939 papers, the question of Shakespeare translation was most heatedly discussed at the 1940 conference of the Shakespeare Cabinet along with the publication of Pasternak’s first version of his translation of *Hamlet* in that year. Although discussion about methods of translation had been ongoing since the 1920s, it was during the First All-Union Translator’s Conference of translators in 1936 that ‘realist translation’ as opposed to ‘formalist’ or ‘naturalist’ (in practice literalist) was established as an official norm. A year prior to that, during a meeting at the Translators Section of the Union of Writers, the importance of translators was hinted at by Ezra Levontin, who described them as ‘engineers of communication’ clearly echoing Stalin’s famous ‘engineers

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823 Arkady Ostrovsky, ‘Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism’ 56.
824 Aleksei Popov (1892–1961) leading Soviet theatre director and theoretician. He staged *Romeo and Juliet* at Moscow Revolution Theatre in 1935 and *The Taming of the Shrew* at Central Red Army Theatre in Moscow in 1937.
of human souls’ remark regarding writers.\textsuperscript{827} In practice, as for Shakespeare translations in particular, despite the efforts for unification of translation methods, the duality of page versus stage (as with translations by Polevoi and Kronberg discussed in Chapter 1) continued to exist, with Pasternak’s translations used most often for theatrical purposes.\textsuperscript{828}

In 1939, Meyerhold whose own theatre was closed down, but who was determined not to give up his plans of staging Hamlet, had commissioned Pasternak to produce a new translation of the tragedy. The poet’s fascination with Hamlet is shown through the fact that he continued working on the translation even after Meyerhold’s arrest later that year. By the end of 1939, the Moscow Art Theatre and one of its founders, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, another legend of theatre with unfulfilled Hamlet dreams, cancelled the Theatre’s contract with Anna Radlova in favour of Pasternak’s unfinished translation. It could be argued that such an action was due to the potential evinced by those extracts of Pasternak’s translation that Nemirovich-Danchenko heard in November 1939; but it could also have been in part an act of bitterness towards the Radlovs, given the tragic fate of his friend and their arch-rival, Meyerhold. At any rate, Pasternak, eager to see his Hamlet on the Moscow Art Theatre stage, repeatedly ceded to requests for changes from the director and actors of this doomed production (see 4.4 below).

Despite Pasternak’s occasionally belittling of the activity of translation, expressed in such statements as ‘I am a translator not by good fortune but through misprision’,\textsuperscript{829} his output as a translator of Shakespeare has been widely studied, in particular from the perspective of ‘translation as escapism’.\textsuperscript{830} This dissertation will only refer to a few aspects of Pasternak’s attitude to Hamlet, such as the role of his text in shaping certain productions and in other creative adaptations of Shakespeare’s works (e.g. Shostakovich’s songs).

4.3 Pre-war and wartime Hamlets: Radlov’s unfulfilled plans, evacuation and fall

In February 1940, Meyerhold’s prophecy (see Chapter 1) came true: he was executed for treason and never accomplished his dream of staging Hamlet. His ultimate efforts to stage the

\textsuperscript{827} Witt, ‘Arts of Accommodation’, 141; see also Semenenko, ‘Making the Soviet Shakespeare Canon: The “Realist” Translation’.

\textsuperscript{828} See Semenenko, Hamlet the Sign, 98-101, and ‘Making the Soviet Shakespeare Canon: The “Realist” Translation’.

\textsuperscript{829} Letter to Mikhail Morozov, translated in Barnes, Pasternak, Vol. 2, 249.

\textsuperscript{830} See for example Semenenko, ‘Pasternak’s Shakespeare in Wartime Russia’, in Irena Makaryk and Marissa McHugh (eds.), Shakespeare and the Second World War: Memory, Culture, Identity, 149-151.
tragedy at the Alexandrinsky Theatre were aborted with his arrest in June 1939 and his execution in early 1940. In the meantime, Radlov, following successful tours of his Theatre, was expanding its Shakespeare repertoire. The announced repertoire of the Lensovet Theatre for 1940 included: *Hamlet* (1938 version with Prokofiev’s music), *Othello* (first version of 1931 and second version of 1938, both with Asaf’ev’s music), *Romeo and Juliet* (first version of 1935 and second version of 1939, both with music by Asaf’ev), as well as a new production, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, with Anna Radlova’s translation, stage design and costumes by Dmitriev and music by Shostakovich.\(^{831}\)

But despite his apparently safe status, even Radlov was not able to keep a clean record. In a similar situation to Eisenstein’s *Alexander Nevsky*, Radlov’s anti-fascist production of 1939, *Kliuchi Berlina* (*The Keys to Berlin*), by Mikhail Gus and Konstantin Finn, which was supposed to fulfil the official requirement for contemporary plays and to react to the upsurge of fascism, turned out to be untimely. As the actor, Voldemar Chobur, who later became a close friend of Radlov, wrote in his unpublished diaries:

> When fascism started threatening the world, prior to the signing of the [Soviet-German anti-aggression] Pact, our Theatre was the only one in the country to stage patriotic productions such as Finn’s ‘Kliuchi Berlina’. ... during the discussions the Theatre, its actor and director were praised greatly. But then came the signing of the Pact and the production was taken off the stage.\(^{832}\)

With the outbreak of war and the siege of Leningrad, the priorities of Radlov and his Theatre changed to patriotism and the staging of morale-boosting performances. In this vein Radlov described his plans for 1941:

> I believe that in these troubling times, we have to try hard so that our Theatre may with excitement, persuasiveness and strength demonstrate the greatness of our liberating war and the heroism of its participants. I also want our stages to echo with utmost anger the remorseless denunciation of these fascist enemies of freedom and

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831 Specifik vkhodiashchiche v repertiarnyi plan 1940 teatra imeni Lenin Soveta’, NLR, f. 625, ed. khr. 230. Part of the repertoire appears in an announcement in S. Radlov, ‘Nashi plani na 1940 god’, *Iskusstvo i zhizn’*, 1940/1, 48. This incidental music of Shostakovich has not been mentioned in any other context.

832 Vol’demar (Vladimir) Chobur, unpublished diaries, in the Zolotnitsky fond, Theatre Museum Library, St Petersburg, uncatalogued (page 2).
culture. And I hope that the creative work of our dramaturgs will complement our work: the work of director. 833

In his book on Radlov, Zolotnitsky attempted a partial reconstruction of the life of the Theatre after the outbreak of war; unfortunately his embellishments and the lack of proper referencing diminish the value of his account. Moreover, the Radlovs’ story becomes increasingly complicated as the war continued and they ended up in the occupied territories. The couple’s movements and activities raised confusion and suspicion, to say the least, among the Soviet authorities, who after the war, arrested and confined them to ‘corrective labour camp’ (Ispravit’no-Trudovoy Lager’, or ITL), a sub-category within the Gulag system. Although the Radlovs were officially rehabilitated in 1957 (posthumously in Anna Radlova’s case, since she died in the camp), many questions remained unanswered. This topic lies beyond the scope of this dissertation and requires a separate investigation into the archives of those countries the couple and the Theatre visited and into their life and times in captivity and beyond. However, the fact that Sergei Radlov became a non-person and that his name disappeared from books - even those describing his Shakespearean productions - cannot be denied, and the ramifications for scholarship are severe. 834 The fond of the Radlovs at the National Library in St Petersburg, which is the director’s only personal archive in Russia, only goes up to 1941. According to his grandson, Sergei Dmitrievich Radlov, any documents and materials belonging to the wartime and post-war periods were confiscated and subsequently disappeared. 835

Hence the further unfolding of the fate of the Radlovs and his Lensovet Theatre can only be reconstructed from the reports of various eye witnesses, the reliably documented excerpts from Zolotnitsky’s book and the unused material he gathered from newspaper cuttings, diaries and letters, which are grouped in his uncatalogued fond, now housed at the Theatre Museum Library in St Petersburg, together with other writings by the likes of Valerii Gaidebura, 836 Boris Ravkin, 837 Erich Franz Sommer 838 and Lina Glebova. 839

833 Sergei Radlov, ‘O planakh na novii god Lensoveta’, Ocherki, informatsii, teksty, vystuplenyi i dragie materiali o gorode Leningrada v blokade (29 December 1941 to 31 December 1941), TsGALI, f. 293, op. 2, del.139, 84.
834 See Eleanor Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 133.
835 Personal conversation with Sergey Dmitrievich Radlov in May 2015. Nevertheless, Radlov has provided me with some unpublished material regarding the trials of his grandparents, which I intend to develop into an article for publication at a later date.
836 Valerii Gaidebura (Haidebura), Gulag i svitlo teatru, Kyiv, Fakt, 2009.
All of these reports agree on the fact that Radlov and his theatre kept their promise and continued to function as long as they could in besieged Leningrad. They were far from the only prominent cultural figures to take an active part in defending the city. In his diaries, Chobur mentions how one day in September 1941, as he was walking with Radlov, they saw Shostakovich on the Fontanka Bridge.

Dmitri Dmitrevich was in some shabby suit, with a gas mask over his cloak, wearing an inconceivable (nemyslimoi) hat, either very dirty or very old. Shostakovich was always very neat, and this picture was extraordinarily surprising. ... ‘We didn’t sleep all night. I was guarding on the roof of the Conservatoire, and the fascists flew over us three times, throwing lighters, which we had to clear off the roof’, said Shostakovich as if he had been doing this job all his life.840

Chobur then describes Radlov’s reaction, praising the composer’s bravery: ‘Talented in everything. Talented people go to the end of everything they put their mind into.’ Elsewhere, Chobur remembers how with the war and the shortage of actors, Radlov himself took on minor roles in his productions. ‘The front was approaching Leningrad. We played during the day and more and more often we went down to bomb shelters with the spectators and continued the performances after the enemy air-raids had been repulsed. The audiences were quite different, but entrance to the theatre was free to everybody … Then came October. It was cold and damp in the theatre. The actresses in particular suffered a lot.’841 These events were all reported in a much rosier tone by the press, which was desperate to boost the morale of the besieged city:

The immediate proximity of the front and the enemy raids against the city have not disrupted the normal life of the Leningrad theatres. The company of the Lensovet Theatre has every reason to claim that the harsh conditions of life in the front-line city have united and tempered it even more. Not for a single day has the theatre closed since the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. The Theatre’s actors are frequent and welcome visitors in Red Army units and hospitals. The company gives regular

841 Ibid.
performances in its own building, while during intermissions and air raids it gives concerts in bomb shelters.\(^{842}\)

Radlov’s theatre remained in Leningrad until as late as March 1942, at which point they were evacuated to Pyatigorsk, in the Caucasus. Given that the Theatre had already toured to this city and had received glowing reviews, especially for their production of *Hamlet*, the troupe was welcomed as heroes and soon created there what Chobur called ‘a little Leningrad’. But in August the Germans arrived and only a few were lucky to escape in time. There are contradictory theories as to why the Radlovs did not leave the German-occupied city and how they reacted to the invaders. According to most sources, including Chobur’s diaries (also quoted by Zolotnitsky) and Boris Ravdin (who is vouched for by Radlov’s grandson, Sergei), by this point the Radlovs had become such heroes and emblems of the city that their departure would have created a panic among people; hence the authorities asked them to stay and promised not to give them up to the enemy. This meant that they missed the last chance of getting away. That the Radlovs were under threat from the Germans is also mentioned in Lina Glebova’s story from the mouth of the Theatre’s make-up artist, disguised as Maria Luzhskoi (her real name was Maria Ivanova).\(^{843}\) The account of Erich Franz Sommer, who happened to serve time in the same camp as the Radlovs and who in his autobiography retells the story of the Radlovs (albeit with many mistakes in the names of places and people) as he claimed Sergei Ernestovich had told it to him, is somewhat different. According to Sommer, Radlov and his wife were sent an invitation to attend the officers’ club, where they were welcomed thanks to Radlov’s diplomacy, intelligence and fluency in German, as well as Anna Radlova’s elegance. Sommer also reminds us that Radlov’s name was known to the officers thanks to the director’s cousin who worked in Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda.\(^{844}\)

In early January 1943, the Germans left Pyatigorsk, ‘for strategic reasons’, and they took Radlov’s Theatre with them to Zaporozhia in western Ukraine.\(^{845}\) There under the new name of ‘Radlov’s Petrograd Theatre’, assigned to them by the Germans, they re-staged their production of *Hamlet* with Prokofiev’s music.\(^{846}\) This was the last occasion on which Prokofiev’s incidental score was used in the composer’s lifetime, as revealed in a letter from

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\(^{846}\) Ibid.
Kseniia Kochurova replying to the composer, who was trying to locate its whereabouts towards at the end of his life (see Chapter 3.5). However, Radlov’s Theatre was not the only troupe to stage Hamlet in the occupied Western Ukraine that year. Irena Makaryk describes the Ukrainian production of the tragedy that opened in September at the Lviv Opera Theatre. Directed by Iosyp Hirniak, the production featured Volodymyr Blavatskii at the title role, who later described it as ‘the crowning point of all [the Theatre ensembles] activities, the test both of its artistic maturity and of the Ukrainian theatre as a whole.’

In September 1943, Radlov’s theatre was sent to Berlin, where the troupe was renamed yet again and joined the vignettes (vineti) as ‘dramatic ensemble in the service of the camps of western workers (po obsluzhivaniui lagerei vostochnikh rabochikh)’. Later, the Theatre was divided into three groups, and the Radlovs were transferred with one part of the troupe to the south of France. There, after the liberation, the Theatre regained its pre-war title in the French version: ‘Théâtre Lensoviet de Leningrad sous la direction de M Sergé Radlov, Metteur en scène’, as seen on the Theatre’s poster for their December 1944 performances of Chekhov and Ostrovsky at the Théâtre de la Rue d’Alger in Marseille. According to Sommer, at that point the Radlovs received several propositions from the British and the Americans, all of which they turned down in favour of the Soviet invitation to return to the country and reassurances provided by the ambassador in France concerning the couple’s involuntary and unpoltical collaboration with the enemy. However, upon their arrival at the airport in Moscow the couple were arrested and transferred to NKVD custody at the Lubyanka. The interrogations were protracted, but by mid-November 1945 the Higher Court of the RSFSR stripped Radlov of his titles and awards and sentenced the couple to ten years in Corrective Labour Camp. However, as a sign of mercy, the Radlovs were allowed to stay together and to choose their camp from the European part of the country. As Anna Radlova’s sister, the sculptress Sara Lebedeva lived in Moscow, they chose Perebory, near Rybinsk. As Radlov’s letters to Chobur reveal, he was quick to create a theatre troupe and to tour to nearby cities. As early as June 1946, Radlov and his wife started working on a series of

themed performances around Pushkin and Shakespeare, including excerpts from *Hamlet*. However, AnnaRadlova’s death in 1949 seems to have been too much for Sergei’s artistic career and emotional health: ‘That I still continue to exist simply proves that I am a coward and a scoundrel, and that the vile survival instinct is stronger than logic, reason, sense of duty and decency.’ The same ‘survival instinct’ helped Radlov after his final liberation from the camp in June 1953 to settle and continue his theatrical output first in Daugavpils (Latvia) and then in Riga, staging Shakespeare once again: *King Lear, Hamlet and Macbeth.*

### 4.4 *Hamlet* in crisis: MKhAT and the Stalin ‘ban’

Despite its clear potential, Radlov’s fate during and after the war did not become the stuff of legend and even remained a somewhat grey area. However, a different, more persistent and widespread myth emerged from the wartime Shakespeare, concerning Stalin and his supposed banning of *Hamlet.* If such a notion (in all its exaggerated forms) made some sense for anti-Soviet agendas during the Cold War, over time the Stalin-and-*Hamlet* saga has become a kind of a marketing tool for new productions of the tragedy by any Central/Eastern European company that tours to the West. Stalin’s ‘war’ against *Hamlet* features in almost every study dealing with Shakespeare and politics, Soviet political cultural life and Russian theatre or Shakespeare history. Solomon Volkov’s concoction of Shostakovich’s memoirs does not shy away from it. In fact Volkov’s Shostakovich goes even further: ‘Of course, all the people knew once and for all that Stalin was the greatest of the great and the wisest of the wise, but he banned Shakespeare just in case. ... For many long years *Hamlet* was not seen on the Soviet stage.’

Although some scholars have taken care to nuance this ‘ban’ by modifiers such as ‘tacit’, ‘virtual’, ‘effectively’ and ‘unofficially’, none ventures to quote a definitive source. It becomes more frustrating when a Russian theatre scholar of the stature of Anatoly Smeliansky presents this idea in tones that brook no disagreement: ‘Stalin, for obvious reasons, intensely disliked the play [*Hamlet*] and banned it at MKhAT after it had been in

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852 Gaidebura, ‘Pis’ma’, 123-4
855 Irena Makaryk, ‘Wartime *Hamlet*’, 120.
rehearsal for a long time in Pasternak’s translation.” Apart from the lack of reference to any documented source and the exaggerated tone, an even more obvious mistake is Smeliansky’s immediately following claim that Okhlopkov’s 1954 Hamlet was the first post-Stalin production of the play – both Grigory Kozintsev’s Hamlet at the Alexandrinsky Theatre and Radlov’s at Daugavpils in Latvia predated Okhlopkov’s.

Yet here Smeliansky, as most other more scholarly studies, does at least refer back to one of the points of origin for the myth of the banning of Hamlet: namely the doomed MKhAT production of the early 1940s. Probably the closest point, in Western literature at least, to the source of this Soviet Chinese whisper seems to be a statement by the theatre scholar Nikolai Chushkin and – for Western readers - Arthur Mendel’s quoting of it: ‘It is enough to recall that an offhand remark by Stalin in the spring of 1941 questioning the performance of Hamlet at that time by the Moscow Arts Theater was sufficient to end rehearsals and to postpone the performance indefinitely.’

Before proceeding to the facts related to this story, we need to put Chushkin’s remark in its appropriate context. Chushkin offers no reference, but his statement is preceded by a fairly incontestable observation regarding Soviet wartime theatre and the public’s need for morale-boosting, or at the very least for active, optimistic plays as opposed to passive, pessimistic ones. Chushkin recollects how ‘shortly before the Great Fatherland War’, and as the nation prepared itself to fight the fascists, there were increasing arguments regarding the Soviet audience’s need for an active hero. Moreover, just like his allies and the Germans, during wartime Stalin was ‘forced to turn to an exploration of nationalism, not world classics’, and hence it was ‘not internationalism, but “Slavic solidarity” and Russian nationalism’ that became the main weapons in the fight against the Fascists. However, this in itself does not imply the complete absence of Hamlet and/or allusions to it from the Soviet stage. In this cause, recognisable ‘Shakespearean motifs’, such as the skull in Hamlet, which had become an inseparable part of popular culture, provided a useful tool for appealing to the patriotism of the Soviet nation. Makaryk provides examples of instances where Shakespeare-infused

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858 Ibid.
860 Ibid.
new plays, such as Oleksander Korneichuk’s 1941 *Partizany v stepiakh Ukrainy* (*Partisans in the Steppes of Ukraine*), were not only approved by the authorities but were even awarded the Stalin Prize.\(^{862}\)

It was not just allusions to Shakespeare that continued during the war. From 20 to 30 April 1944, Yerevan celebrated the Bard’s 380th birthday in style, with an instalment of the All-Union Shakespeare Conference and accompanying festivals. Prior to this, in 1942, Arshan Burdzhalian had staged *Hamlet* for the third time in the Sundukian Theatre, to such acclaim that the production remained in the repertoire of the Theatre for an entire decade.\(^{863}\)

But despite such documented instances of the presence of *Hamlet* on the Soviet stage, the myth of Stalin’s disapproval has persisted. With no actual reference to be found in the archives (including that of the Moscow Art Theatre)\(^{864}\) literary historian Dmitri Urnov’s article, ‘How did Stalin ban *Hamlet*?’,\(^{865}\) is perhaps the only example of an in-depth investigation. Urnov agrees that the aborted production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre in the early 1940s, and in particular the rumours that surrounded it, were the main point of origin. This was of course no ordinary production: apart from the iconic venue of the Moscow Art Theatre, this staging featured the collaboration of such luminaries as Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (main supervisor), Vasilii Sakhnovskii (director), Boris Pasternak (translator), Vissarion Shebalin (composer), Vladimir Dmitriev (artist designer) and Boris Livanov (leading actor).

