The late- and post-Soviet trials of *Hamlet* in song, ballet, and opera

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Abstract

With the (re-)tightening of censorship, a proliferation of subtexts and Aesopian messages may be detected in late-Soviet Shakespeare adaptations in general and *Hamlet* in particular. This article examines representative cases of responses to *Hamlet* in the late- and post-Soviet eras, taking the genres of song, ballet, and opera/theatre, and broadly mapping them on to the topics of, respectively, Individualism, Convention, and Politics. In setting forth a narrative of *Hamlet* adaptations in these periods, this article shows that the tension between individual creative activity and politico-cultural climate was and continues to be more complex and multifaceted than might be predicted.

Keywords

Ballet, music, opera, political allegory, Soviet and post-Soviet era, Georgia

Résumé

Avec un nouveau durcissement de la censure, on note, à la fin de l’ère soviétique, une prolifération de sous-textes et de messages ésopiens dans les adaptations de Shakespeare en général et de *Hamlet* en particulier. Cet article passe en revue des exemples représentatifs de la réception de *Hamlet* à la fin de l’ère soviétique et dans l’ère post-soviétique, à travers, successivement, les genres du chant, du ballet et de l’opéra/théâtre, respectivement abordés depuis la perspective de l’individualisme, de la convention et de la politique. En proposant ainsi une narration des adaptations de *Hamlet* à cette époque, l’article démontre que la tension entre l’activité créatrice individuelle et le contexte politique et culturel était, et continue d’être, plus complexe, et présente plus de facettes, qu’on ne pourrait le penser.

Mots clés

Ballet, musique, opéra, allégorie politique, ère soviétique et post-soviétique, Georgie

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One of the most intriguing cultural events that had to be put on hold in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic was a music drama spectacle at Moscow’s International Music House, entitled ‘Gamlet Story’. Premiered on 16 January 2019, this show was described by its creator and director Natalia Semenova as ‘a fantasy on the theme of [Shakespeare’s Hamlet] … a synthesis of music, poetic performance, film plot and video project’. Three actors played three Hamlets, who coexisted on the stage and represented three types: a businessman, a showman, and a secret service officer. They were complemented by a fourth Hamlet in the figure of Alexei Aigui, the composer and lead musician of the omnipresent musical ensemble. Echoing some of the most significant post-Soviet Russian Hamlets, ‘Gamlet Story’ freely adapted Shakespeare’s source text, not retaining much beyond ‘To be or not to be’ (spoken in different translations by each actor). The rest of the show was a compilation of Russian contemporary and twentieth-century poems. Unconventional though this concept was, it was not entirely without precedent, even in Russia. In 2016, the veteran theatre director Lev Dodin also created a hybrid play-text for his Hamlet, made up of various Shakespearean texts as well as excerpts from Saxo Grammaticus and Holinshed’s Chronicles. Perhaps most extreme of all recent Russian Hamlets, Nikolai Kolyada’s 2007 highly eccentric and provocative production, with its references to pagan celebrations and rituals, kept much of Shakespeare’s text, in a production that exaggerated physicality with grotesque gestures, visuals, and movement, creating a counterpoint that overrode the meaning and significance of words.

Despite the freshness and appeal of these productions, and regardless of the possibilities afforded to their creators by advances in technology, in the broadest perspective, their innovations follow a line that may be traced back to much earlier Russian adaptations. The earliest quasi-translation of Hamlet into Russian in 1748, by Aleksandr Sumarokov, was only loosely based on Shakespeare’s text; and the most famous words that emerged from the seminal production of the tragedy on the Russian stage in 1837 had no equivalent in the source text. For his notoriously zany 1932 production at the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre, Nikolai Akimov incorporated (or intended to incorporate, since some of his interventions were excised in rehearsal) additional text derived from the writings of Erasmus and newly commissioned jokes for the gravediggers’ scene. As with Dodin eighty-four years later, Akimov justified his intervention somewhat tendentiously as an attempt to be true to the spirit of Shakespeare’s work. Even having more than one Hamlet on the stage was not without precedent: Vsevolod Meyerhold, who never realised his dream of staging Hamlet, had envisaged scenes where two Hamlets encounter and engage with one another.

The most characteristic feature of the newest adaptations was, and continues to be, the foregrounding of music and bodily expressions at the expense of Shakespeare’s verbal text, as in ‘Gamlet Story’ and in Kolyada’s production. This is most prominently foreshadowed in the surge of transmedial adaptations of Hamlet – in the form of songs, ballets, and operas – that followed the 1964 quatercentenary celebrations, coinciding with the
post-Thaw period of Soviet history, commonly known (thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev’s retrospective labelling) as the Stagnation.4

In fact, although the sociopolitical context of the post-Thaw/Stagnation Soviet era is at first glance in complete contrast to that of contemporary post-Soviet Russia (1991 to the present day), further reflection on their respective Hamlets suggests a number of affinities even more deeply seated than the above-noted similarities. This is in line with the essence of Russian engagements with Hamlet and Hamlet and the idea of the tragedy as a ‘mirror’ of society.5 It has been suggested, with some justification, 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’.6 Accordingly, understanding Russian adaptations of Hamlet and their sociopolitical contexts is a two-way process. Clearly many productions reflect the political climate of their times; but also – perhaps less obviously – those contexts may themselves be more subtly appreciated through knowledge of those productions. Subtexts and contexts are to be understood not only as those intended by the creators, but also as those that have been perceived or even imposed on the work by commentators. In this latter sense ballet offers a particularly pertinent example, as will be seen.

