

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE



Disseminating Shakespeare
IN THE NORDIC
COUNTRIES

Shifting Centres and Peripheries in the Nineteenth Century

Edited by
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Afterword: Towards a regional methodology of culture

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Working with German and French versions, eighteenth-century Nordic translators brought Shakespeare's texts and broader European contexts to bear on each other. While they privileged the tragedies, such as early Finnish versions of *Macbeth* and the first Danish translation of *Hamlet* by Johannes Boye in 1777, Englishness was but one of several components, alongside those from continental Europe, of these cultural transactions. Instead of reinforcing cultural hierarchy and the idea of unilinear transmission of cultures, the early translations created a web of inter-connections that empowered readers and audiences for whom English was a second language.

Since its first staging in Copenhagen in the early nineteenth century, *Hamlet* has both visceral and dramaturgical connections with Denmark thanks, in part, to the famed 'Hamlet's castle' (Kronborg) in Helsingør and to the Scandinavian legend *Amleth*. Nordic Shakespeares are also found in unexpected places. Finnish, Norwegian, Polish and English actors perform

together in *Songs of Lear* (directed by Grzegorz Bral, 2016), a work by the Polish company Teatr Pieśń Kozła (meaning Song of the Goat). Nordic performances have also engaged with world events. Hundreds of balloons in *Lér Konungur* (directed by Benedict Andrews, 2010), the National Theatre of Iceland in Reykjavik's adaptation of *King Lear*, are reminiscent of those at American political conventions. With its characters milling around in conservative contemporary business attires, the production critiques neoliberal, free-market capitalism driven by corporate interests.

Nineteenth-century Nordic Shakespeare, the focus of this book, is defined by its rich diversity and has been recognized for its lasting influence on our understanding of Shakespeare. The nineteenth century was an era when Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden redefined themselves as sovereign nation-states with distinct national literatures. It was also an era when these cultures negotiated their relationships to other European cultures, especially French classicism and German Romanticism. Nineteenth-century Swedish actor Hedvig Charlotte Raa-Winterhjelm, for example, astonishingly performed in three languages in four Nordic countries. The chapters in this volume invert the concept of 'global' Shakespeare by showing the interactions between forces from multiple centres of cultural production both within and beyond the Nordic countries. Nordic Shakespeares are neither part of the world Englishes cultural sphere nor cultures that are diametrically opposed to the Anglophone world.

The case studies in this volume share a penumbra even though they bear different cultural coordinates. When light is shed over an opaque object, it casts a shadow with a partially shaded outer region. Nineteenth-century Nordic Shakespeares form a penumbra of multiple cultural texts as they evoke discrete plot elements of Shakespeare and culturally-specific themes. Judith Buchanan theorizes that, in this manner, adaptations contain a 'textual penumbra', a body of extra-textual information closely associated with the adaptations that enrich their meaning.¹ An innocuous penumbra could

be an awareness by the audience or reader of previous works by the artist. A more intrusive penumbra could be directors' statements on record or the significance of the venue.

We gain new insights on cultural history through the study of the intra-regional influence of Shakespeare across a geocultural area, such as the Nordic countries, rather than siloed, 'national' Shakespeares in individual countries. In this model of regional studies, there are no singular, unitary centres and peripheries in the cultural exchange, because the diffuse nature of disseminating ideas on varied but connected cultural terrains enables us to have a more comprehensive vision of claimed affinity with, indifference to, and resistance of, Shakespeare. Along with the Romantics, Søren Kierkegaard is well known for his admiration of Shakespeare. As James Newlin's chapter shows, the Danish philosopher ends up appropriating and using *King Lear* as a guiding force in his books *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*. Finnish writer Aleksis Kivi used Shakespeare as a model for vernacular theatre. In contrast, the 1920 Norwegian Nobel laureate for literature Knut Hamsun, like his contemporaries George Bernard Shaw and Leo Tolstoy, used harsh words to reject Shakespeare's aesthetic merits – an author (in Hamsun's view) who creates only typified characters that may be popular with the masses but are of little value. All these positivist and antithetical strands co-exist in Nordic reception histories of Shakespeare. Relational, cultural meanings emerge through negation of and negotiation with Shakespeare.