In copious detail, and with many added commentaries, often in the form of rhetorical questions, Urnov offers an overview of the historical facts, as well as reports and reminiscences of such figures as Livanov regarding this production and its fate. Urnov retells the story (as reported by the lead actor) that might have been behind the rumours, which has also been published in a book by the actor’s son, Vasilii Livanov:\(^{866}\)

\(^{862}\) Makaryk, ‘Wartime *Hamlet*’, 122.


\(^{864}\) Kindly confirmed by Ksenia Iasnova from the research centre of the archive of the Moscow Art Theatre, email communication, 29 January 2016.


In the 1940s, at a reception in Kremlin … Boris Nikolaevich [Livanov] is asked to …
go to a special hall where ‘the one whom everyone knows’ is present. Zhdanov is at
the piano, playing. Stalin enters …. ‘What is the [Moscow Art] Theatre working on
these days?’ asked Stalin; learning that the Theatre is going to stage Hamlet, Stalin
states: ‘But Hamlet is weak’ … ‘But our Hamlet is strong, comrade Stalin’, answered
the actor preparing the role. ‘This is good …because the weak get beaten.’

If this encounter resulted in the rumours regarding the ‘ban’, that can only be explained ‘in
the spirit of the Stalin time… then it was possible to draw any conclusions in accordance with
one’s goals, or as a result of one’s fears or risks.’ Hence the Theatre’s official statement
regarding the encounter quoted Stalin as saying: ‘it was great to speak to a thinking
[mysliashchim] artist’. Such vague phraseology typically allowed room for many different
interpretations, as dictated by individual and collective fear. ‘This [fear] was in the air and we
breathed this air’, adds Urnov.

Evidently the story of Stalin’s disapproval was also in the air, because later it was re-told by
Isaiah Berlin, among others, albeit in a different version, where Stalin had supposedly
described Hamlet as decadent and not suitable for staging. As Semenenko observes, the
popularity of such rumours was inevitable, since it fitted in with ‘the vein of the mythology
surrounding Stalin’.

Urnov, however, goes on to argue - convincingly - that the production of Hamlet at the
Moscow Art Theatre was halted not by Stalin but rather by many unfortunate circumstances
and much internal tension within the Theatre itself. The outbreak of the War and the arrest of
the director, Vasilii Sakhnovsky, raised the first hurdles. Yet once the Theatre returned from
the wartime evacuation, the rehearsals of Hamlet continued under the supervision of
Nemirovich-Danchenko himself. For him, as for Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, Hamlet was a
lifetime project destined never to be realised. The accounts of Nemirovich-Danchenko’s
work on the MKhAT production suggest that the elderly director was desperate to realise his
Hamlet dream. Among the material in the personal collection of the theatre director and critic

867 Urnov, ‘Kak Stalin Gamleta zapretil’, 218 (the following quotes are from Urnov’s article unless otherwise
credited).
868 Semenenko, ‘Pasternak’s Shakespeare in Wartime Russia’, 157; Isaiah Berlin, Personal Impressions,
870 Nemirovich-Danchenko’s directorial concepts and work on Hamlet are partly documented in Vladimir
Nemirovich-Danchenko and Vitalii Vilenkin, Nezavershennie rezhisserskie raboty: Boris Godunov, Gamlet,
Moscow, VTO, 1984.
Arkadii Katsman, there are reproductions of Dmitriev’s sketches and models for various scenes. One of them, depicting the setting for the first act, is curiously very similar to Natan Altman’s design for Kozintsev’s 1954 production. It has a note on the back of the photo: ‘This version was not taken up by N.-Danchenko. This is due to its being too cumbersome (gromozdko), gloomy (mrachniy) and pessimistic. Dmitriev made other more optimistic sketches.’

Then came Nemirovich-Danchenko’s death in April 1943, which also sounded the death-knell for this production. At first the Theatre continued rehearsals and preparations under the direction of Vasili Sakhnovsky, seemingly determined ‘to create a show worthy of the memory of the great Master [Nemirovich-Danchenko].’ Here Urnov’s account differs from Livanov’s reminiscences. According to the former, Nemirovich-Danchenko’s replacement at the head of the Moscow Art Theatre (Artistic Director), Nikolai Khmelev had already manifested his opposition to the production of Hamlet with Boris Livanov in the title role telling him that ‘you shall play Hamlet over my dead body’.

With Sakhnovsky’s death in 1945 the production was ‘literary demolished’. The rumours regarding Stalin’s personal influence on the abortion of the project were ‘maliciously spread and supported by Khmelev’s Party’.

However, according to Vasilii Livanov, MKhAT’s Hamlet seems still to have been awaited, even in the West. Livanov quotes his mother as receiving in early 1945 a gift from a troupe of English actors headed by the ‘English Kachalov’, John Gielgud, consisting of ‘a recording of two monologues from Hamlet read by Gielgud. He dedicated his performance to ... “my friend Boris Livanov, who is now working on Hamlet”’. According to Vasilii Livanov, his father’s working notebooks of this time show how he and his friend Pasternak were hard at work trying to adjust the translation to the acting and to the requirements of the Theatre. It

872 ‘Blizhaishie prem’er khudozhhestvennogo teatra’, Literatura i iskusstvo, 30 June 1943, quoted in Livanov, Liudi i kukli, Moscow, Astrel’, 2012, 60, also available online at http://www.litmir.co.br/?b=186132&p=60, accessed 27 October 2015.
874 Urnov, personal correspondence (email), 31 July 2016.
875 Urnov, ‘Kak Stalin Gamleta zapretil’, 5-6. According to Urnov (personal correspondence 31 July 2016) the recording was kept at the Dom Aktera Vserossiiskogo Teatral’nego Obschestva, where he listened to it in the mid-1950s. The current whereabouts of the recording are unknown.
could be argued that this set a trend for Pasternak, who later created at least twelve different versions of his translation of the tragedy.  

As for the music, a letter from Shebalin to his wife on 18 June 1943 indicates that he had just ‘signed the contract for composing music to Hamlet at the MKhAT’. On 13 December of the same year, he wrote to his friend and father-in-law Maksim Gube: ‘I’m up to my eyes in work. Yet I managed to compose a new quartet (the sixth) and something for MKhAT (Hamlet).’ In December 1944 he mentioned completing his score, admitting that ‘this work has been interesting and most significant for me. Three and a half centuries have passed since the appearance of the tragedy of Hamlet in the world; but the great creation fully retains its great power and freshness, its truthfulness and profundity.’

None of the writings on Shebalin, even those published in later years, mentions any reason other than Sakhnovsky’s death for the project of Hamlet remaining unrealised. In 1957 Shebalin would return to the play, composing a new score for a production directed by Boris Zakhava at the Vakhtangov Theatre the following year. By this time, however, he had already created a much more important Shakespearean-themed work: an opera based on The Taming of the Shrew.

Despite all efforts, the MKhAT production seems to have come to a complete standstill by 1945, when Hamlet was replaced by Ivan the Terrible, a play about the medieval Russian tsar by Alexei Tolstoy, which was premiered in 1946. This turn of affairs did not pass without comment. In the same year Pasternak, whose other Shakespearean translations apparently had no better chance of being staged in major theatres, wrote directly to Stalin. In this curious letter, which seemingly remained unanswered, after complaints about various personal, domestic and family problems Pasternak reminded Stalin of his work on translating Shakespeare ‘for the past five years’ and asked:

Is it possible for the Committee on Artistic Affairs (Komitet po delam iskusstv) to drop a hint to theatres, so that they could be content with their own taste and stage them, if they like these [plays], without awaiting any additional instructions

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877 Semenenko, ‘Pasternak’s Shakespeare in Wartime Russia’, 148. Pasternak’s translations of Shakespeare in general and of Hamlet in particular have been widely studied. See, for example, Anna K. France, Boris Pasternak’s Translations of Shakespeare, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.)
879 Ibid., 131.
880 Interview in Moskovskii Bol’shevik, 17 December 1944, quoted in Shebalina, V.Ia. Shebalin: Gody zhizni i tvorchestva, 136.
(ukazanie)? Because in theatres, and not only there, everything that lives only by itself and not thanks to some additional recommendations or sanctions is put aside. This is what happened to Hamlet at MKhAT, whose path was crossed by the modern play, Ivan the Terrible.  

Semenenko suggests that by calling a play about Ivan the Terrible ‘modern’, Pasternak was ironically alluding to Stalin’s ‘ongoing campaign of mythologization of the first Russian tsar’.  

4.4.1 Hamlet and Ivan the Terrible

In 1946, the names of Ivan the Terrible and Hamlet were also brought together in a different context, which could be considered as another source for the by then well-known attitude of Stalin towards the Danish prince. The two parts of Sergei Eisenstein’s planned epic trilogy on the life and times of Ivan the Terrible had contrasting fates. The first, released in 1944, enjoyed great success and was awarded the coveted first-class Stalin prize, while the second, filmed in 1946-7 was met with severe criticism from Stalin and had to wait until 1958 to be released in public cinemas. In February 1947 the film-maker and the main actor, Nikolai Cherkasov, were summoned to a meeting with Stalin, Zhdanov and Molotov at the Kremlin, during which they were severely criticised and driven to self-denunciation. Stalin formulated one of his main criticisms using the Turgenevian image of Hamlet as an analogy: ‘The tsar comes out in your film as indecisive, like Hamlet. Everyone suggests to him what should be done, but he can’t make a decision himself.’ Despite the abundant presence of bloodshed and carnage, Stalin complained that Eisenstein had failed to depict the cruelty of Ivan and ‘why it was essential to be cruel.’

Katerina Clark provides several instances from Eisenstein’s writings, life and works that confirm the film’s debt to the genre of Elizabethan revenge tragedy, and particularly Shakespeare’s appropriation of it in Hamlet. Among the outside influences, Clark mentions Eisenstein’s acquaintance with the scholar and Elizabethan specialist, Ivan Aksenov. Some of

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882 Semenenko, ‘Pasternak’s Shakespeare in Wartime Russia’, 158.
884 Ibid. 441.
885 Ibid.
Clark’s own arguments, including her accounts of Renaissance humanism as depicted by Eisenstein, provide evidence for a complementary hypothesis: that Eisenstein’s Hamletic model may have been specifically that used by Nikolai Akimov in 1932. Although there is no direct evidence that he had seen it, Eisenstein had no doubt heard of this production and the noise created around it, not least through the writings of his friend, Aksenov. One particular revelatory instance identified by Clark is the scene from the pre-coronation reign of Ivan, where a secretary of the foreign ambassadors is depicted by a figure with striking similarity to the Holbein portraits of Erasmus.\footnote{Ibid., 64.} This Erasmus figure, however, ‘with his cynical realpolitik’ seems ‘closer to that other renowned Renaissance intellectual and opponent of Erasmus, Machiavelli’.\footnote{Ibid., 66.} The cryptic presence of this Erasmus/Machiavelli dialogue, juxtaposed in one character, might, as Clark concludes, provide an insight into Eisenstein’s personal dilemmas as a cosmopolitan immersed in contemporary Western culture and at the same time a Soviet patriot.\footnote{Ibid., 69.} It also suggests an original solution and a nod towards Akimov’s depiction of Hamlet and Horatio as Machiavelli and Erasmus respectively, dividing the ‘To be or not to be’ as a dialogue between the two opposite yet, in Akimov’s view, symbiotic Renaissance intellectuals.

Despite the multi-layered structure of Eisenstein’s film and its reception, most mentions of Stalin’s criticism are content with the face-value of the Ivan/Hamlet comparison. Describing Hamlet as a weak-willed personality, this comparison reveals that Stalin’s understanding of Hamlet was far more conservative than many interpretations of the tragedy at the time. This understanding had its roots in the Romantic era, and even in Goethe’s understanding of the Danish Prince. On the other hand, as Semenenko observes, this comparison reveals, above all, how Stalin’s model of history differed from the one depicted by Eisenstein, which was ‘based, among other factors, on the Shakespearean model of tragedy’. Instead of using ‘the historic events as a background for the characters’ lives’, Eisenstein focused on ‘Shakespearean tragedy, in which psychology and history are fused.’\footnote{Semenenko, ‘Pasternak’s Shakespeare in Wartime Russia’, 159.} This is confirmed by Molotov’s criticism regarding ‘the stress on psychologism, on the excessive emphasis of inner psychological contradictions and personal sufferings.’\footnote{Molotov at the Kremlin meeting of 26 February 1947, quoted in Dobrenko and Clark, Soviet Culture and Power, 441.} Clark correctly identifies the source of ‘Eisenstein’s emphasis on the way irrational psychological forces drove Ivan’ in a
passage in T.S. Eliot’s essay on Hamlet and his psychological motives, in *The Sacred Wood*, a work that Eisenstein refers to in his writings.\(^{892}\)

With the drastic change of cultural climate from relative artistic freedom during the Great Patriotic War to the start of the anti-formalist campaign in late 1948, there was no room for an Ivan depicted not as a mythical figure and a ‘great and wise ruler’\(^{893}\) but as a tragic character of a Shakespearean stamp.

### 4.5 Post-war Hamlet: The Zhdanov affair and Soviet Shakespearology

Stalin’s Hamletised reception of *Ivan the Terrible* was emblematic of the drastic post-war changes in the political and cultural climate, following the legitimisation of Soviet power by victory in the Great Patriotic War. Eisenstein’s film and Stalin’s reaction to it, including his famous criticism of its depiction of the tsar, are often quoted in relation to the post-war cultural purges and the period that has come to be known as the Zhdanov Affair (Zhdanovshchina) after the second secretary of the Communist Party, Andrey Zhdanov (1896-1948). But in fact, Zhdanov himself died before the full consequences of the anti-formalism campaign unfolded, and before anti-cosmopolitanism showed its teeth. As Dobrenko and Clark observe: ‘Zhdanov’s role … was not decisive. Unquestionably, it was Stalin who not only initiated the various decisions but also directly dictated and pronounced them.’\(^{894}\)

The Kremlin meeting of 26 February 1947 came six months after the decrees of the Central Committee against the journals *Leningrad* and *Zvezda*, the first of three decrees of that year establishing the policy of cultural repression and the official start of the Zhdanov era.\(^{895}\) As the editors of *Soviet Culture and Power* show, referring to the materials from the Central Committee archives, Zhdanovism was nothing new and was not preceded by any kind of ‘thaw’. In essence, the resolutions of the years 1946–1948 ‘merely made public what had been known to a narrow circle of writers and had been concealed from the broad public.’\(^{896}\) Furthermore these decrees, which were just ‘ordinary “censoring” resolutions’ were simply

\(^{892}\) Clark, ‘Sergei Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible* and the Renaissance’, 59-62.


\(^{894}\) Dobrenko and Clark, *Soviet Culture and Power*, 447.

\(^{895}\) For the first and the third (on cinema) see ibid., 402-403.

\(^{896}\) Ibid. 392.
‘symbolic documents marking the new status of the state’ and its public function of exhibiting itself.  

In theatre too, there was a natural continuation of the pre-war campaign for Socialist Realism, and theatrical Zhdanovism was merely officialised by the second decree of the Party Central Committee, issued on 16 August 1946 and titled ‘About the Repertoire of the Dramatic Theatres and the Means of Improving It’. According to this ‘the principal defect of the present dramatic repertoire is that plays by Soviet authors on the contemporary themes have actually been crowded out of the country’s leading theaters.’ Similar criticism had already featured in closed discussion sessions of Radlov’s Theatre in the late 1930s; but if Radlov had managed to partially ignore them then, this time the Central Committee resolved to oblige the Committee on Artistic Affairs to ensure ‘the production by every drama theatre of no fewer than two or three new plays annually of high ideological and artistic standards on present-day Soviet themes.’ The changes to the administrative system of the theatres and the appearance of the new role of the deputy artistic director in charge of literature (Zavlit) reduced the artistic freedom of the theatre producer and ‘further reinforced the outside control and complicated any diversions.’ All this, and particularly the resolutions, should be viewed, as Dobrenko puts it, as ‘ideological warm-ups’ and ‘prelude’ to the rising campaign of ‘struggle against anti-cosmopolitanism’ and ‘preparation for a new wave of terror.’

Curiously, none of these factors seem to have resulted in Shakespeare being dethroned, even if Soviet Shakespearean priorities at this time shifted noticeably from stage to page. There is good evidence to suggest that in post-war years the Bard was ‘generally tolerated and even generously subsidized by Communist authorities but, at the same time, strictly controlled.’ Bearing the seal of approval of Marx, Engels and Lenin, Shakespeare was indeed an attractive subject for schools and research institutes and provided ‘an ideal classic to reach the widest strata of readers and audiences and thus to bridge the gap which had frequently developed between modern art and the people.’ Moreover, in the immediate after-war years, Shakespeare was briefly used as ‘a link between Russia and the West’. In this regard,

898 ‘The dramatic repertoire and measures to improve it: Decision of the Central Committee, CPSU (b), 26 August 1946’, in Decisions of the Central Committee CPSU (b) on Literature and Art (1946-1948), Moscow, Foreign Languages, 1951, 11-20; quoted in Senelick and Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theater, 484.
899 Senelick and Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theater, 483.
900 Dobrenko, ‘Literary Criticism’, 171.
Mikhail Morozov played a defining role. He contributed ‘a few brief notes on Shakespearean events in Russia’ to the *American Shakespeare Association Bulletin*; and his booklet *Shakespeare on the Soviet Stage* (translated into English) was published in England, opening with a fulsome introduction by John Dover Wilson. Surprisingly, perhaps, the booklet gave no sign of any exploitation of Shakespeare for ideological means and propaganda. Instead it offered a brief history of Russian adaptations and translations of Shakespeare plays since the 18th century, followed by a chapter on recent productions, and ending with a declaration, admired by Dover Wilson, of the necessity for a close relationship between scholars and practitioners. However, when it came to the inevitable mentioning of Radlov’s productions, Morozov managed to avoid any reference to the name of the theatre director, who was at this point considered a non-person. Morozov used instead the name of the leading actors as a means of identifying these specific adaptations.

The official accounts of theatre repertoires of the wartime and late Stalinist period, published during the ‘thaw’, are, as Makaryk observes, quite sketchy and gloss over many plays that were feared to be problematic. With the rumours of Stalin’s attitude towards *Hamlet* already in the air, it is not surprising that the few productions of *Hamlet* that did take place received minimal attention. For example, Valerian Bebutov’s 1946 *Hamlet* at the Kolas Theatre of Vitebsk received very little comment beyond its being in line with the tendency of the time to present Hamlet the fighter (*Gamlet-bortsa*). There were at least two more *Hamlet*-related events in the same year, both in the form of a composition (*kompozitsiia*) for a single performer, and both in Moscow. The main actor of Radlov’s *Hamlet*, Dudnikov, is reported to have presented his composition of *Hamlet* during one of the evenings of the annual Shakespeare Conference. The other one-man *Hamlet* event was organised by actor and musicologist, Aleksandr Glumov, at the Club of Moscow State University and at the Polytechnic museum in September 1946 and on 4 January 1947. Surviving posters of these events advertise them as ‘Concert with reading of a composition based on tragedy of *Hamlet*

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904 See, for example, the multi-volume history of Soviet theatre: Inna Vishnevskaia et al. (eds.), *Istoriia sovetskogo dramaticheskogo teatra v shesty tomakh*, Vol. 5: 1941-1953.
905 Makaryk, ‘Wartime *Hamlet*’, 123.
by Shakespeare, with music by N.N. Rakhmaninov [sic!] arranged for string quartet’. The accounts of the ‘protokol’ and discussion (obsuzhdenie) at Moscow University show that Glumov included the monologues as well as the main characters of the tragedy and succeeded in providing different nuances for each of them. The translation Glumov chose for his mono-spectacle was that of Pasternak, and by doing so he offered the first ever Moscow public performance and quasi-staging of this text. Pasternak himself attended the premiere, and it was after this performance that he created the first draft of his poem ‘Hamlet’, which not only appears at ‘the opening bars of the coda’ to Doctor Zhivago but also marks the start of the author’s first phase of intensive work on the beginning of his iconic novel. In a similar way to Glumov’s performance with its multi-tiered central figure, the lyric persona of Pasternak’s ‘Hamlet’ is ‘a composite of at least five strata – Pasternak, Zhivago, an actor portraying Hamlet, Hamlet himself, and Christ.’ A similar complexity was embodied in the Soviet bard of the 1970s, Vladimir Vysotsky, whose guitar accompaniment to his ‘recital’ of the as-yet-unpublished poem of Pasternak provided an ideal opening for Yuri Lyubimov’s canonic production of Hamlet at the Taganka Theatre (1971-1980).

Admittedly, and notwithstanding the previously mentioned productions of Hamlet and the continuation of related scholarship, the account of registered Shakespeare productions of the post-war and late-Stalinist period reveals a clear preference for comedies, particularly in the years immediately following the war; among the tragedies, Othello was the front runner, with as many as 52 productions between March 1945 and February 1953; Macbeth and Richard III were the least performed plays, apart from those not performed at all.

The year 1948 saw the extension of Zhdanovshchina to composers and the assassination of the actor, Solomon Mikhoels, soon to be followed by the anti-cosmopolitan campaign brought about in January 1949 ‘by circumstances that had arisen in Stalin’s circle after the

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908 RGALI, f. 2420, op. 1, ed. khr. 67. No further detail regarding the music appears in any of the consulted material; however, it was most probably by Nikolai Rakhmanov (1892-1964) who was a theatre composer and conductor.
911 Ibid., 132.
unexpected death of Zhdanov. During this critical period, it was not Shakespeare but supposed Western-style attitudes towards his scholarship that came under attack, including works of Mikhail Morozov that were deemed to be under Western influence, particularly his 1947 project Shekspirovskii sbornik, this being the proceedings of the annual Shakespeare Conference held by the Shakespeare department of the All-Russian Theatre Society. It was not the subject matter or the mere fact of writing about a foreign author that came under criticism, but Morozov’s ‘Western’ approach to Shakespeare scholarship – in reality no more than that of an exceptionally well-read commentator - and his lack of insistence on the superiority of Soviet Shakespearology. In subsequent articles, Morozov tried to redeem himself by attacking 'bourgeois’ critics and by accusing the West of dissociating Shakespeare from real life and realism, insisting that Shakespeare’s humanism and realism could only be revealed in Soviet productions, where the heroes are not abstract.

Following these attacks, and while politically correct Soviet Shakespearology was being developed by the likes of Aleksandr Anikst, criticism and scholarly articles were replaced by the writings of Pushkin and Vissarion Belinsky on Shakespeare, as well as translations and reprinting of translations of plays and sonnets in great anthology volumes; in this regard Pasternak had his fair share, with his translations being published in various guises.

Meanwhile, the next volume of Shekspirovskii sbornik had to wait until after Stalin’s death, by which time Morozov was also dead and had been replaced by Anikst as the new face of Soviet Shakespeare scholarship. From this point on, Soviet Shakespearology gradually separated along three distinct lines, namely Anikst and his school; the philosophical approach typified by Lev Vygotskii, and Kozintsev’s fusion of a close reading of Shakespeare text with practical directorial experience. This diversity of approach was not sharply antagonistic, as had been the case prior to death of Stalin, but it represented a clear move away from the ‘conflictlessness’ (bezkonfliktnost’) of the late-Stalin era. At the same time, sites of socio-political and artistic contention moved from affirmation of the status quo towards critique of it, with Hamlet as a potential instrument of such critiques.

915 See Dobrenko, ‘Literary criticism and the institution of literature’, 175.
916 Mikhail Morozov et al. (eds.), Shekspirovskii sbornik, VTO, Moscow, 1947.
Chapter 5
Critical Hamlets

5.1 Hamlet fever during the Thaw: A tale of three productions

There was at least one other contributing factor to the longevity of the myth of Hamlet and Stalin: the ‘Hamlet fever’ that took over Soviet theatres following Stalin’s death, which is now well known and widely quoted in Western and Russian literature, even if many nuances of this term are commonly ignored.\(^{920}\) It could be argued that the sudden onset of Hamlet productions meant that they might have been held back while Stalin was alive. Senior Russian Shakespeare scholar, Alexei Bartoshevich, himself an advocate of the idea of the tacit/unofficial Stalin ‘ban’, explains the phenomenon rather more subtly, by suggesting that in the history of Hamlet’s stage life there has been an alternation of Hamletian and non-Hamletian eras.\(^{921}\) The former is when all political, social and historical factors are aligned in such a way as to make society - or more precisely a generation within a given society - open and ready for new Hamlets. Accordingly 1954 was a Hamletian time, as were the 1970s, when Vladimir Vysotsky’s Hamlet took both Soviet and international stages by storm.

The accounts of immediate post-Stalin productions of Hamlet are frequently reductionist, exaggerated and inaccurate. For one thing, most mentions of the term ‘Hamlet fever’ only list one or at most two productions that appeared in 1954, namely Nikolai Okhlopkov’s at Moscow’s Mayakovskiy Theatre and Grigori Kozintsev’s at Leningrad’s Pushkin Theatre, passing over Sergei Radlov’s defiant return with his Hamlet at the Daugavpils Theatre in Latvia. Moreover, despite premiering only in December 1954 - more than five months after Kozintsev production in Leningrad - Okhlopkov’s takes primacy even in such authoritative reference books as Smeliansky’s.\(^{922}\) In his more recent articles, Senelick, in an effort to respect the chronology, identifies Okhlopkov’s Hamlet as ‘the first major [production]’ and hence downplays the importance of Kozintsev’s and Radlov’s stagings. Senelick then describes Okhlopkov’s Hamlet as ‘the most original interpretation of Hamlet since Nikolai

\(^{920}\) The term probably entered Western writings through Chushkin’s use of it in Gamlet-Kachalov, 309, quoted in Mandel, ‘Hamlet and Soviet Humanism’, 734.


\(^{922}\) Smeliansky, The Russian Theatre after Stalin, 5.
Akimov’s grotesque revision of 1932 at the Vakhtangov Theatre. Despite the valuable archive documents presented in his article, Senelick does not provide the reader with convincing justification for either of his claims.

The three productions used three different texts: Radlov stayed loyal to his wife’s translation (she, like Radlov himself, was still not rehabilitated), while Kozintsev opted for Pasternak’s, in what would be its first major staging, whereas Okhlopkov used Lozinskii’s. As an event, Radlov’s production had probably even more historical importance than Okhlopkov’s. In late 1953, having served almost nine out of ten years of his ‘correction camp’ sentence and having lost his wife there, Radlov assumed leadership of the almost non-existent Drama Theatre in Daugavpils and almost immediately started planning his Hamlet. For Radlov this was his rising from the ashes, while for the city of Daugavpils it was the first ever Shakespeare play to be staged. Reactions were accordingly rapturous.

As for originality of interpretation, Kozintsev’s controversial reworking of the end of the tragedy was far more original than anything in Okhlopkov’s Hamlet. Having omitted the lines of Fortinbras entirely, Kozintsev resurrected his title-character at the very end, where, accompanied by Shostakovich’s triumphant music (one of only two pieces freshly composed for the production), the Danish prince recites Shakespeare’s Sonnet 74, affirming the immortality of spirit as opposed to body (see lines 11-14, for instance: The coward conquest of a wretch’s knife./ Too base of thee to be remembered./ The worth of that is that which it contains,/ And that is this, and this with thee remains). Although the resurrection seems to be in line with Pasternak’s Christ-like understanding of Hamlet, the poet’s disapproval and his

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924 Except for the Sonnet 74 recitation at the end of the tragedy, where Kozintsev used Samuel Marshak’s translation.
927 Other aspects of Kozintsev’s production may be deduced or inferred from his letters, diary entries, and advice to actors and publications, as well as from reminiscences of his contemporaries. Some of these are collected in Valentina Kozintseva and Iavov Butovskii (eds.), Ot balagana do Shekspira: Khronika teatral’noi deiatel’nosti G.M. Kozintseva, St Petersburg, Dmitrii Bulanin, 2002, 368-453.
928 Kozintsev restored Fortinbras for his 1964 film adaptation of Hamlet but still reduced the lines to the bare minimum.
hastily drafted translation of the sonnet were among reasons why Kozintsev preferred to use Samuel Marshak’s translation for this epilogue to Pasternak’s intense displeasure.929

Notwithstanding Senelick’s claims, Okhlopkov’s Hamlet with Evgenyi Samoilov (later replaced by Mikhail Kozakov) in the title role was described as ‘absolute nightmare’ by Innokentii Smoktunovskii, the Hamlet of Kozintsev’s 1964 screen version, to the point that he almost rejected the role, since it seemed empty of any life.930 But the real ‘star’ of Okhlopkov’s production, which for many became the main object of study, was the stage design by Vadim Ryndin and above all the multi-purpose ‘vast metal gates or castle doors, bolted and heraldically decorated’.931 It was these gates that gave the production its Western nickname, ‘The Iron Curtain Hamlet’, overshadowing Al’tman’s design for Kozintsev’s production with another iconic element, a statue of Nike. The assumptions regarding Okhlopkov’s Hamlet – whether concerning its originality or its stage-concept - could be explained by the time and context of its premiere and its stage life. Kozintsev’s production in Leningrad, which was indeed the first post-Stalin Hamlet in the Soviet Union, opened on 31 March 1954, shortly before the publication of Ilya Ehrenburg’s novel The Thaw (Ottepel’), whose title has come to epitomise the Soviet era from the death of Stalin to the deposing of Khrushchev, i.e. 1953-64. For outside observers the period 1953-54 was still one of questioning the change of the political wind rather than conviction that it would actually change at all.932 Okhlopkov’s grand Moscow premiere, on the other hand, took place at the end of 1954, and it remained on the stage almost throughout the Thaw, well into the mid-1960s. Okhlopkov’s was the production chosen to be played alongside Peter Brook’s Hamlet during the first ever tour by a British theatre troupe to the Soviet Union in December 1955. Of course when performed parallel to Brook’s staging and Paul Scofield’s performance, the Russian Hamlet appeared heavy, highly stylised and slow.933 Yet, this historical event turned a bright international spotlight on Okhlopkov’s production. Hence even its shortcomings,

929 For correspondence between Pasternak and Kozintsev (as well as between Pasternak and Ol’ga Freyndenberg), see Grigori Kozintsev and Boris Pasternak, ‘Pis’ma o Gamlete’, Voprosy literature (1975/1), 212-223; Valentina Kozintseva and Iakov Butovskii (eds.), Ot balagana do Shekspira, 397-401 and 411-413.
930 Interview Anna Gereb with Smoktunovskiy, 8 October 1993: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUc7OIK7CUc, accessed 24 August 2016.
933 For a comparison of a few scenes from each production, see Mikhail Kozakov, Risunki na peske: Akterskaia kniga, Moscow, AST/Zebra E2007, 129-134 (excerpts translated in Senelick and Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theatre, 524-525).
notably its excessive monumentality, once observed through the lens of the Thaw, became attractive subject matter for Western commentators.

However, what is often overlooked is the difference between the Western and the Russian understanding of the metaphor that defined this period. If for a Western reader the Thaw is most often associated with renewal and anticipation of the spring, it ‘belonged to, but also worked against, some of the most stable and meaningful associations in Russian poetry and lyrical imagination.’\(^{934}\) With reference to the Russian climate, for many poets the Thaw was synonymous with the season of mud and far from a favourite time of the year.\(^{935}\) At the same time the melting of the accumulated snow would reveal ‘what lies beneath, what was always there’ – in other words a return rather than an advance, and even a recurring event in the cycle of the seasons.\(^{936}\) Each of these readings highlights a different nuance to the nature of the liminal 1950s, suggesting, as Clark observes, that much of what was considered new was in fact a restored continuity with trends that had emerged in the 1930s. Maia Turovskaia is among the few scholars and critics to observe that the widely discussed decorations and set design of Okhlopkov’s *Hamlet*, as well as its overall style, were in fact not new at all but belonged to the tradition of historical monumentality that had been fully explored in Shakespeare productions of the 1930s.\(^{937}\)

With this in mind, notwithstanding the tumultuous programme of reform and de-Stalinisation that Khrushchev was soon to embark on,\(^{938}\) Stalin’s death in March 1953 ‘did not mark an absolute BC/AD dividing line.’\(^{939}\) For the theatre, for example, the Thaw came in several phases including the abolition of the Glavrepertkom - the Central Repertoire Board - with its function taken over by the Ministry of Culture (1953), the publication of an editorial in *Kommunist* advocating diversity in arts (1955), and the posthumous rehabilitation of Meyerhold (1955).\(^{940}\) But as Philip Sabant observed in 1954, the theatrical Thaw was already set in motion when the distribution of Stalin prizes for 1951 Theatre contained no first- or


\(^{935}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{936}\) Katerina Clark, ‘“Wait for Me and I Shall Return”: The Early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?’, in Kozlov and Gildburd (eds.), *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, 86.


\(^{939}\) Katerina Clark, ‘Wait for Me and I Shall Return’, 86.

even second-class prizes awarded to a Soviet play, revealing the stagnated status of drama and theatre.941 More generally the ‘first Thaw’942 has been seen as beginning with the publication of lead articles in Pravda on 7 April 1952, attacking the theory of ‘conflictlessness’ promoted by Nikolai Virta and Boris Lavrenev.943 The key-note address by Malenkov at the Nineteenth Party Congress of the same year further established the campaign rejecting the ‘varnishing of reality’ in favour of ‘the truth of life’.944 In this light, the 1954 productions of Hamlet had their roots not in Stalin’s death but in ‘the shift of the ideological trajectory in 1952’, which ‘judging by the scope, breadth, and intensiveness ... came straight from Stalin.’945 This is one aspect that sets the Hamlets of 1954 apart from preceding and later productions of the tragedy: in line with Dobrenko’s arguments regarding literature in 1952, the new Hamlets (Okhlopkov’s and Kozintsev’s) found ‘a balance’ between ‘vigilance’ and ‘heightened class struggle’ alongside portraying ‘the beauty of our life’. Both Okhlopkov and Kozintsev succeeded in providing the audience with ‘the image of Soviet man ... portrayed in all of his colossal height, in all the wealth and multi-facetedness of his character and his fate’, whilst avoiding a ‘blue-skied and idyllic’ image of life and staying true to ‘the severe truth of our era – the era of difficult, but beautiful heroic tasks’.946

This aesthetic trend could provide an alternative explanation to Bartoshevich’s theory for Kozintsev’s re-scripting of the hero’s denouement as a way of complying with the authorities and censorship,947 since it could be argued that Kozintsev was restoring the balance which had been tipped over by the production’s ‘atmosphere of tyranny and cruelty in which the Danish prince had been suffocating’,948 whilst adhering to his personal reading of Shakespeare’s tragedy as a celebration of poetry.949 Such a balance was absent from Akimov’s ostensibly dialectical materialist reading and from Radlov’s realist celebration of Shakespeare’s optimism. In succeeding years, this balance would be increasingly skewed by other factors, such as political immediacy, whether as a catalyst for a production’s reception

943 ‘Predolet’ ostavanie dramaturgii’, Pravda, 7 April 1952.
945 Ibid.
(Lyubimov’s of 1971) or directly implied by the adaptation (Slonimsky’s opera of 1991). At the same time, Kozintsev’s decision to finish his production with a reading of Sonnet 74 might have well resulted from the director’s knowledge of Shakespeare’s works. Indeed, this Sonnet has strong associations with Hamlet, and in particular with the dying words of the Danish prince; the opening lines (But be contented when that fell arrest/ Without all bail shall carry me away) echoes Hamlet’s Had I but time, as this fell Sergeant, Death/ Is strict in his arrest (V/2/320-321).950

5.2 Kozintsev’s concept and Shostakovich’s music (theatre and film)

In order to reinforce the multifaceted portrait of this new Soviet Hamlet, and given the dominating power of set designs, all other components of Kozintsev’s production, particularly the incidental music, needed to be flexible enough to be freely manipulable by the director. In this respect, it was easier to refer back to already known music than to take the risk of dealing with a complex, more or less autonomous, score such as Shostakovich had provided for Akimov’s Hamlet. While Radlov in Daugavpils referred back to Prokofiev’s music composed for their 1938 Hamlet collaboration, Okhlopyov’s choice of Tchaikovsky’s The Tempest and Hamlet was more backward-looking, and was even criticised for being ‘in the manner of a Hollywood film’.951 Kozintsev, too, looked for familiarity as well as plurivocality when he turned to his long-standing collaborator, Shostakovich, to provide the incidental music. In fact, as it turned out, he ended up using music that was almost entirely pre-composed. The contract between the Pushkin Theatre and Shostakovich, signed on 15 December 1953, suggests that the composer was supposed to provide the theatre with fifteen new musical numbers by the following February: 1. Opening number, 2. Claudius’s exit, 3. The Ghost’s appearance, 4. Music accompanying the start of the play-within-a-play 5. Pantomime, 6. Gigue, 7-12: Ophelia’s songs, 13-14. Gravedigger’s songs, 15. Finale.952

Exactly one month prior to the contract Shostakovich had informed Kozintsev that he would not be able to take on the music of Hamlet due to his excessively busy schedule, and had suggested that his pupil Kara Karayev could replace him.953 It seems, however, that during his visit to Leningrad prior to the signing of the contract, Kozintsev had managed to convince