The first phase of the sustained study of Shakespeare and globalization unfolded over the past few decades, where national politics have been brought to bear on Shakespeare's afterlife.² The rise of global Shakespeares as a field was concomitant with the emergence of polity-driven historiography, both of which facilitated linear, synchronic narratives about cultures. The global and the national became politically expedient categories of difference. There is an historical reason why the global is imagined to be whatever the United States and the UK are not.³ Since 1949, the United States and UK have

been close military allies as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) partners, though their governments diverge on foreign policy and worldviews. Their political and cultural differences notwithstanding (which is captured aptly by Oscar Wilde: 'we have really everything in common with America nowadays, except, of course, language'), these two countries – with a combined population of 400 million – have collectively maintained the dominant role of Anglophone cultural production in the modern world.⁴ This phenomenon has contributed to the tendency, in English-language scholarship, to assume that the global refers to the cultural realms beyond the United States and the UK.

The current, second phase of global studies is challenging fixed notions of cultural authenticity, drawing more attention to 'regional' Shakespeares.⁵ Our current phase of the study of cultures is informed by non-linear, rhizomatic networks that blur the lines between central and peripheral locations of cultural production. The 'inescapable plurality' of centres and peripheries, as Nely Keinänen and Per Sivefors call it, moves the field beyond narrowly defined national Shakespeares. Nordic Shakespeares, as this volume reveals, developed within a history of mediated influences and Shakespeare has served as a foil for artists in media beyond theatre. In other words, this book enriches our understanding of Nordic cultures and Shakespeare by offering layered meanings of cultural dissemination, carefully dissecting the idea of Shakespeare's singularity.

This book, along with other recent works, examines the transnational cultural flows that go beyond the scope of geopolitical divisions of nation-states and cultural profiling. The multiplicity of the plural term global Shakespeares helps us push back against deceptively harmonious images of Shakespeare's ubiquitous presence. This book has risen to meet the challenge of collation of empirical data across a geocultural sphere. Globalization is difficult to study empirically when 'evidence is far better organized on a national rather than cross-border basis'.⁶ Focusing on incongruent layers of influence

and difference, including Nordic, French, German and English sources, in the early dissemination of Shakespeare, this book contends that, in some cases, national boundaries were significant factors in the dissemination of Shakespeare and evolution of local cultures and, in other cases, the nation-state was not as useful as an organizing principle through which to understand Nordic Shakespeares and their cultural meanings. While at times the Nordic cultures had antithetical relations with one another, there was also significant cooperation that went beyond the nation-state.

A regional methodology with a transnational framework can identify shared and conflicting patterns of cultural dissemination. Regional data is widely available but difficult to classify; this book has organized and synthesized important sectors of Nordic histories to serve as a key method 'for disrupting nationalist and globalist paradigms', according to Aaron Nyerges and Thomas Adams.⁷ From literary history to social sciences, including American studies, scholars have recently been calling for renewed attention to the region as a unit of knowledge. A regional methodology attends to intra-regional idiosyncrasies and connections by breaking down perceived, clear cultural boundaries between nation-states.

Notes

- 1 Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film*, 10.
- 2 Kennedy, ed., *Foreign Shakespeare*.
- 3 Deb, 'The Rise of the Global Novelist'.
- 4 Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*, 7.
- 5 Desmet, Iyengar and Jacobson, eds, *The Routledge Handbook*; Joubin, *Shakespeare and East Asia*; Della Gatta, *Latinx Shakespeares*.
- 6 Turner and Holton, 'Theories of Globalization', 5.
- 7 Nyerges and Adams, 'Introduction', 6. See also Pryse, 'Afterword'.

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much of the material on Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, and Geijer's translation.

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