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950 See, Rupin Desai, “‘But I have that within which passeth show’: Shakespeare’s Ambivalence towards his Profession”, in Desai (ed.), Shakespeare the Man: New Decipherings, Madison, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014, 101-120, here 104.
951 Ossia Trilling, ‘How Different Can One Be?’, World Theatre 8/1-2 (1964), 96.
952 ‘Dogovory s dramaturgami, kompozitormi o napisanyi p’es i muzyki k nim i oformlenyi spektaklei: 5 Ianvar 1953 do 30 Dekabre 1953’, TsGALI, f. 354, op. 1, ed. khr. 635, 43.
Shostakovich, reassuring him that the production could re-use some of his previous scores; and in January 1954 Shostakovich wrote to Kozintsev, inquiring whether he had ‘managed to sort out my musical heritage (nasledie)’. As Kozintsev later admitted, his affinity with the music of Shostakovich was such that he would often envision his work whilst imagining Shostakovich’s music. His diaries and working notebooks (zapisnie knizhki) of this time reveal how he was at work at creating a harmony between his concept of Hamlet for each scene and his choice of Shostakovich’s score to his 1941 production of King Lear at the Bolshoi Dramaticheskii Teatr. Studying Kozintsev’s choice of musical numbers from King Lear and the new functions that he assigns to them for his Hamlet provides an insight into his reading of each tragedy and the affinities that he found between the characters and events of the two plays. The fact that Kozintsev was able to re-use most musical numbers that had been specifically and to his requirements composed for a different play also points to the plurivocal nature of Shostakovich’s musical language and its capacity to be interpreted in multiple manners. The importance of this incidental music is even more apparent when considered in parallel with Shostakovich’s subsequent music for Kozintsev’s film version of Hamlet in 1964, some of whose numbers originate in the composer’s 1954 theatre score. This is particularly true for the Gigue, one of the very few newly composed episodes for the 1954 production. This balagan-style number, an equivalent to Radlov/Prokofiev’s minuet/pantomime, was to appear following Claudius’s storming out of the ‘Mousetrap’ and Hamlet’s inviting the musicians and actors to play in celebration of his success in confirming his uncle’s guilt. A variation of the opening bars reappears in the musical number, ‘The Ball at the Palace’, an as-yet-unpublished cue around ten minutes into the film, immediately after the first fanfare, which had been played to the scene of Claudius naming Hamlet as his successor (see Ex. 5.1). Like the Gigue from the 1954 Hamlet, ‘The Ball’ is supposed to be diegetic; however, the very fast tempo (marked presto) and the melody quite removed from the opening B flat major make this music highly unsuitable for dancing to. With the functional dominant-tonic accompaniment juxtaposed with complex melody it seems that only the accompaniment is meant to serve as music for the ball, while the melody might best be described as representing Hamlet’s tortured

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954 Letter from Shostakovich to Kozintsev, 7 January, 1954, TsGALI, f. 622 op. 1, ed. khr. 1000, Letters, 17.
955 Kozintsev, King Lear, the Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, 254.
956 TsGALI f. 622, op.1, ed. khr. 308-310.
957 See also ‘Zadanie D.D. Shostakovichu na muzyku k spektalu’, in Kozintseva and Butovskii (eds.), Ot balagana do Shekspira, 383-384, where, however, the commentary to this document wrongly states that Shostakovich composed a complete new score for the 1954 production of Hamlet.
thoughts. This duality also has its roots in the 1954 theatre production: Kozintsev, as his notes show, required that the music of the Gigue ‘went against the ongoing tragic events on the stage’. 958


Soon the film music goes to a second plane as Hamlet’s shortened first soliloquy starts as voice over the thoughtful (rather than tragic) prince walking among the guests. The music gradually disappears, as Hamlet wanders out of the ballroom to welcome Horatio and the frightened soldiers. The use of music as a connecting device between different scenes is a recurring feature throughout the film, as is also pointed out in Kozintsev’s journal notes: ‘The boundaries that separate scenes must be destroyed. … No film transitions: no black-outs, fade-outs, or double exposures. … Hamlet’s thought penetrates this motley, speeding world, and exposes the cancer cells and the decomposition of the organism.’ 959

In his film Kozintsev cuts out the night patrol and the Ghost’s first appearance to the soldiers. As such is the Ghost is mentioned for the first time here, as Horatio reports to Hamlet against a background of an open fire. Accordingly Shostakovich’s music introduces the theme of the Ghost, which continues as the men separate and Hamlet remains alone with his thoughts and fears; a close-up on the fire establishes this elemental symbol of the film.

The theme of the Ghost, particularly the string tremolos and their punctuating chords, echoes the storm music of the 1941 King Lear, which according to Kozintsev’s notes was also chosen to represent the Ghost of Hamlet’s father at the 1954 production (Ex. 5.2).

958 Kozintsev, Materiali k postanovke Gamleta, TsGALI, f. 622 op 1, ed. khr. 310, 52-53.
959 Kozintsev, Shakespeare: Time and Conscience, 231.

Even the three punctuating chords with which the film opens, and which are always linked to, if not part of, Hamlet’s theme, have a precedent in Kozintsev’s musical requirements for his theatre production. In his notes regarding the change of scenery, Kozintsev suggests three gongs as a signal. However, he insists that the transition to Hamlet’s room should be signaled with three chords of a different nature and then adds in parenthesis: ‘Hamlet’s theme’.\(^{960}\) This clarification goes against Tatiana Egorova and Erik Heine’s identification of the three chords as a ‘leitmotif’ for Elsinore.\(^{961}\)

It is a different matter with Ophelia’s songs, where uncovering material belonging to the theatre production actually further complicates an already unclear picture. Unlike the 1954 theatre production, where Ophelia sang all six of her songs, four of them having instrumental accompaniment,\(^{962}\) Kozintsev kept only three of Ophelia’s songs in the film: ‘How should I

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\(^{962}\) See, Shostakovich’s letter of 11 February 1954 to Kozintsev: ‘I am sending you the instrumentation of four songs. For the 5th and 6th I didn’t do an instrumentation, as you told me that they go without music’, TsGALI, f. 622, op.1, ed. khr. 1000, 21.
your true love know’, ‘Valentine’s Day’ and ‘My Robin’. These are all sung a cappella and in a natural, non-professional manner by the actress Anastasia Vertinskaia. However, the melodies from the first and third are incorporated in other musical cues of the film: respectively Hamlet’s farewell to Ophelia, which depicts Ophelia reading Hamlet’s love poem before being interrupted by a strange visit from him, and the Death of Ophelia, a montage that links Laertes and Claudius’s plot to Hamlet’s return via shots of Ophelia’s empty chambers, her dead body in the water and a seagull’s flight. While Egorova unaccountably considers these songs to be influenced by Russian folk music, Olga Dombrovskaiia correctly observes that Shostakovich turned to songs that ‘were traditionally used for these scenes from the 18th century and possibly from Shakespeare’s time.’ However, when it comes to Shostakovich’s source for these songs, Dombrovskaiia admits that the picture is incomplete and only points out an inference that might be drawn from a letter from Kozintsev to Jay Leyda in June 1952, where the director mentions having looked for a volume of Shakespeare music in bookshops but failing to find it. More importantly she reports the existence of two unknown and undated manuscripts in the Shostakovich archives, with the harmonised melodies of the three songs. Findings from the Pushkin Theatre archive and RGALI may help with the chronology. The former holds the orchestral parts from the 1954 production, and since the whereabouts of the main score (or piano score) are unknown, these have been used to reconstruct the Gigue and the Finale. However, a separate manuscript sheet containing the melody to Ophelia’s ‘How Should I your true Love Know?’ seems to have remained undetected to this day. As witnessed and reported by Sergei Slonimsky, the 1954 Ophelia definitely sang this traditional melody with Shostakovich’s harmonisation. The Pushkin Theatre manuscript suggests that the mysterious manuscripts Dombrovskaiia mentions may have belonged to Shostakovich’s now missing score for 1954 Hamlet, particularly given that, according to their correspondence, Kozintsev sent Shostakovich’s theatre score to him in January 1963, while the composer was working on his film music and was still considering reusing his previous material. Thus the approximate dating of the manuscripts of the songs goes at least as far back as the time of Shostakovich’s

963 Egorova, Soviet Film Music, 182-183.
966 Dmitri Shostakovich Archive, f. 2, op. 1, del. 166.
967 Interview with Slonimsky, 28 March 2013.
968 Kozintseva and Butovskii (eds.), Perepiska Kozintseva, 230-231.
work on the 1954 production, and this in turn suggests that the composer’s source for this traditional melody was other than what Dombrovskaya had suggested. At the same time, a document in the archived collection of the actress Mariia Babanova contains the manuscript of I.M. Meerovich, responsible for the music for Okhlopkov’s Hamlet, where the composer writes out two melodies belonging to Ophelia’s songs, once using Shakespeare’s words and then words from a traditional song. One of these songs is ‘How should I your true love know?’, to the same melody used by Shostakovich. The reference for the English text of Shakespeare is given on the verso as ‘Hamlet H[orace] F[urness], Philadelphia, 1877’; but no reference or indication is provided for the melodies. The same melody had been used by William Walton in his music for Laurence Olivier’s 1948 film version of Hamlet; and given that Okhlopkov was appointed a deputy of the Ministry of Culture in 1953 in charge of foreign films, it is possible that he had viewed and known of Olivier’s film and had suggested the songs to his composer. In fact the most authoritative account of the origins of this melody states that it was transcribed from an actress who had played the part of Ophelia prior to the burning down of Drury Lane Theatre in 1812, where the manuscripts handed down from original sources had been housed (see Ex. 5.3).

Ex. 5.3: 'How should I your true love know?' (traditional)

5.3 The Shakespeare celebrations of 1964

In 1964 the Soviet Union celebrated Shakespeare’s 400th anniversary on an unprecedented grandiose scale, marked by an outpouring of conferences, books, articles, theatre productions and other forms of adaptation. Among many publications was an entire section of the

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970 Louis Elson, Shakespeare in Music, London, David Nutt, 1901, 234-235, with the melody and bass-line given at 236.
972 For a video of the jubilee celebration at the Bolshoi Theatre, see
magazine *Sovetskaia muzyka*, dedicated to the theme of Shakespeare and music. This contained articles by such prominent Shakespeare scholars as Aleksandr Anikst, presenting an overview of the ‘musicality of Shakespeare’ and the different functions of music in his plays, as well as from musicologist and composer Adolf Gotlib reporting from international concerts performing music from Shakespeare’s time.

The ‘broad spectrum’ of the anniversary activities not only showcased the Soviet ‘reverence and enthusiasm’ for Shakespeare but also reflected the continuous Soviet view of culture as a primary ‘sphere of power and contestation’. With ‘multivalent internal purposes’ these jubilee events, as Makaryk observes, contained three strategies: ‘double-voicing, or the expression of admiration [of Shakespeare] coupled with castigation [of the Western approach to him], claims of ownership and superiority’, which echoed Turgenev’s claims a hundred years earlier and finally ‘the Stakhanovite idea of exceeding all norms of adulation’. Thus the Shakespeare anniversary became ‘our own special occasion, a red-letter day in the calendar of a country in which Shakespeare has truly found a second home – a vast country, generous in love and gratitude, always ready to bring his great works to life again and again, pouring into them her own feelings and emotions.’

But by far the best-known product of the celebrations, at least in the West, was Kozintsev’s cinema adaptation of *Hamlet* with Shostakovich’s music, which went on to be nominated for several international prizes (including the Golden Globe and BAFTA) and won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1964. Apart from being one of the most successful cinematic exports of the Soviet Union, this film also provided a first encounter with Soviet Shakespeare appropriations for most non-Russian speakers, and hence it has been widely discussed and written about. Although many of the resulting readings are reductionist in their insistence, without any scientific/archival proof, on Kozintsev’s film being solely a criticism of the Soviet regime, there also exist more scholarly and objective studies of Kozintsev’s

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973 *Sovetskaia muzyka*, 1964/4, 75-91.


977 Ibid.


cinematic language and his appropriation of Shakespeare, as well as of Shostakovich’s film music. Apart from this music’s genesis, its musical properties and its relation to the film, it is interesting to observe the afterlife of the score - not just of the orchestral suite that emerged from it, but also Shostakovich’s own more cryptic use of its motifs and ideas in other non-programme works, chiefly his string quartets. The third movement of his ninth quartet, for example, features an exact quote from the scene of the graveyard, with Hamlet reminiscing on his childhood while holding Yorick’s skull. As Dombrovskaiia points out, in his sketches for the quartet at this point Shostakovich simply wrote ‘Hamlet’ in the middle of the page, without any musical notation. The flourishes of the violin solo during Ophelia’s mad scene, as well as the short lament motif in the same scene, both reappear in the eleventh String Quartet (movement 3, opening) and fourteenth String Quartet (movement 3, R894-10), the latter having already appeared in the slow movement of the Seventh Quartet of 1960. It is also possible to trace the dotted-rhythm theme of Hamlet in the funeral march of the Fifteenth String Quartet. It is, of course, tempting to interpret such instances as the composer’s hidden programme or message incorporated in the non-programmatic works, but it is just as possible to understand them in a more mundane fashion: for example, in the case of the quotation from the graveyard scene, the noises and spoken words in the film prevent the music from being heard, leaving open the possibility that Shostakovich simply did not want such a strong musical idea to be wasted.

Back in the early 1940s, when working on the score for Kozintsev’s theatre production of King Lear, Shostakovich had admitted that ‘at each encounter with Shakespeare, my thoughts go far beyond that humble task at hand; there appear musical dreams and beyond them the hope and desire of one day adapting the Shakespearean theme.’ The composer’s friend and secretary Isaak Glikman remembers how he was asked on several occasions to write a libretto

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on a Shakespeare play ‘except Othello’ (perhaps because of the status of Verdi’s opera), and after the completion of the Hamlet film-score, Shostakovich had asked his opinion about the possibility of a symphonic poem on the subject. During work on the film and its music, Kozintsev reported how Shostakovich even told him that he was working on a Hamlet symphony. None of these plans ever came to anything. However, the references to the film music in his quartets suggest that he may have been incorporating Hamlet-related ideas in his other works in a similar way to Meyerhold with excerpts from his never-realised production of Hamlet (see Chapter 1.6.3).

5.4 Hamlet after the Thaw: a multi-generic affair

Perhaps prompted by the 1964 anniversary celebrations, from the mid-1960s there was a distinct rise in the number of non-theatrical adaptations of Hamlet. The play and/or its heroes and themes were used as subject matter for opera, ballet, film-ballet and songs (both art songs and popular/estrada), a trend which continued all the way to the collapse of the Soviet Union and beyond.

As Dobrenko observes, the end of the Thaw in non-political spheres is not easy to define. The political end is generally considered to be marked by the resolution of the October plenary session of the Central Committee (CPSU) in 1964, which toppled Khrushchev and handed power to Leonid Brezhnev. In other respects, however, such as the economy, the Thaw continued for a few more years. As for cultural history, the final chords were sounded by the trial of Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel in winter 1966, the Fourth Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in spring 1967 with Solzhenitsyn’s call for an end to censorship, and finally Aleksandr Tvardovskii’s February 1970 resignation from the post of editor-in-chief of the journal Novii mir, ‘which had been the center of the liberal intelligentsia’. Later Mikhail Gorbachev would refer to this period of ‘creeping re-Stalinisation’ as the Era of Stagnation (zastoi).

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984 Glikman, Diaries, Shostakovich archive, f. 4, r. 2/4, diary entry for 30 March 1954, file 38.


987 Ibid.

Senelick and Ostrovsky point out the paradox that ‘the period known as Stagnation, owing to the smug, stolid, and increasingly arteriosclerotic leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, also saw the most exciting upsurge in theatrical creativity since the 1920s.’ This was despite or perhaps even thanks to the mechanisms of theatre censorship maintained by the Ministry of Culture under the leadership from 1960 to 1974 of Ekaterina Furtseva, as it forced theatre directors to come up with innovative creative ideas that could nevertheless successfully pass through the censorship filters. The theatre was, after all, where people flocked in order to ‘hear messages they could not hear elsewhere.’ In many ways the situation is paralleled by the new realist Iranian cinema, particularly the works of Abbas Kiarostami, which have risen to international acclaim but were in effect a result of painful censorship, which the director avoided by choosing simple subject matter and exploring the lives of distant villages. In the case of Soviet Union, once these conditions were removed by the collapse of the system, there remained no need for such Aesopian language or scenic metaphors. The creative results were themselves therefore somewhat paradoxical. For instance, when the Lithuanian theatre company headed by Eimuntas Nekrosius performed Hamlet in London as a part of the 2012 Globe to Globe festival, the actor of the title role, Andrius Mamontovas (also Lithuania’s leading rock star) admitted that: ‘I miss those secret messages... there were always little secret messages from the artist to the audience. But there’s no need for that now because you can say what you want openly – it’s more entertainment now.’

5.4.1 ‘I am Hamlet’: Songs

Casting a rock star as Hamlet, who performs his music as a part of the production, was probably prompted by Yuri Lyubimov’s Hamlet starring the Russian bard, poet and actor, Vladimir Vysotsky as the Danish prince, premiered on 29 November 1971. Dressed in sweater and jeans, Vysotsky opened each night of the production, singing to his seven-string guitar accompaniment. The production was so successful that it ran for nine consecutive seasons until Vysotsky’s death in 1980, overshadowing along the way Andrey Tarkovsky’s Hamlet at the Lenkom (Leninskii Komsomol) Theatre in Moscow in 1976. This was not the first collaboration of Vysotsky and Lyubimov, but by casting such an iconic figure against other more blank characters and against his scenic metaphor in the form of a heavy cloth curtain, Lyubimov confirmed his new theatrical path. As Birgit Beumers observes, in the

989 Senelick, Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theater, 555.
990 Ibid.
early 1970s ‘Lyubimov gave prominence to the sincerity of the individual and his tragic loneliness’ in a hostile environment.\textsuperscript{992} In the case of Hamlet, the individual (Hamlet) was set apart from society with the help of the scenic solutions of the designer David Borovsky, such as the now legendary omnipresent curtain woven from thick yarn, and by matching all the costumes to the earthy colour of the curtain against Hamlet’s black sweater. In this way ‘it was left to him to resolve the conflict between his action and his conscience.’\textsuperscript{993}

A year after the premiere\textsuperscript{994} Vysotsky composed a poem and song entitled ‘My Hamlet’ (\textit{Moi Gamlet}), in which he spoke from Hamlet’s point of view of the prince’s inner turmoil and conflict.\textsuperscript{995} Vysotsky’s impersonation of Hamlet - whether as an actor or singer - helped Shakespeare’s tragedy to penetrate deeper into the popular culture of the country, all the way to such genres as Soviet estrada. For example, the moment that defined Alla Pugacheva’s ‘rush to the spotlight’ of Soviet pop culture is defined by the performance of her song ‘Arlekino’ at the Golden Orfeo festival in Bulgaria in 1975, which, apart from public recognition, brought her the Grand Prix of this socialist pop competition.\textsuperscript{996} The song’s melody, by Bulgarian Emil Dmitrov, received a new arrangement and lyrics wherein the harlequin of the song describes his fate as a tired clown who has been playing Hamlet for himself for many years and who could reveal his tears only if he could only take off his mask, which he cannot. As in Vysotsky’s song, the phrase ‘I am Hamlet’ (\textit{Ia Gamlet}) refers to Alexander Blok’s 1914 poem with the same title. The tragic middle section of Pugacheva’s song, which is overall a merry tune with grotesque accompaniment, together with her interpretation, created what has been called ‘a synthetic theatre of estrada’\textsuperscript{997}

From the perspective of concert vocal repertoire, Shostakovich, following his two incidental music scores for the tragedy (1932 and 1954) and his film score of 1964, had two further encounters with Hamlet, specifically with the figures of Hamlet and Ophelia and their relationship. The first of these was the opening song of his 1967 cycle, \textit{Seven Romances on the Poems of Alexander Blok} (Op. 127), for which he chose an early poem of Blok -
'Ophelia’s Song’, written in 1899. 998 From an early age Blok had enormous admiration for Shakespeare, and for *Hamlet* in particular. This fascination grew and took a more mystical shape after 1 August 1898, when he acted some scenes of the tragedy alongside his future bride and embodiment of the Eternal Female, Liubov Mendel’eva, as Ophelia. 999 Blok’s nine Hamlet-themed poems have dual significance in that they both represent the poet’s understanding and interpretation of *Hamlet* and ‘comment upon Blok’s personal experience in his relentless quest to define himself and his relation to Feminine Ideal’. 1000 What may have attracted Shostakovich to Blok’s *Hamlet* is the shift in the poet’s interpretation of the play from the theme of revenge or philosophical meditation on life to the theme of the tragedy of Hamlet-Ophelia’s love. In this regard Blok assumes the role of both Hamlet and Ophelia when describing their dependence on one another. In ‘Ophelia’s Song’, Blok identifies with Ophelia’s longing heart in her grieving for her beloved’s departure to the faraway lands from which he shall never return. Although Blok’s Ophelia does not sound particularly mad, the poem could also be seen as a variation on one of Ophelia’s songs from her mad scene, ‘He is dead and gone’. This hypothesis is backed up by Blok’s wife, who remembers one night when she and Blok were reading various translations of Ophelia’s songs and suddenly Blok showed her this poem, telling her: ‘There is yet another translation [of Ophelia’s mad songs]!’ 1001

Shostakovich’s setting of this song – unusually for voice and cello, since it was written for the famous husband-and-wife musicians Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vushnevskaya – opens with a declamatory cello line, as if reciting a monologue which from the start shows darkening tendencies by means of its flattening of scale-degrees. With the entrance of the voice, which unlike the cello is almost entirely diatonic (C minor), the song turns into two parallel monologues rather than a dialogue. This continues throughout the first strophe, which could be described as a memory of promises made and broken (Ex. 5.4a). The second verse, however, which is more rooted in the present and Ophelia’s realisation of the tragedy at hand, sees the cello trying to interact with the voice, for example by the clash in bar 24 of its G flat against the soprano’s G natural (Ex. 5.4b). This gesture proves fatal as when singing the word


'tears' the voice goes to G flat and the second verse, which is sung entirely in the lower register ends with this flattened note. The third verse goes back to the opening, but as with other numbers of this cycle, despite Shostakovich’s tendency towards strophic construction, it changes, here by stretching the lines and gradually unflattening the cello’s previous modal deviations: now, it seems, it is Ophelia’s tragic destiny that is affecting Hamlet and his conscience.

Ex. 5.4: a) and b): Shostakovich, *Blok cycle*, No. 1 ‘Ophelia’s Song’
The juxtaposition of the transparent diatonic vocal line representing Ophelia against the ‘hyperminor’ (or flatter-than-minor) cello (Hamlet) makes this song at some level a musical parallel to Mikhail Vrubel’s 1888 painting, *Hamlet and Ophelia* (see Plate 5.1). The painting, set at dusk by the water, depicts Hamlet talking to Ophelia. The painting does not correspond to any particular moment of the tragedy, yet each of the figures contains the essence of the Shakespearean characters: Ophelia, ‘a study in blue and violet’ is the more vertical component, evoking, as with Gustave Moreau (for example in his 1885 *Eve*), purity and spirituality, which is enhanced by her near-dematerialisation into the vegetation that surrounds her; she is becoming one with the nature. Ophelia’s near-transparency is set against Hamlet’s density. Yet a gentle arabesque curve joins the two figures, suggesting a dialogue or even a ‘dédoublement’ of the tragic hero.\footnote{For the notion of ‘double’, see Michel Guiomar, *Principes d’une esthétique de la mort*, Paris, José Corti, 1988 (orig. pub. 1967), 285-324.} The ‘somber hues of the evening scene’, which Byrns links to the atmosphere ‘of premonition and foreboding’,\footnote{Richard Byrns, ‘The Artistic Worlds of Vrubel’ and Blok’, *The Slavonic and Eastern European Journal*, 23/1 (Spring 1979), 38-50, here 44-5.} are evoked in Shostakovich’s music by the ever-flattening degrees in the cello part. Similarly, despite the overall melancholic character of Shostakovich’s song, the opposition of masculine and feminine, of translucent and dense, gives the setting the same underlying dramatic tension as Vrubel’s painting and Blok’s *Hamlet*-themed poems.
In this, as in the later ‘I am Hamlet’ (III, 91), where the poet is Hamlet himself, Blok intimates that the prince has lost a spiritually necessary part of his own being with Ophelia's death; he is in a frigid world from which the life force has disappeared. Like Vrubel’, Blok is able to shift back and forth between the two roles, finding male and female aspects in embodiments of the title-figure.

Blok felt a great affinity with and admiration for Vrubel’. Although from different generations, the two held comparable views in terms of apocalyptic visions and the Eternal Feminine. Just as in Shostakovich’s song, both Vrubel’ and Blok indulge in role-play by assuming the mask of Hamlet and Ophelia in turn and shifting roles back and forth, finding ‘male and female aspects in the embodiments of the Central Figure.’

Something similar can be detected in Shostakovich’s next Hamlet-themed song, ‘Hamlet’s Dialogue with his Conscience’, the third number in the 1973 song cycle, Six Poems of

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1005 Ibid., 44.
Marina Tsvetaeva for voice (contralto) and piano (Op. 143). Tsvetaeva wrote her three Hamlet poems in 1923 and later included them as autonomous lyrics in her poetry collection, After Russia. ‘Hamlet’s Dialogue’ is placed last, and in it Ophelia’s voice, which had been heard in the two previous poems, is replaced by that of Hamlet’s conscience addressing him by his name and by repeated evocations of Ophelia’s ‘muddy’ death. Each of these references is then confronted by a reminder of Hamlet’s love for Ophelia, paraphrasing Shakespeare’s ‘Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum’ (V/1) in his defence. But these attempts are gradually deflected, and the poem ends with Hamlet questioning his love for Ophelia: I perplexed loved her? Given Tsvetaeva’s harsh judgement of Hamlet, which seems to refer back to a Turgenevian reading of the Dane, Shostakovich’s selecting of this poem seemingly contradicts his affinity with the character of Hamlet as shown in his film music. However, his song removes both the stage direction ‘perplexed’ and, more importantly, the final question mark, providing further evidence of his compassion with Hamlet.

Although Tsvetaeva does not clarify which words belong to Hamlet and which to his conscience, each verse combining the two roles, it is often assumed that it is the conscience who evokes the image of Ophelia’s death and Hamlet who placates these accusations with ‘his protestations of love’. Support for this view may be found in the poetic construction itself, since the death evocations of the conscience, with their ‘cross-stanzaic boundaries’, ‘contain more enjambments and are endowed with greater thematic and rhythmic variety’ than Hamlet’s repeating of ‘ever smaller’ contributions. If this view is accepted, Shostakovich’s treatment reverses the roles, or at least their power: Hamlet’s ‘conscience’ is restrained by setting his words to repeated notes, whereas his own defence features a wider variety of intervals, rhythm and dynamics. Only in the second verse, which contains the image of Ophelia’s garland, does Shostakovich move away from his initial repeated notes and instead deploys a variation of Hamlet’s first protestation of love, thus beginning the process of the fusion of the two roles earlier than Tsvetaeva.

On the other hand, it seems that Shostakovich’s reading of this poem is greatly influenced by his obsession with death. In this respect the song can be heard as a disguised variation on ‘To be or not to be’, rather than on its ostensible topic of Hamlet and Ophelia. The song opens with a descending and ever-flattening piano introduction, which leads to the first reference to Ophelia (albeit unnamed) in the ‘muck’. Attributing both parts (Hamlet and his conscience) to the same voice and setting the evocation of death by repeated notes suggest a deep-seated affinity with Schubert’s famous ‘Death and the Maiden’, as well as echoing the repeated notes that accompanied the scene of Ophelia’s madness in Kozintsev’s film (Ex. 5.5). The repeated notes are then taken over by the piano, which continues to act as a representation of death until its postlude, where the prelude is restated an octave lower, finishing with a G-based dyad. The major-minor ambiguity at the very end could suggest that through this song Shostakovich was restoring what has been missing from almost all Soviet Hamlets in general and from his own previous depictions of this character in particular: his doubts. Himself increasingly infirm and facing the void, having experienced Akimov’s power-thirsty Hamlet and Kozintsev’s decisive one, Shostakovich could finally refer back to the existential essence of Hamlet’s dilemmas: ‘To be or not to be’.  

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1012 This gesture is also present in the composer’s String Quartet No. 15, composed in the same year.


a)  

Largo \( \dot{=} 80 \)

b)  

Andantino

5.4.2 Hamlet moves: The tragedy as ballet

Shostakovich had still other connections with *Hamlet*, albeit indirect ones, when selections of his music (mainly from his film and 1932 theatre music) were used for various ballet adaptations, the first of them appearing as a ballet-film created specifically for the small screen and televised in 1969, and the latest being a 2015 production by Declan Donnellan and Radu Poklitaru at the Bolshoi Theatre using material from Shostakovich’s fifth and fifteenth symphonies.
The Soviet phenomenon of the TV ballet-film (khoreodram) on Shakespearean themes, which developed in the mid-1950s, shows the gradual stripping of the tragedies to a Romantic core, excising all political and sociological elements and subplots. This is particularly true for those on *Hamlet*. Here, as for operas and ballets in general, the diminishing role of secondary characters was as much a matter of practicality as a creative choice. In particular, choreographers seem to have preferred to base their ballets on the contrasts between mass scenes with cameo background and intimate settings with just a few main dancers. In her 1991 tele-ballet, *Meditation on the Theme of Hamlet (Razmyshlenie na temu Gamlet)*, Svetlana Voskresenskaia takes such reductions to the bare minimum of four characters: Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude and Claudius.\(^{1014}\) Relying on journalistic Aesopian readings of everything Soviet, Nancy Isenberg tries hard to ‘decode’ what she considers a network of ‘political clues’ in this rendition, going so far as to suggest such clichés as Gertrude representing ‘Mother Russia’. What she evidently does not appreciate is that Voskresenkaia is above all offering a take on Robert Helpmann’s 1948 ballet, *Hamlet*, where the choreography depicts images in the mind of a dying Hamlet.\(^{1015}\) Instead of Tchaikovsky’s music, which accompanied Helpmann’s ballet, here a medley of Shostakovich’s music, including his score for the 1932 *Hamlet*, his fifteenth String Quartet and his fourth Symphony, provides the musical canvas.

The popularity of ballet settings of Shakespeare tragedies coincided with the growing success of Soviet dancers in the West, particularly that of Rudolf Nureyev, who defected in June 1961.\(^{1016}\) As Nancy Isenberg observes, the post-Stalin ‘brief but powerful’ encounter between Soviet dancers and their Western counterparts proved costly for what had been ‘held to be the perfect mirror of Soviet grandeur.’\(^{1017}\) When in 1964 the Sadler’s Wells ballet troupe revived Robert Helpmann’s above-mentioned *Hamlet* with the title role assigned to Nureyev, the Soviet reply came in the form of the 1969 ‘choreographic suite’, produced as a telefilm by the studio ‘Ekran’, starring Latvian Maris Liepa and set to a hybrid of Shostakovich scores to both the 1932 theatre production and the 1964 screen version of *Hamlet*. Directed by Sergei Evlakhishvili (who would later direct other tele-spectacles on literary classics, such as *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Richard III*) and lasting some 40 minutes, the Suite was designed as

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\(^{1016}\) For more on dancers’ defection during the Cold War, see David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

\(^{1017}\) Nancy Isenberg, ‘Dramatic Leaps and Political Falls’, 21.
a syrupy love-story, or more precisely love triangle, made up of Hamlet, Laertes and Ophelia. Using a minimalist setting of a beige staircase against a beige and blue background, the choreography alternates between solo, pas-de-deux, trios and group scenes featuring the corps de ballet of the Bolshoi Theatre as actors, courtiers and personifications of Hamlet’s disturbed thoughts. Claudius and Polonius feature as catalysts of the lovers’ misery, while Gertrude’s brief appearance has only accessory significance.

The next two Hamlet-themed ballet-telefilms used extracts from Tchaikovsky’s *Hamlet*. With only six feature roles (Hamlet, the Ghost, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia and Laertes) the 1971 production of Lentelefilm was a 19-minute suite choreographed by and starring Nikita Dolgushin, which was most likely influenced by Kozintsev’s film with its use of black-and-white cinematography and the setting at the gates of a castle. In 1988, Lentelefilm issued a composition of three mini-ballets based on Shakespeare tragedies: *Pavana mavra* (with the title taken from José Limon’s 1949 *The Moor’s Pavane*, based on *Othello* and with music of Henry Purcell), *Hamlet* (using Tchaikovsky’s music) and *Romeo and Juliet* (to Tchaikovsky’s fantasy-overture). Here *Hamlet* once again had only four main characters: the prince, Ophelia, Gertrude and Claudius. In compensation it enjoyed an over-elaborate visual style, being set in several different locations, mostly with heavy decors making extensive use of montages for flashbacks (probably inspired by Helpmann’s concept of depicting Hamlet’s mind) and even included a scene that closely followed the setting of Vrubel’s 1888 *Hamlet and Ophelia* (see Plate 5.1 above).

Unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* had to wait until the late 1960s to attract original Soviet ballet music, and none of the three major *Hamlet* ballets that ensued could match the success of Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* or even Aleksi Machavariani’s 1957 *Othello*. Of the three *Hamlets*, two came from outside the metropolitan hub of Moscow/Leningrad: Tbilisi, Georgia in the case of Revaz Gabichvadze’s score choreographed by Vakhtang Chabukiani (who had also been the mastermind of Machavariani’s *Othello*), and Almaty (Alma-Ata), Kazakhstan in the case of Aida Issakova’s, choreographed by Bulat Ayukhanov. These were both premiered in 1971 and preceded by a few months by the Kirov’s premiere of Nikolai Chervinsky’s *Hamlet* choreographed by Konstantin Sergeev; the latter had been the first performer of Romeo in Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* in 1940, alongside Galina Ulanova. For Chervinsky’s ballet the role of Hamlet was assigned to the young Mikhail Baryshnikov, who soon rejected the academism of Sergeev, before defecting to the West in 1974 while on tour in Toronto; to add insult to injury, two years later he took up the role of Hamlet in John
Neumeier’s *Hamlet Connotations*, to Aaron Copland’s music, which was premiered in New York in January 1976.

5.4.3 Opera vs theatre: Hamlet and other characters

In his negative review of Ambroise Thomas’s 1868 operatic *Hamlet*, Tchaikovsky questioned the composer’s and the librettists’ respect for ‘the sacredness of Shakespeare’s art’. He went on to praise German composers who, according to him, had realised the inability of music to convey the irony that pervades Hamlet’s speeches and his intellectual processes, and who therefore avoided any temptation to turn *Hamlet* to an opera. He complained that ‘the light-minded Frenchman’ just saw in Hamlet ‘the usual tragic hero’ and did not ‘stop for long to dwell on the fine points of Hamlet’s psychology.’

As Winton Dean has observed, one of the reasons for the fact that of nearly 300 Shakespearean operas, very few – if any - have joined the canonic repertoire, is that ‘Shakespeare characters constitute a more formidable obstacle to a composer than his plots’. According to Dean, the job of an operatic setting of Shakespeare plays can be done ‘only by a composer who is not afraid to impose his own personality on the text.’

For *Hamlet*, that task was addressed by two Soviet composers, Aleksandr Machavariani and Sergei Slonimsky, who did so by incorporating meta-musical socio-political commentaries in their operas composed in 1967/8 and 1991 respectively.

Identifying himself with the Danish prince, Machavariani commented that his was a ‘Hamlet with Georgian spirit’. Insistent that Shakespeare would always remain a contemporary, he regarded *Hamlet’s* main themes as symbolising the war of new and old ideas - truth and justice versus falsehood and treason. Criticising those productions of the tragedy where Hamlet is depicted as a weak and indecisive character, Machavariani described his Hamlet in a similar way to Radlov, as a brave, strong person who is capable of true love and at the same time of great disgust for evil, whilst remaining a tragic figure. This heroic reading is reflected in the music’s epic, even oratorical, style, with a substantial role assigned from the outset to the chorus. Where this concept departs from the apparently similar interpretation of Radlov in 1938 is in the allegorical nationalist agenda. In the Machavariani’s words: ‘This is a personified tragedy signalling the renaissance of a man. I see common features in the fate of

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1019 Winton Dean, ‘Shakespeare and Opera’, 94.

1020 Ibid., 95.
Hamlet and Georgia. Accordingly, having selected Ivan Machabeli’s translation from the original, the composer insisted that his opera should be first performed in Georgian. This condition, together with other circumstances, such as his twice turning down membership of the Party, his insistence on his Georgian identity whilst abroad, and jealousy caused by the great international success of his *Othello*, placed the composer in disfavour among his colleagues and in the eyes of officials. Consequently Machavariani’s *Hamlet* remained unstaged.

If, for Machavariani, ‘in the character of Hamlet… most important is tragedy as an outcome of fate, rather than tragedy caused by the vicissitudes of life’, Slonimsky in his opera, which was premiered at Samara’s Academic Theatre for Opera and Ballet on 1 October 1993, regarded the uneducated and corrupt crowd as the root of all miseries.

Casting the opera in three acts and with only six main roles, Machavariani decided to reduce the role of Horatio radically, a decision that invites comparison both with the productions of the 1930s and with Slonimsky’s opera, regarding not only Horatio but also the secondary roles in general. For Akimov in 1932, Horatio had represented an Erasmus figure, acting as Hamlet’s partner and even double, to the point of sharing the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy with him. Radlov, on the other hand, advising his actors, in what he called a replacement for a *doklad*, explained that his heroic Hamlet had his parallel in Laertes’ lines: both young men had lost their beloved fathers and Ophelia; both were seeking revenge and the rightful throne of Denmark; Laertes, however, was driven by his uncontrollable emotions rather than by his sense of duty. Accordingly Radlov, probably due to objections raised during the discussions (*obsuzhdenie*) of the production, chose the young Boris Smirnov as a more passionate and energetic actor for the leading role; Smirnov had previously been acting as the hot-blooded Laertes to Dudnikov’s more introvert Hamlet, suggesting that for the director the two roles were, to some extent, interchangeable. Later, during the Radlov Theatre’s evacuation in Pyatigorsk and then in Daugavpils after Radlov’s release, he chose Konstantin Kriukov, the Laertes to Smirnov’s Hamlet, as his new Danish prince.

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1022 Machavariani, ‘*Opera Gamlet*, *Sovetskaiamuzyka*, 1964/1, 152.
1023 Reported by the composer’s son, conductor and composer Vakhtang Machavariani – email exchange with the author, November 2015.
1024 As claimed by Vakhtang Machavariani, ibid.
1026 Radlov, ‘*Gamlet iz besedy s akterami*, *Iskusstvo izhizn*’, 1938/3, 17-20.
Slonimsky had a much more socio-dramatic reason for removing Horatio from the libretto of his ‘dramma per musica’. The composer centred his opera on the theme of the faceless crowd (*tol’pa*), who are ready to salute any ruling dictator so long as they are safe. He represented this crowd in the figures of two gravediggers of old and new generations, who feature in the added Prologue and Postlude to Shakespeare’s text. Slonimsky has explained that ‘the idea was to prove that the slogan “vox populi vox dei” (*glas narodi glas bozhe*) is not true.’ Hence he gave them a long prologue in ‘the lowest possible genre of “bardic songs” (*bardovskie pesni*)’. To demonstrate the illiteracy and ignorance of the people, Slonimsky made them sing even the name of Hamlet with the wrong accentuation (gamLET). This was not only added in the text but also emphasised musically. ‘Hamlet is afraid of such people. And in my opinion that is why Shakespeare gave Hamlet Horatio, whom Hamlet calls his friend and asks to tell the truth.’ Slonimsky decided that only pure instrumental music would be capable of ‘telling the truth’ and consequently accorded the role of Horatio to the orchestra. On the stage his Hamlet ‘was left to be even lonelier and more tragic than Shakespeare had intended’.

If the orchestra was to be Horatio, then the instrumental overture that follows the gravediggers’ song (prologue) echoes the opening of Akimov’s opening of his *Hamlet*, with Horatio announcing the story he was about to tell. This resemblance is reinforced by the fact that the overture introduces all the major themes of the opera, and, in Slonimsky’s words: ‘tells the truth about the story of *Hamlet*’. The composer prefers the term ‘thematic system (*tematizm*)’ to ‘leitmotif in the Wagnerian manner’, since each character has several themes related to their emotional and actual state. Most of these appear in one form or another during the overture, among them: the theme of the Ghost of the father (R13), the theme of Hamlet’s duel (from R16), the theme of prophecy of death (*predchuvstvie smerti*) (R19), themes of Ophelia in natural tones (R20), the theme of ‘To be or not to be’ (R24), and the theme of Ophelia’s madness and death (R28) (Ex. 5.6).

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1027 According to the composer, this classification had to do with his desire to distinguish his work from the traditional genre of opera. This and the following quoted remarks are derived from an interview with Sergei Slonimsky at his apartment in St Petersburg, 28 March 2013.
Ex. 5.6: ‘Thematic system’ in Sergei Slonimsky, *Hamlet*
The musical medium helped Slonimsky’s treatment of the scene of ‘the Mousetrap’ scene to remain closer to the instructions in Shakespeare’s text than is the case in most theatrical productions. The presence of a pantomime version of ‘the murder of Gonzago’ prior to its theatrical (mise-en-abîme) performance has often confused producers. Only few theatrical productions have striven, as those of Radlov and Akimov did, somehow to keep the double play-within-a-play (see Chapter 2.10.3 and Chapter 3.5.3). Slonimsky, however, uses music most advantageously to create a twofold ‘mousetrap’ scene: ‘a ballet-within-the-opera followed by opera-within-the-opera’. Both episodes, however, are constructed from similar musical material. The ballet starts as an ordinary court presentation in antique modes and style (R170-R173); the music then turns into an ‘infernal dance’ with extensive use of tritones (R174-178) pointing to the poisoning of the sleeping King. This is followed by a funeral march for the deceased King-actor, during which the Queen expresses her sorrow (R180). A similar pattern develops in the ‘opera-within-the-opera’ section, with the addition of vocal lines.

Not only did Slonimsky use Pasternak’s translation for his libretto, but he also followed many aspects of Pasternak’s reading of the tragedy. The composer has described the essence of the tragedy as residing in the prince’s loneliness caused by his debt to his father, which stops him from being himself and forces him to follow the will of his father and accomplish the duty that has been entrusted upon him. Apart from this, Slonimsky has often referred to the importance of religious and moral values to Hamlet and even to his surroundings, an example of which appears in Claudius’s confession scene and Hamlet’s unwillingness to kill a praying man: ‘This is the religious conscience that reigned back then, the same that Boris Godunov shows when repenting his crimes.’ Such a reading echoes Pasternak’s ‘perception of a hidden strength and religious motivation in the character and the role of Hamlet’; Pasternak, too, believed that ‘From the moment of the ghost’s appearance, Hamlet renounces himself in order to “do the will of him who sent him”’. The idea of self-denial and succumbing to the will of a ‘father’ and God also points to Andrey Tarkovsky’s final film, *The Sacrifice* (1986), where the protagonist sacrifices himself and his family in order to save humanity from an imminent nuclear attack. Despite dreaming of creating a film version of *Hamlet* and incorporating Hamletian themes in his films,

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1028 Barnes, Boris Pasternak, 171.
1029 Ibid. See also Anna France, ‘Boris Pasternak’s Interpretations of Hamlet’, *Russian Literature Triquarterly* 7 (1972), 219-222.
Tarkovsky only managed to direct a theatrical version of the tragedy for the 1976-7 season of the Moscow Lenkom (Leninskii Komsomol) Theatre. The mixed reaction to the production meant that very few materials concerning it are available.\textsuperscript{1030} The published discussion between Tarkovsky and the crew, some short clips and interviews, as well as Tarkovsky’s subsequent diary entries on his work on the production and later on his plans regarding the film version of \textit{Hamlet}, all indicate that he had a very different reading of the tragedy from Pasternak’s. Indeed, despite using an edited version of the latter translation for his staging, he had serious reservations about it preferring Mikhail Morozov’s ‘literal translation’.\textsuperscript{1031} For Tarkovsky

the true \textit{tragedy} of Hamlet consists of the fact that he still turned into a vulgar person \textit{(poshliakom)} - he became a killer, a dirty killer, an avenger! … I wonder what was more frightening for him: the first time he kills or the first time he realises that he is capable of killing?\textsuperscript{1032}

For Tarkovsky the drama of Hamlet was not in that ‘he is doomed to die and thus perishes’, but rather that ‘tragically the protagonist is threatened by a moral, spiritual death. And because of this, he is impelled to reject his spiritual pretensions and become an ordinary murderer. He has to stop living, and in other words, to commit suicide. That is, not to carry out his moral duty.’\textsuperscript{1033}

The fact that Tarkovsky convinced the main director of Lenkom Theatre, Mark Zakharov, to accept the film-maker’s own preferred composer, Eduard Artemiev, and his two favourite actors, Anatolii Solonitsyn and Margarita Terekhova as Hamlet and Gertrude respectively, suggests how important these three components were to the director’s personal understanding of the tragedy. Indeed, the very few excerpts from rehearsals and interview clips that have survived suggest the significance of the relationship between Hamlet and his mother.\textsuperscript{1034} In this regard, Tarkovsky’s interpretation of Ophelia had little or no trace of romanticism: as the actress, Inna Churikova, who was a member of the troupe of Lenkom, stated in an interview: ‘Ophelia is a normal human being. And I don’t really know if she loves Hamlet out of love or...

\textsuperscript{1031} °Pasternak’s [translation] is appalling, opaque; there are moments when I feel he is deliberately obfuscating the sense of the play, or at any rate of some passages’ – see Andrey Tarkovsky, \textit{Time Within Time: The Diaries, 1970-1986}, London, Faber, 1994, 121.


\textsuperscript{1034} \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dswRWrch3xe}, accessed 17 December 2015.
just because he is a prince. In any case she loves a prince and she really desires to be a queen. In this regard, Hamlet’s mother is her rival.’ Depicting Ophelia as ‘a strong woman (krepkaia baba)’, Tarkovsky described during the rehearsals a scene featuring Hamlet and the two women: whilst classical music is playing, Hamlet is lying in his dirty clothes pondering about his having to become a ‘swine (svoloch)’ in order to complete his task; at this moment Ophelia gets up from the ever-present on-stage bed and opens her mouth to say something, but she is interrupted by the graceful passage of the Queen, which is signalled only by the sound made by the latter’s clothes. Ophelia throws herself at the Queen and tears up her clothes, holding them in front of herself: ‘Oh, oh, the queen (U-U, Koroleva …) then all becomes clear’. Ophelia’s striving for power resonates with Akimov’s Hamlet and his goal of retrieving the throne of Denmark; she has no marionette-like features as in Kozintsev’s film, and nothing in common with Radlov’s well-behaved obedient daughter.

Compared to this multi-layered and somewhat Machiavellian Ophelia, Slonimsky’s heroine follows a more Pasternakian/Russian reading of her as an ethereal, bright (svetlaia) innocent figure, who was indeed ‘the true victim’ and ‘the most tragic image’ of the play. Pasternak’s treatment of Ophelia, in line with his 1917 poem, ‘English lesson’, featuring the Shakespearean heroine, has been described as a ‘serious distortion of Shakespeare’s tragic vision’. In what Rowe calls ‘a purposeful simplification’, Pasternak, and hence similarly Slonimsky, strives to convey ‘a sense of sorrow at the destruction of a fragile precious beauty’. This ‘one-dimensional’ Ophelia resonates with Berlioz’s depiction of the heroine in his cantata ‘La mort d’Ophélie’ (1848), and it follows her idealisation as a part of Russian literary tradition of the 19th century. Akimov’s Ophelia might have turned into the opposite image but would have remained one-dimensional had it not been for Shostakovich’s music, which helped turn Akimov’s femme fatale into a woman with almost as many emotional layers as the heroine of the composer’s opera Lady Macbeth.

In line with his reading of the play, Slonimsky gave his Ophelia some of his most tender melodies, including songs imbued with the spirit of English traditional music. Elsewhere, he harmonised the same melody for ‘How should I your true love know?’ as used previously by Walton and Shostakovich (see Chapter 5.2). Slonimsky’s Ophelia has several themes,

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1035 Ibid.
1036 Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia, 149-50.
particularly during her mad scene (starting at R285): this is what the composer calls a ‘vinok’ (bunch) of themes. However, there is one theme in particular that Slonimsky identifies as ‘her poetic image’, to which she comes back regularly. This same theme appears in the orchestra as if depicting Hamlet’s thoughts as he awaits his death, followed by the theme of the Ghost for whom Hamlet has given his life.

Given Pasternak’s negative reaction to Kozintsev’s omission of Fortinbras in his 1954 theatre production, the poet would surely not have been wholly satisfied with Slonimsky’s treatment of this character. The composer had little faith in Fortinbras’s legitimacy as successor to the throne and regarded him as yet another ‘tyrant’. Consequently he transferred the triumphant final march of the Norwegian prince, which musically alludes to the famous Triumphal March from Verdi’s Aida, to the second act (Ex. 5.7). As a result the final scene, ‘the culmination of the opera’, according to Slonimsky, ends with Hamlet’s ‘the rest is silence’, followed by an orchestral postlude. Reports of Tarkovsky’s theatre rehearsals suggest that he too considered the duel to be the apotheosis of the tragedy. But his reasons differed somewhat: he believed there was no ‘note of triumph’ (nota torzhestva) in Hamlet’s murderous acts, whether directed at Laertes or at Claudius: ‘what triumph? To spill blood is humiliation (unizhenie).’

This view was, of course, still not as dark and violent as Ingmar Bergman’s 1986 production, where the play ends with Fortinbras and his ‘gang’ marching to Danish rock music and dressed in leather, killing everyone with machine guns.

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1038 Surkova, “Gamlet” Andreia Tarkovskogo: Besedy na Lomonosovskom’.
1039 Birgitta Steene, Ingmar Bergman: A Reference Guide. Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2005, 468; for reviews of the production and list of tours, see ibid., 688-700.
Still, both Tarkovsky’s and Slonimsky’s solemn endings and the latter’s sceptical view of Fortinbras are far removed from Radlov’s Norwegian prince on a white horse and Prokofiev’s positive, if complex, accompanying music, with the emergence of a sunny final C major. Likewise composed during a liminal period – of the collapse of the Soviet Union – Slonimsky’s *Hamlet* has nothing in common with the post-Soviet tendency for ‘neo-
Shakespearisation’ and ‘neo-Hamletisations’, a complex process of adaptation of other Shakespearean adaptations and/or appropriation of Shakespeare according to current tendencies and popular culture. An example of this latter process is Vladimir Kobekin’s opera, *Gamlet (Datskii) (Rossiiskaia Komedia (Hamlet (Danish) (A Russian) Comedy)*, based on Arkadii Zastyrets’s comedy, composed in 2001 and premiered seven years later at Moscow’s Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theatre (Moskovskii Akademicheskii Muzykal’nyi Teatr). At first glance, this ‘musical drama’, as the composer labels it, has quite a lot in common with Akimov’s 1932 production: Ophelia portrayed as a drunk, ‘easy’ girl who sings, among other things, cabaret songs (Shostakovich’s ditty in Akimov’s production echoed by ‘Ochi chernye’ in Kobekin’s); manipulation/paraphrasing of the text, including ‘To be or not to be’, which Kobekin/Zastyrets change to ‘To have or to be’; added shower scenes. But unlike Akimov’s *Hamlet*, Kobekin’s was widely praised (even if not by Shakespeare scholars) and even received the prize of ‘Golden Mask’, the Russian equivalent of the Olivier awards. Yet this show was devoid of the most important element of Akimov’s production: a political stance.

In this respect, Valerii Fokin’s 2010 production at St Petersburg’s Alexandrinsky Theatre, which consciously included allusions to Akimov’s version, came closer, and as Bartoshevich and Zakharov observe, restored the political element that was notably absent from most Russian *Hamlets* of the 1990s and 2000s. From a different perspective, the referencing of stylistic features and/or the conception of Akimov’s production in so many contemporary *Hamlets* might lead one to conclude that, contrary to Rudnitsky’s hypothesis, Akimov’s production was not – or not just - too late for the avant-garde of the 1920s but was in fact strikingly ahead of its time, to the point of portraying a Russian Hamlet fit for emulation in the 21st century.

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Conclusion

There is something peculiarly, even dangerously, attractive about cultural topics in the Stalin era. They exert an appeal on the level of *Schadenfreude* that can be hard to escape. At the same time they feed the temptation towards hero-worship: to discover and/or rehabilitate individuals who can plausibly be cast as resistant to tyranny, and who did what we fantasise we would have done ourselves.

Even if these baser urges can be resisted, there are intellectual pitfalls that need to be recognised as such and dealt with. A prime example is the issue of Stalin’s supposed ‘ban’ on productions of *Hamlet*, discussed in Chapter 4 above. Gaining some clarity about its status opens the way to subtler accounts of what motivated artists in the late- and post-Stalin eras. At the same time, the fact that it was acted on at the time as though it was a reality rather than fiction itself offers an insight into Russian society and culture at the time.

In a more abstract sense, there is also something tantalising about *Hamlet* as an acknowledged summit of directorial/acting ambitions colliding with a culture of (self-) censorship and ideological constraint. Was anyone involved in productions of the time free to put their concepts into practice? Can the candour of surviving documents be asserted? And if not, how may they or the artefacts they relate to be understood?

Addressing these questions is the tall order I have set myself in this dissertation and which I hope to continue to act upon in research projects arising out of it. It is one for which no off-the-peg methodology exists, but which may yet be addressed by a combination of several. In this instance I have taken into account (though not necessarily referenced at every turn) principally Patrice Pavis’s theories regarding the analysis and intercultural reading of performance, Alexa Huang’s writings on Global Shakespeare, Aleksei Semenenko’s studies of translations of *Hamlet* and Christopher Wilson’s approaches to music in Shakespeare, alongside musicological analysis blending topic and intonation theory (Agawu *et al.*⁴⁰⁴⁴) and dramaturgical concepts such as Freitag’s pyramid.

Interest in the context for the theatrical scores of Shostakovich and Prokofiev was a prime motivation for my research, and their respective scores for *Hamlet* (1932 and 1938) are by common acknowledgment their finest in this area. Since the productions by Akimov and Radlov for which they were written are also landmarks for Russian stagings of the tragedy, falling a mere six years apart, my core topic quickly fell into place, at least once I had determined that the entire sweep of Russian music for Shakespeare was far too broad. As my work moved increasingly into theatrical and cultural areas, I soon encountered the imagery of the ‘mirror’ or the ‘window’ as metaphors for defining the place of *Hamlet* within Russian culture; this proved a strong secondary motivating force. It is enshrined memorably in Eleanor Rowe’s pioneering *Hamlet: A Window on Russia*, which gave me an authoritative voice to enter into dialogue with. My project, however, nuances Rowe’s study by adding archival sources and offers complementary materials and details on theatre productions and on *Hamlet*-inspired music, in order to paint a more accurate and complete picture of the assimilation of *Hamlet* (and *Hamlet* the character) in Russian culture, or in other words: how *Hamlet* in Russia became Russian *Hamlet*. Rowe’s book (whose narrative stops in the 1970s) relies uncritically on others’ analyses, and despite its title she concentrates on literary individuals and ideas. Hence it does not really show how, as Bartoshevich has repeatedly noted, any interpretation of *Hamlet* in Russia offers a mirror that reflects the specifics of a society at that given moment.\(^\text{1045}\) Hence this project has aimed to demonstrate through detailed analysis and contextualisation of productions *Hamlet* in Russia, particularly in the Stalin era, that the image of tragedy as a mirror that reveals or even distorts the social context is indeed relevant.

However, individual creative artists go far beyond mere passive acceptance of such concepts. They have their own agendas and personalities, which in turn play an important role in determining – in this case - the surface of the ‘mirror’. The mirror that was already significantly shaped by the conditions and political climate of the Stalin era was slanted and faceted by artists who evidently sought to find reflections of themselves and their ideologies in it. The Russian *Hamlet* may always have sought to remain, in Jan Kott’s words, ‘our contemporary’; but both ‘our’ and ‘contemporary’ are notions jointly shaped by society and artists themselves. It follows that the creative backgrounds of directors and composers are

\(^{1045}\) Aleksei Bartoshevich has repeatedly referred to the image of mirror in his writings, lectures and interviews about *Hamlet*, for example, ‘Gamlety nashikh dnei’, in Karina Melik-Pashaeva (ed.), *Teatr, Zhivopis’, muzyka, Kino: Ezhekvartal’nyi al’manakh*, No. 4, Moscow, GITIS, 2010, 9-21, here 20.
closely intertwined with the productions studied in this dissertation, and this I have sought to convey in a fuller manner than before.

In this attempt at contextualising pivotal moments in Russian history through the prism of *Hamlet*, the present study has features in common with Richard Taruskin’s benchmark collection of revisionist essays, *Defining Russia Musically*. Taruskin identified various threads and case studies at various historical junctures, each representing a different strand of Russian identity, and each forming the basis of, as it were, a short story. My study, which might be pretentiously subtitled *Defining Russia Hamletly*, chooses a single, if multi-coloured, thread and attempts to weave it into a single, continuous novel. The thread encompasses the process of how the Russian temperament and socio-political conditions have redefined *Hamlet*, and at the same time how *Hamlet* and its Russian afterlife have helped to clarify what it is to be Russian. One can certainly learn much about the Russian temperament from those aspects of the play that have resonated with and inspired Russian artists and translators, and from those interpretations (or to use Gaydin’s terminology Hamletisations) that were approved. This reflection of the Russian temperament continued with the multi-generic adaptations of *Hamlet* in the post-Stalin era, as my selective survey in Chapter 4 (with a certain bias towards opera and ballet) has tried to show.

**The place of Shakespeare in the works of Shostakovich and Prokofiev**

This dissertation seeks to contribute to a fuller understanding of the creative development of the Soviet Union’s two star composers. As in any meeting of two imposing creative figures, Shostakovich and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* configure one another, without completely submitting to the shape of the other. *Hamlet* was not quite the same after Shostakovich had got his creative hands on it, and Shostakovich was not quite the same after *Hamlet* got under his skin. As I have argued in Chapter 2, working with *Hamlet* and big personalities in the Soviet Union’s theatrical world shaped Shostakovich’s creative persona(e) in ways that have yet to be fully appreciated. As a composer in his mid-twenties, prodigiously talented, but not as yet with defined ethical goals, Shostakovich was far from fully formed. Although he was soon to be compelled into self-reflection by official denunciations, he was already being buffeted by the cultural pressures. The already multi-faceted nature of *Hamlet*, compounded by the tragi-comic fusion that Akimov drew from it, gave Shostakovich’s music a double-voiced quality, whether he intended it or not, and while the chronological relationship to his

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no less tragi-comic second opera, *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, remains frustratingly obscure, it is clear that this dual engagement with generic ‘doubleness’ was a watershed in his creative output, becoming a fundamental part of his creative profile, and indeed a prime creative coping strategy, in years to come. As shown in Chapter 5, the composer returned to Hamletian dualities not only in his famously bleak film-score for Kozintsev but also in his later works (the Blok and Tsvetaeva song-cycles), further exploring those aspects of the tragedy that resonated with his growing obsession with death. It could therefore be argued that alongside Gogol, Shakespeare was one of the most important literary figures for Shostakovich, who was more a literary-minded composer than one interested in the visual/fine arts. As studies by Zhitomirsky and Orlov indicate, the theme of ‘Shostakovich and Shakespeare’ is one that does feature in Shostakovich studies, but such studies scarcely do justice to its significance, and they are remarkably few.

Compared to Shostakovich, Prokofiev came to Hamlet at a later stage in his career, with his creative identity long since established, and, as shown in Chapter 3, after having already worked with major theatrical personalities such as Tairov and Meyerhold. Even so, his work on Hamlet coincided with the period when he was trying to find his feet in the Soviet Union in terms of what he was allowed to do and how he might wrest the place of most prominent Soviet composer from Shostakovich. Still wounded from the experience of the non-production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Bolshoi, he was concerned to do the right thing, and despite renewing his collaboration with Sergei Radlov, the nature of his work on Hamlet was very different from their ballet. Its effect on his output, in terms of taking on abstract philosophical subject matter, was almost immediate. It was certainly closely aligned with his very next opus – the collaboration with Eisenstein on the heroic-patriotic film, *Alexander Nevsky*.

Starting from 1939, Prokofiev wrote the most epic of his instrumental works: the Piano Sonatas Nos. 6, 7, 8 (1939-44) differed drastically from their predecessors in terms of heightened ethical ambitions, just as his Symphonies Nos. 5 (1944) and 6 (1945-47) were quite different from his previous ones in their epic, heroic and Beethovenian qualities, while his long-gestated First Violin Sonata (1938-1946) was one of his most profound statements. Prior to these works, Hamlet was the most philosophical subject matter he had ever taken on,


enabling and encouraging him to move into the kind of territory that Shostakovich was known for, and hence to compete with the latter’s claims to leading status among Soviet composers. Hence, although Hamlet might not have as obviously pivotal a role in Prokofiev’s development as it does in Shostakovich’s, this study has been driven in part by the conviction that it is more significant in this respect than it is often given credit for. Collaboration with a Shakespeare scholar and director of the calibre of Radlov was an important part of the process of Prokofiev’s search for greater profundity of utterance, and of his building a much more serious conception of himself as an artist and continuing to purge his creative persona of exhibitionist display.

**Reconstruction of Akimov’s Hamlet: Quixotic or realistic?**

It could be argued that Akimov’s Hamlet was the most seminal production of the tragedy during the Stalin era. It was certainly the most discussed. Despite its apparent shortcomings, which as explained in Chapter 2 were the result of many different factors, the production consolidated Akimov’s reputation, disseminated his ideas, and contributed to the return of Hamlet to the Soviet stage, as well as opening a door to the possibility of future iconoclastic productions: a door that was promptly shut, but never definitively locked and bolted. The production, which saw the collaboration of several up-and-coming theatre and music personalities, was indeed an epicentre where several creative art movements of the time came together.

One of the secondary objectives of this study has been to provide material derived and worked from archival sources, reviews and testimonies as well as other secondary sources that could potentially contribute to a partial or complete reconstruction of this production. As Senelick observes, any attempt at a reconstruction is complicated by contradictory reports of the production that appeared at the time, and by the myth-making attached to the individuals involved. However, in the case of the Akimov/Shostakovich Hamlet, such reports, when viewed in the light of available sources outlining the theatre director’s original ideas and creative manifestos, only reinforce the desirability of such a reconstruction. Given the changes that meant that much of Akimov’s concept got lost in the process of realisation, it could be argued that Akimov’s Hamlet was never truly staged in the first place, and certainly Shostakovich’s incidental music still awaits reception in the context it was intended for.

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1049 Senelick, *Gordon Craig’s Moscow Hamlet: A Reconstruction*, xv. By ‘reconstruction’ Senelick does not mean a literal restaging but rather an abstract recreation of the procedure and the materials, for the purposes of historical understanding.
As demonstrated in Chapter 2, and given the resonance that the production (even in its distorted form) has with many post-Soviet tragi-comedy interpretations of Shakespeare in general and Hamlet in particular, the purpose of such a seemingly quixotic project goes beyond historian/antiquarian restoration. This could be a viable theatrical experience in its own right.

This study hence has aimed to provide a detailed account of the thinking processes of its main protagonists (Akimov and Shostakovich, Radlov and Prokofiev) in the context of the challenges thrust upon them by the Stalinist cultural climate. It suggests that a confluence of factors threw up creative solutions that were, certainly in Akimov’s case, iconic/scandalous at the time and arguably remain so. My demythologized account of Akimov’s Hamlet proves that radical yet serious productions of the tragedy such as Matthew Warchus’s at the Royal Shakespeare Company (1997) and Robert Lepage’s Elseneur/Elsinore in Montreal and Toronto (1995/6), have almost as long a pre-history as female Hamlets. At the same time, it could be argued that the West has increasingly tended to separate experimental/radical interpretations from ‘serious’ ones, especially when it comes to Shakespeare. The negative press and popular reaction to Lyndsey Turner’s idea of moving ‘To be or not to be’ to the beginning of her production of the play with Benedict Cumberbatch in the title role at the Barbican Theatre (2015), and the mixed reviews of Emma Rice’s disco-inspired A Midsummer Night’s Dream at the Globe Theatre (2016), are cases in point. A reconstruction of the Akimov Hamlet would not only have intrinsic shock value but would serve as a reminder that such radicalism could go hand-in-hand with an agenda that was entirely serious and in its own way rooted in a search for authenticity.

As for Radlov and his Hamlet, an important outcome of this study has been to show in him the genesis of the hybrid figure (Shakespeare scholar and Shakespeare practitioner), with which Kozintsev came to be associated from the 1960s. Tracing Radlov’s Shakespearean career from his earliest activities to the outbreak of War, also reinforces the important place that Russian/Soviet theatre has allotted to Hamlet and other (though by no means all)


1051 For a study of Hamlet as an avant-garde play and as material for avant-garde productions, see Richard White, Avant-Garde Hamlet: Text, Stage, Screen, Lanham MD, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015. With frequent reference to Jan Kott, White argues that Hamlet as a play exhibits aspects of vanguard movements and accordingly invites unorthodox, experimental and avant-garde adaptations.
Shakespeare. His is one among numerous examples of *Hamlet* as the highest point in the creative career of a theatre artist, one for which years of preparation is required.

By setting these two productions against a background of Shakespeare/*Hamlet* appropriations before and after the Stalin era, this study demonstrates that despite the strictest doctrines of this most repressive period of Soviet cultural history, its *Hamlet* (re-)productions were no less creative and ‘contemporary’, and indeed no less ‘sponge’-like, in their absorptions of the problems of their time.¹⁰⁵²

The notion of *Hamlet* as a political play has come to be regarded as much more an Eastern European characteristic than a Western one. A comparison of Olivier’s and Kozintsev’s screen adaptions, for example, reveals the fundamental contrast between the psychological concerns of the former and the politico-social ones of the latter. In fact the influence of Russian/Soviet *Hamlets* in the West and on Western consciousness has been somewhat patchy. By comparison with the influence of certain pre- and post-Stalin productions (such as those by Craig and Stanislavsky in 1911, or Liubimov and Vysotsky in 1971), the closed nature of Stalinist society and the Iron Curtain that persisted after his death meant that the Central- and Eastern-European approach to Shakespeare in general and Russian stagings of *Hamlet* in particular have had much less international impact that they might have done. Asian adaptions, for example, have made far more impression.¹⁰⁵³

All this represents one of the great might-have-beens of the theatre and Shakespeare worlds. The picture that studies of Kozintsev’s Shakespearean films paints – to take the most widely known of Russian appropriations – fails to take proper account of the continuity of Russian engagement with *Hamlet* (see Chapter 5.2 and 5.3). And the fact that there is no authoritative study whatsoever of Shakespeare in Central and Eastern Europe suggests that we are only at the beginning of a new phase of scholarly endeavour. If scholarship and practical reconstruction could go hand in hand in filling the gap, there would surely be potential for some truly dramatic rediscoveries.

¹⁰⁵² Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 52.
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Note: the form YEAR/NUMBER indicates the number of a journal or newspaper in a particular year, where that journal has no volume number. For ease of identification this detail is in some cases followed by the exact date or month.


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**Webography**


### Appendices

**Appendix Table 1: Sergei Radlov’s theatre career: An overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Life Events</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Theatre (Petrograd/Leningrad unless stated)</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Author/Composer</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement at Meyerhold’s Studio on Borodinskaia Street; writes poems for the Studio’s journal <em>Love for Three Oranges</em>.</td>
<td>1913-1917</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Marries Anna Radlova (née Darmolatova) (1891-1949) Russian poetess and translator.</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Graduates from Philological Faculty of St Petersburg State University.</td>
<td>1916</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of repertoire department of Petrograd Theatre Section (TEO) of Narkompros.</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Narodnyi dom and Theatre of Experimental Performances</td>
<td><em>Menaechmi</em></td>
<td>Plautus</td>
<td>Radlov’s own translation, use of masks, costumes and acting techniques of ancient theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>The Studio Theatre (Teatr ‘Studia’)</td>
<td><em>The Battle of Salamin</em></td>
<td>Piotrovsky and Radlov</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in the organisation and directing of two of Petrograd’s mass spectacles of 1920.</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Mass spectacle</td>
<td><em>The Siege of Russia</em></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Funds and heads the Theatre of Popular Comedy (*Teatr narodnogo komedii*) together with Vladimir Solovyev, with actors and circus performers in its troupe. Extensive use of techniques of commedia dell’arte. | | Mass spectacle | *Towards the World Commune (Part II)* | | Team project under leadership of K. Marzhano

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383
After the closure of the Theatre of Popular Comedy, Radlov creates an experimental drama workshop. Experiments include cinema pantomimes – sketches of films never shot.\(^{1054}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Theatre/Movie</th>
<th>Director/Author</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Theatre of Popular Comedy</td>
<td><em>La jalousie du Barbuillé</em></td>
<td>Molière</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>A Friend</em></td>
<td>Radlov and Serge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>The Pantomime Theatre of the First Company of Film Actors</td>
<td><em>A Glass of Malaga</em></td>
<td>Radlov</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An example of Radlov’s experimental cinema-mimodrama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>The State Academic Drama Theatre (Alexandrinsky)</td>
<td><em>Poor Eugen</em></td>
<td>Ernst Toller</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The playwright was reportedly surprised to encounter Radlov’s serious treatment of the play.(^{1055})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>The State Academic Theatre (Alexandrinsky)</td>
<td><em>Lysistrata</em></td>
<td>Aristophanes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Narodnyi Dom Drama Theatre</td>
<td><em>Lucrece Borgia</em></td>
<td>Victor Hugo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Using his and Piotrovsky’s translation. ‘In the style of a street show… creating a lively, powerful feeling of antiquity without falling into archaeology or a learned academism. His <em>Lysistrata</em> is both antique and modern.’(^{1056})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{1054}\) Zolotnitsky, *Sergei Radlov: The Shakespearian Fate of a Soviet Director*, 27.

\(^{1055}\) Er. Es. [R. Suslovich], ‘*Eugen dlia Toller*, Rabochii i teatr, 1926/16 (20 April), 15.

\(^{1056}\) S. Mokulskii, ‘*Lysistrata* na akademicheskoy stsene’, Leningradskaya pravda, 1924/229 (7 October), 7.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Theatre/Studio/Group</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Composer/Librettist</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre (Kirovsky/Mariinsky)</td>
<td><em>Der ferne Klang</em></td>
<td>Franz Schreker (own libretto)</td>
<td>Radlov also produces several operettas and musicals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>Love for Three Oranges</em></td>
<td>Carlo Gozzi/Prokofiev</td>
<td>The first production of this opera in the Soviet Union after its premiere in Chicago in 1921.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>Wozzeck</em></td>
<td>Berg based on Georg Buchner/Berg</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Opera Studio of the Conservatoire</td>
<td><em>Rigoletto</em></td>
<td>F. Piave, based on Hugo/Verdi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Free Theatre</td>
<td><em>Help! Murder!</em></td>
<td>Schmidthoff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leningrad Circus</td>
<td><em>October in the Ring</em></td>
<td>Radlov</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The State Academic Drama Theatre (Alexandrinsky)</td>
<td><em>Othello</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The College for Stage Arts</td>
<td><em>Othello</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>The same production as at the Alexandrinsky, but using his pupils and disciples who would later become part of Radlov’s Theatre Studio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>Boris Godunov</em></td>
<td>Pushkin/Musorgsky</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Der Rosenkavalier</em></td>
<td>Hugo von Hofmannsthal/Richard Strauss</td>
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<td>The Youth Theatre</td>
<td><em>Manaechmi</em></td>
<td>Plautus</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>Ice and Steel</em></td>
<td>Deshevoy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Artist</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Appointed artistic director of the Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre (Mariinsky). Keeps the post until 1934.</td>
<td>The State Jewish Theatre (Moscow)</td>
<td><em>Four Days (Iulis)</em></td>
<td>M. Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td></td>
<td>Narodnyi Dom Summer Theatre</td>
<td><em>Oedipus Rex</em></td>
<td>Sophocles</td>
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<td>The Young Theatre</td>
<td><em>Othello</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>Flames of Paris</em></td>
<td>Asafiev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Awarded the title of Honoured Artist of the RSFSR (Zasluzhnyi artist RSFSR).</td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>Das Rheingold</em></td>
<td>/Wagner</td>
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<td>The Young Theatre</td>
<td><em>Ghosts</em></td>
<td>Ibsen</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Young Theatre is re-named ‘Theatre Studio Headed by Sergei Radlov’ (pod rukovodstve S. Radlova). The Theatre soon becomes an authority for Shakespeare productions (using Anna Radlova’s translations).</td>
<td>Radlov’s Theatre Studio (Teatr studiia pod rukovodstvom Radlova)</td>
<td><em>Romeo and Juliet</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre</td>
<td><em>The Bakhchisarai Fountain</em></td>
<td>Pushkin/Asafiev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alongside Adrian Piotrovsky works on the libretto of Prokofiev’s ballet version of <em>Romeo and Juliet</em>. The ballet will be premiered in 1938 in Brno (Czechoslovakia) and in 1940 in the USSR.</td>
<td>Radlov’s Theatre Studio</td>
<td><em>Othello</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The Academic Maly Theatre (Moscow)</td>
<td><em>Othello</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The State Jewish Theatre</td>
<td><em>King Lear</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Appointed artistic director of Pushkin Academic Theatre.</td>
<td>The Pushkin Academic Theatre (Alexandrinsky)</td>
<td><em>Salut, Ispaniia!</em></td>
<td>Aleksandr Afinogenov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>The word ‘studio’ disappears from Radlov’s troupe. Parallel work on a production of <em>Boris Godunov</em> at Moscow Art Theatre, as a part of the centenary of Pushkin’s death. Due to disagreements with Nemirovich-Danchenko work remains unfinished.</td>
<td>Radlov’s Theatre Studio</td>
<td><em>Short tragedies (Malen ’kie tragedii)</em></td>
<td>Pushkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Radlov’s Theatre</td>
<td><em>Hamlet</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>With Anna Radlova’s translation, Dmitriev as artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Radlov’s Theatre</td>
<td><em>The Keys to Berlin</em></td>
<td>Konstantin Finn</td>
<td>This production and Radlov’s own <em>For the Motherland!</em> (Za Rodinu!) are considered unfavourably because of the ongoing Soviet-German non-aggression pact. <em>The Keys to Berlin</em> will return to stage, two months after the start of war in 1941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>The Leningrad Soviet (Lensovet) Theatre</td>
<td><em>An Ideal Husband</em></td>
<td>Oscar Wilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>The Leningrad Soviet (Lensovet) Theatre</td>
<td><em>La Dame aux camélias</em></td>
<td>Dumas (fils)</td>
<td>The last theatre production to be premiered in besieged Leningrad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>The Leningrad Soviet (Lensovet) Theatre</td>
<td><em>Hamlet</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>Revival of several productions from their repertoire, including <em>Hamlet</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resigns from the post of artistic director of Pushkin Academic Theatre.**

In May, Radlov’s Theatre is renamed The Leningrad Soviet (Lensovet) Theatre (not to be confused with the current Lensovet Theatre in St Petersburg). The Theatre publishes a booklet on their Shakespearean productions and revives *Othello, Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* as part of the Shakespeare festival to celebrate the 375th anniversary of his birth.

Radlov and his theatre tour to several Soviet Republics, with *Hamlet* and *An Ideal Husband* among other productions.

Due to departures and deaths of several members of the troupe, Radlov has to appear as an actor on the stage. Radlov has to abandon his work on a future production of Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra*.

The Radlovs and Lensovet Theatre are evacuated to Piatigorsk in the Caucasian mountains, soon to be occupied by the Germans.

Radlov smuggles in his Jewish mistress, the actress Tamara Jakobson, by changing one letter of her surname and pretending she was a Swedish actress by the name of Jakobsen.
The Germans send the remaining members of the Theatre troupe, including the Radlovs, with a convoy to Zaparozhie (Ukraine). Radlov organises classes for young actors.

The Radlovs and remaining actors are sent to Berlin where they break up into a few groups with Radlovs and a few going to France (near Toulon) and after the liberation to Marseille and Paris.

Upon their return to Moscow the Radlovs are arrested and accused of treason and sentenced to ten years in the Gulag. Anna Radlova dies in 1949.

Radlov is freed in 1953 but not allowed to live in Moscow or Leningrad. He starts working at the Drama Theatre of the Latvian city of Daugavpils and then from 1954 until his death (1958) in Riga Theatre of Russian Drama.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Radlov’s Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-5</td>
<td>Radlovs and some of the actors of his Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-5</td>
<td>Revival of several productions among them Wrongly accused (Bez vinni vinovat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944-5</td>
<td>Alexander Ostrovsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>The Drama Theatre in Daugavpils (Latvia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Riga Theatre of Russian Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>King Lear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Macbeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Tevye the Milkman (Tevie der Milchier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Sholom-Aleichem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Later to become Fiddler on the Roof</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Table 2: Akimov and Shostakovich’s Hamlet – musical numbers

The order of musical numbers and scenes is here reproduced employing several previously unresearched archival materials, and special care is taken to arrive as close as possible to Akimov’s original concept (for all the difficulties associated with that term). This order therefore differs from that suggested by Gerard McBurney for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra’s CD recording of the incidental music (Signum SIGCD052, 1994), which in cases of doubt follows Shakespeare’s text rather than Akimov’s manipulations of it. Any future attempt at reconstructing the production should at least take the newly established order into account. On the other hand, contradictory reports, especially those by Iurii Elagin, suggest that some last-minute changes might have been made in the choice of scenes and music. The famous ‘Flute Scene’, which according to Elagin was accompanied by the parody of Davidenko’s march, might well have been a case in point, given that the ‘Hamlet and Rosencrantz’ scene with this parody music was excised before the opening night.

Sources for information in columns 1-5 of Appendix Table 2 are in the archive of the Vakhtangov Theatre, Moscow (folder 26, individual items uncatalogued).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical number according to ‘repetiteur’s summary’ / number in parts</th>
<th>Name of fragment/ in parts (if different)</th>
<th>Scene number</th>
<th>Name of scene</th>
<th>Words or comments</th>
<th>Manuscript, including sketches, piano scores</th>
<th>Number in published full score (p) / suite (s)</th>
<th>Key and metre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Night Patrol (Nochnoi dozor)</td>
<td>‘To be played complete here and after’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4 C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/</td>
<td>Night patrol</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Night Patrol (Nochnoi dozor)</td>
<td>‘To be played complete here and after’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4 e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a/2</td>
<td>Shepherd’s pipe - Clarinet solo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bonfire (Koster)</td>
<td>‘After Koznovskii’s words: “I heard this and I believe it”’</td>
<td>Pastushii rozhok</td>
<td>3p</td>
<td>3/4 Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>Funeral March</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>In the presence of the King (U korolia)</td>
<td>‘According to the mise-en-scène after Simonov’s words: “spend it at thy will (trat’ ego po mere luchshikh sil’)’”</td>
<td>Vakhtangov 1/a</td>
<td>4p, 2s</td>
<td>4/4 bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>Dancing music; Exit of King and Queen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘After Simonov’s “let’s go” and finishes with the exit of Shchukin’</td>
<td>RGALI 1/a</td>
<td>5p</td>
<td>2/4 G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>Dining (obedenmaia) music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘After Gorinov’s “In Denmark incontestably”. It is played several times all through the change of scene and ends at the start of the next scene with the signal from Shikhimov’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3/4 G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>At Ophelia’s</td>
<td>‘No music’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Arsenal</td>
<td>‘No music’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/6</td>
<td>Flourish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ruins</td>
<td>‘Right after the cannon fire following Kozlovskii’s “when the vision starts to wander’”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4 C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7/7</td>
<td>Dancing music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Once complete without repeats attacca after Flourish’</td>
<td>Vakhtangov 1/b + 2</td>
<td>8p</td>
<td>4/4 e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/8</td>
<td>Finale of the First act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘After Gorinov’s “I alone will address him”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4 c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1058 Piano score, RGALI, f. 2048, opis 2, ed. khr. 43.
Interval (but in orchestra parts: ‘30 minutes pause after number 10’)

**Act 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical number according to ‘repetiteur’s summary’ / number in parts</th>
<th>Name of fragment/ in parts (if different)</th>
<th>Scene number</th>
<th>Name of scene</th>
<th>Words or comments</th>
<th>Manuscript, including sketches, piano scores</th>
<th>Number in published full score (p) / suite (s)</th>
<th>Key and metre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passage of the beggars</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>Track 28a on CD recording$^{1059}$</td>
<td>2/4 d (modal flat II and IV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>The passage of Hamlet with boys/ entrance (vykhod) of Hamlet and boys</td>
<td>The court (dvor)</td>
<td>‘After Shchukin’s “he made haste”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vakhtangov 2a</td>
<td>10p</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>Galop of Ophelia and Polonius</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>‘Is played several times after Shchukin’s “more hazardous and noxious to hide love than to announce it” (opasnee i vrednei ukrit’ liubov, chem ob’iavit’ o nei ). Finishes with the exit of Shchukin and Vagrin’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11p</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vakhtangov 2b</td>
<td>2/4 C (modal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No music</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Portrait</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No music</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene of Hamlet with Rosencrantz.</td>
<td>12p</td>
<td>2/4 C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^{1059}$ *Shostakovich: Hamlet & King Lear*, various soloists, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Mark Elder (Signum SIGCD052, 1994).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>The arrival of the actors – <em>pp</em></td>
<td>‘Is played in the interlude after Rapoport’s “Too much is not enough” (<em>cherenčur nedostatochno</em>). Several times <em>pp</em>. Finishes with Shchukin’s “All the blessings to you gentlemen”. Polonius to Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/15 (crossed out)</td>
<td>The arrival of the actors - <em>forte</em></td>
<td>‘After Shchukin’s “On my honour” (<em>pochesti moei</em>), <em>forte</em> finishes with the start of the text of the next scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/16</td>
<td>The arrival of actors - <em>forte</em></td>
<td>10 The arrival of actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/11</td>
<td>Exit (<em>ukhod</em>) of Polonius with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/17 (14 crossed out)</td>
<td>Dialogue of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern</td>
<td>‘It is played during the intermedia after Goriunov’s “in order to ambush the King’s conscience” and his exit. It is played several times <em>pp</em> finishing with Rapoport’s words “Either no, or go” (<em>libo net, libo ukhodi</em>) is played to the end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 crossed out, 13/18</td>
<td>Hunt</td>
<td>11 Hunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 crossed out, 14/19</td>
<td>Finale of the second act</td>
<td>‘After Simonov’s “Madness of the strong requires observation”’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1060 Shostakovich’s manuscripts at the Vakhtangov theatre carry two different paginations.
## Act 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Musical number according to ‘repetiteur’s summary’ / number in parts</th>
<th>Name of fragment/ in parts (if different)</th>
<th>Scene number</th>
<th>Name of scene</th>
<th>Words or comments</th>
<th>Manuscript, including sketches, piano scores</th>
<th>Number in published full score (p) / suite (s)</th>
<th>Key and metre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 crossed out, 15/20</td>
<td>Instruments tuning up</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘Together with rising of panel curtain (paduga) with the signal of pomrezh (assistant-director)’</td>
<td>Vakhtangov 2c (top of page: 3rd Act: rehearsal of the show)</td>
<td>19p (only in piano score)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 crossed out, 16/21</td>
<td>Introduction (Hamlet’s advice to actors)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Gorinov’s “I beg you…avoid this”’</td>
<td>Vakhtangov 2d</td>
<td>20p</td>
<td>4/4 d (modal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Love scene (kusok) of King and Queen</td>
<td>17/22</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Gorinov’s “vkhodit”’</td>
<td></td>
<td>21p</td>
<td>3/4 G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 crossed out, 18A</td>
<td>First love bit (kusochik)</td>
<td>20 crossed out, 18A</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Ianovskii’s “In High esteem and love”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 crossed out, 18b</td>
<td>Second bit ‘with another spouse’</td>
<td>21 crossed out, 18b</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Ianovskii’s “with a different espouse”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 crossed out, 18v</td>
<td>Third bit</td>
<td>22 crossed out, 18v</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Tutyshkin’s “O mercy (O poshchadi)”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 crossed out, 18g</td>
<td>Fourth bit ‘and I shall become a wife again’</td>
<td>23 crossed out, 18g</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>After Tutyshkin’s “I give you my love for eternity”’</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/4 d flat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 crossed out 19</td>
<td>‘Dispel sleep’</td>
<td>24 crossed out 19</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Ianovskii’s “and happy on the day of trouble, dispel sleep”’</td>
<td></td>
<td>4/4 D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 crossed out, 20/25</td>
<td>Entrance of the poisoner</td>
<td>25 crossed out, 20/25</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Gorinov’s “he pours poison into the ear of the King”’</td>
<td></td>
<td>22p</td>
<td>3/4 non-tonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 crossed out, 21/26</td>
<td>Music of poisoning</td>
<td>26 crossed out, 21/26</td>
<td>Cellar</td>
<td>‘After Gorinov’s “drop your silly jokes and start”’</td>
<td></td>
<td>26p</td>
<td>4/4 non-tonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 crossed out, 22a/27</td>
<td>Drum roll, <em>attacca</em></td>
<td>‘After Zhuravlev’s “to destroy life of the living”’, just as the poison is being poured, after the container is dropped</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 crossed out, 22b/28</td>
<td>Exit of the poisoner</td>
<td><em>24p</em> 4/4 wandering tonal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29 crossed out, 23/29</td>
<td>Passionate action of the Queen</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “the Queen returns”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 crossed out, 24/30</td>
<td>‘It will be a prison’/ (no title)</td>
<td>‘After Tutyshkin’s “my beloved, it will be a prison for me”’</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>31 crossed out, 25/31</td>
<td>‘I give you my love for eternity’/ (no title)</td>
<td>‘After Tutyshkin’s “I give you my love for eternity”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 crossed out, 26/32</td>
<td>Dialogue of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern / (mimo= to be left out)</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “So I will pay the theft”. It is played several times <em>pp</em> and finishes with Mironov’s “Most stupid people”, until the end …/ (pencilled in: “Pantomim”)’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33 crossed out 27/34</td>
<td>Entrance of guests / arrival of guests 13 Show (<em>spektaki</em>)</td>
<td>‘According to mise-en-scène when Goriunov goes up the stairs and hides’ <em>6s (shestvie), 26p</em> 4/4 C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 crossed out, 28</td>
<td>Entrance of guests</td>
<td>‘After Shchukin’s “Oho, do you hear that?”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 crossed out 29</td>
<td>Introduction of the show ‘4/4 Adagio, 3 bars (No. 16)’</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “otherwise oblivion threatens him”’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘When patter (*govorok*) is heard from off-stage, *attacca* to …’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Love scene of King and Queen, 3/4 Andantino (No. 17) 9 bars</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “this means villainy”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>First little piece, 3/4, 1 bar (18a)</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “How these moppets dance”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Second little piece, 3/4, 1 bar (No. 18 b)</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “You are on a roll (kachki) my prince”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Third little piece, 3/4, 1 bar (18v)</td>
<td>‘After Vagrina’s “What are they showing now?”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Fourth little piece, 3/4, 1 bar (18 g)</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “a tip before making jokes”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>‘Rasseiat snam’, ‘4/4, Andantino, 8 crossed out 4 bars (flute and horns) No. 19 (skipped) attacca to No. 42’</td>
<td>‘After Vagrina’s “what are they showing now?”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Music of poisoning, 4/4, adagio, fff, 6 bars (21)</td>
<td>‘After Vagrina’s “what are they showing now?”’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/35</td>
<td>/ Exit of guests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/36</td>
<td>/ (no title)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>43/ 37</td>
<td>Drum roll (No. 22a)</td>
<td>‘After Zhuravlev’s “Yes, life is destroyed in the living” (Lucian at the end of mousetrap)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers 35 to 43 are framed, probably indicating they belong to the off-stage performance of the Mousetrap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44 crossed out, 30a/ 38</td>
<td>Flute scene, No. 30</td>
<td>‘After second line of Goriunov “Hey, music”’</td>
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27p 4/4, wandering tonality
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Music</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30b</td>
<td>‘Goriunov: “manage these holes using your fingers”’</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 crossed out</td>
<td>Pantomime/ musical pantomime</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2/4 g</td>
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<tr>
<td>31/39</td>
<td>The king is unwell</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 crossed out</td>
<td>‘Hamlet carries body of Polonius’</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4/4 C</td>
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<tr>
<td>32/40</td>
<td>Scene with mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>47, 33/41</td>
<td>‘The King drags (tashchit) the Queen’</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2/4 Bb</td>
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<tr>
<td>48, 34/42</td>
<td>‘When the fencers converge as Rosencrantz’s whistle blows’</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2/4 d</td>
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<tr>
<td>49, 35/44</td>
<td>Claudius’s monologue</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4/4 e</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interval (mentioned in parts only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>/45, 46</td>
<td>/Signals of Fortinbras (mimo= to leave out?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>50, 36a/</td>
<td>First signal</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2/4 b</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fortinbras</td>
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Act 4

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Musical number according to ‘conductor’s summary’ / number in parts</th>
<th>Name of fragment/ in parts (if different)</th>
<th>Scene number</th>
<th>Name of scene</th>
<th>Words or comments</th>
<th>Manuscript, including sketches, piano scores</th>
<th>Number in published full score (p) / suite (s)</th>
<th>Key and metre</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td>Romance for the feast (crossed out)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Feast</td>
<td>‘With the signal of the assistant director at the same time as panel curtain rising’</td>
<td>Vakhtangov 7 (11)</td>
<td>8s (Pir), 37p (Kankan)</td>
<td>2/4 F (modal)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>38/ 47</strong></td>
<td>Feast (crossed out) Cancan</td>
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<td>‘As soon as the applauding finishes from previous scene attacca’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>39 / 48</strong></td>
<td>Ophelia’s song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘After Orochko’s “follow her closely”’</td>
<td>RGALI 7, 7 verso, 8</td>
<td>9s, 38p</td>
<td>2/4 D</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td>Dance (crossed out)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td>Coda (Otygrish ) of Ophelia’s song</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>‘After Simonov’s “like the light in your eyes”’</td>
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<tr>
<td>/49</td>
<td>/ Ophelia’s parting</td>
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<td>/ Ophelia’s parting</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>43/ 51</strong></td>
<td>Flourish</td>
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<td></td>
<td>‘After Simonov’s “And where the guilt is, there fall the ax”’</td>
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‘No music’ 22 Pirates
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>King and Laertes</td>
<td>52/53</td>
<td>Dance music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44/53</td>
<td>Lullaby</td>
<td>‘After Shikhmatov’s “and thus my noble father is murdered”’, crossed out and replaced with “but my revenge will come”</td>
<td>Vakhtangov 5/b (IV act)</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Introduction to graveyard</td>
<td>Graveyard</td>
<td>‘With the signal of the assistant director at the same time as panel curtain’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gravedigger’s song</td>
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<td>Only piano score (Track 27b on CD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>46a</td>
<td>Requiem</td>
<td>‘First 9 bars until the entrance of the chorus. After Goriunov’s “What! Ophelia?”’</td>
<td>11s</td>
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<tr>
<td>46b/54</td>
<td>Requiem, complete</td>
<td>‘After panel curtain falls’</td>
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<tr>
<td>47/55</td>
<td>Joust (Turnir)</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>‘With the signal of assistant director’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48/56</td>
<td>Signalling the beginning of the joust/two blows</td>
<td>‘After Simonov’s “And you watch with the watchful judging eye”’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>49/57</td>
<td>Fight, fast and slow, following/fight A</td>
<td>‘After Shikhmatov’s “Prince starts” to cut on Goriunov’s words “to the judgement”’</td>
<td>Fast boi: RGALI 2b + second half different, Vakhtangov 4c,d Slow boi: Vakhtangov 4ob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Details</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>50/ 58</td>
<td>Flourish (tush)</td>
<td>‘After Simonov’s “good health”’ 42p</td>
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<tr>
<td>51/ 59</td>
<td>Fight fast and slow in succession/ fight B</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “it can wait, let’s start”, to cut off on Goriunov’s “another blow”’ Fast: 2/4 around g Slow: 2/4 around g</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>52/ 60</td>
<td>Flourish</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “My Lady” to cut with the signal from Simonov’</td>
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<tr>
<td>53/ 61</td>
<td>Fast and slow fight in succession/ fight A</td>
<td>‘After Shikhmatov’s “You think so? Let’s begin” to cut off on Simonov’s “Separate them! They are huddled”’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54/ 62</td>
<td>End of joust (turnir)/ end of the tournament (poedinok)</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “The blade is poisoned too”’ Vakhtangov 4(^4) 45p 2/4 g</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>55/ 63</td>
<td>Fortinbras’s march attacca ‘bodriikusok’/ first section</td>
<td>‘After Goriunov’s “Pass on the truth about me” pp’ Vakhtangov 5 46p 2/4 F ‘Bodrii’ from R3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>56/ 64</td>
<td>‘Sil’nyi kusok’/ Fortinbras’s March 2(^nd) section</td>
<td>‘After Kozlov’s “He didn’t know that” (togo ne znal)’ From R6</td>
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<tr>
<td>/ 65</td>
<td>/ Fortinbras’s march 3(^rd) section</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ 66</td>
<td>/ Trumpet signal</td>
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<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td>‘After “An army salute”’ From R7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>/ 68</td>
<td>/ Epilogue</td>
<td>Only in piano score at Vakhtangov</td>
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Abstracts

Les mises en scène et les mises en musique d’Hamlet en ère stalinienne et après

Résumé


Hamlet in the Stalin Era and Beyond: Stage and Score

Summary

Hamlet has long been an inseparable part of Russian national identity. Staging Hamlet in Russia during the Stalin era, however, presented particular problems connected with the ideological framework imposed on the arts and culture as well as with Stalin’s own negative perceived view of the tragedy. The two major productions of Hamlet in Russia during this period were those directed by Nikolai Akimov (1932) and Sergei Radlov (1938). Thorough re-examination of these productions, as undertaken in the central chapters of this dissertation, reveals much previously unknown detail about their conception, realisation, reception and afterlife. It highlights the importance of the role of music composed for them by Dmitry Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev, respectively, and it suggests a complex interaction of individual and institutional agendas. This work has been made possible by numerous visits to Russian archives, which contain invaluable documents such as production books and stenographic reports of discussions, previously unreferenced in Western scholarship. These central chapters are preceded by a historical overview of Hamlet in Russia and of music and Shakespeare in general. They are followed by a survey of major adaptations of Hamlet in the late-Stalin era and beyond, concentrating on those with significant musical contributions. The outcome is a richer and more complex account of the familiar image of Hamlet as a mirror of Russian/Soviet society.

Keywords : Hamlet, Stalin, Nikolai Akimov, Dmitry Shostakovich, Sergei Radlov, Sergei Prokofiev, Shakespeare and music; Russian/Soviet Shakespeare, Russian/Soviet theatre, Grigori Kozintsev, Sergei Slonimsky, Vladimir Vysotsky, Alexi Machavariani, Boris Pasternak, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Shakespeare commemorations in the Soviet Union, Global Shakespeare, Appropriation and adaptation