The post-Thaw and the post-Soviet eras share an overarching atmosphere of post-trauma, and this is clearly reflected in the Hamlet adaptations of those times. Rather than revering the Danish prince, creative artists dared to question his suitability as a leader and to hold him accountable for his multiple murders. Probing this notion of the non-ideal Hamlet, they looked beyond Shakespeare’s words, or indeed sometimes beyond any words whatsoever. In this respect the role of music, whether incidental (as in the theatre) or essential (as in song, ballet, and opera) is of prime significance. Music has always had the potential to take Shakespeare’s tragedy beyond the text ‘as a primary guarantor of structure, narrative and sense and beyond the spoken word as the dominant materiality’.7 In the particular context of the Stagnation era, with its retightening of control and censorship following the relative freedom of the Thaw, the abstract and non-referential language of music became an even more crucial means of conveying meanings, or allowing meanings to be ‘read’ that were not explicit in the words. Hence the focus on musical adaptations in this article.

The Stagnation era, so-called ‘owing to the smug, stolid, and increasingly arteriosclerotic leadership of Leonid Brezhnev’ also saw ‘the most exciting upsurge in theatrical creativity since the 1920s’.8 This upsurge took place despite, or perhaps even thanks to, the mechanisms of cultural censorship and the consequent pressure on artists maintained by the Ministry of Culture under the leadership from 1960 to 1974 of Ekaterina Furtseva: this forced theatre directors to come up with innovative creative ideas which could successfully pass through the filters of censorship. The theatre was, after all, where people flocked to ‘hear messages they could not hear elsewhere’.9 Once these conditions were removed by the collapse of the system at the end of 1991, there remained no need for ‘Aesopian’ language, i.e., verbal conceits or scenic metaphors pointing to sociopolitical subtexts.10 The creative results were therefore once again somewhat paradoxical, as Bartoshevich has put it: ‘The problem now is whether the theatre will be able to maintain its significance as the most important instrument of national self-consciousness
and self-expression in conditions of political freedom’. The paradox is well captured in an apparently off-hand remark. 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) reflected on the double-edged sword of artistic freedom: ‘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’. Thus, the correlation in a former totalitarian society between political context and artistic text may not be as direct as might be assumed, at least in the sense that freedom of expression may not go hand in hand with meaningful communication and may even present a challenge to it. In setting forth a narrative of late- and post-Soviet *Hamlet* adaptations, focused through the lens of musical settings, I shall argue that the tension between individual creative activity and the politico-cultural climate was, and continues to be, more complex and multifaceted than might be assumed. Self-identifying with the hero of the tragedy, songwriters, whether in the art- or popular music fields, used Hamlet as an alter ego to make commentaries on the state of the individual within a social or existential context. Ballet adaptations, on the other hand, were more subject to the constraints of Cold War ideology and/or the conventions of the medium. Opera, for its part, seemingly provided composers with more room to manoeuvre in making grand-scale statements. Such statements included those bearing political or even nationalist undertones, in which respect they approached Shakespeare’s text with a somewhat similar mindset to that of radically inclined theatre producers.

With these issues in mind, I shall examine representative instances of multigenre responses to *Hamlet* and Hamlet in the late- and post-Soviet eras, considering song, ballet, and opera/theatre in turn, and broadly mapping them on to the topics of, respectively, Individualism, Convention, and Politics, which are at the heart of the most authoritative studies of the post-Thaw and Glasnost eras, but which have not been examined through the prism of Shakespeare and music.

**Individualism through song: ‘I am Hamlet’**

Casting a rock star such as Mamontovas as Hamlet (in the above-mentioned Nekrosius 2012 *Hamlet*), who performs his music as part of the production, had a clear precedent in the example of Yuri Lyubimov’s famous production starring the Russian ‘bard-poet’ and actor, Vladimir Vysotsky (1938–80), which premiered on 29 November 1971. This 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 this iconic figure against blank characters (emphasised by their rather monotonous delivery as opposed to Vysotsky’s over-the-top passion) on a set dominated by a heavy cloth curtain – inviting a range of metaphorical interpretations (from death to history and time) – Lyubimov confirmed his new theatrical path. Whereas in the 1960s, Lyubimov’s work at the Taganka Theatre was dominated by sociopolitical agitation, in the early 1970s ‘Lyubimov gave prominence to the sincerity of
the individual and his tragic loneliness’ in a hostile environment. In his production of *Hamlet*, the individual (Hamlet) was set apart from society with scenic solutions (designed by David Borovsy) such as the omnipresent curtain woven from thick yarn, and by matching all the other characters’ costumes to the earthy colour of the curtain, which contrasted with Hamlet’s black sweater. In this way, symbolically ‘it was left to [Hamlet] to resolve the conflict between his action and his conscience’. Rebellious against the whole world and the controlling society that the curtain symbolised, this Hamlet was ready to express the self-accusatory attitude of the Russian intelligentsia, who had lived through the euphoria and decline of the post-Stalin Thaw.

Dressed in sweater and jeans, Vysotsky opened each night, performing to his seven-string guitar accompaniment. Recordings show him singing the words of the ‘Hamlet’ poem from Pasternak’s *Dr Zhivago*; this was itself an act of defiance since the novel was not officially rehabilitated until 1987. A year after the premiere, Vysotsky himself composed a song entitled ‘My Hamlet’ (*Moi Gamlet*), in which he spoke from Hamlet’s point of view about the prince’s inner turmoil and conflict, as in the last two verses:

I’m Hamlet and I despised violence and abuse/I spat on the crown of Denmark/But in their eyes, I tore throats for the throne/And killed my rivals to the throne. /The striking splash appears as a delirium/And death through birth emerges from the side/And still we are giving the deceitful answer/Not finding the right questions to ask.

This was a Hamlet who had realised that to fight with villains, he had to speak their language of bloodshed. As with his performance of the *Zhivago* poem, it was not only the words but also Vysotsky’s guttural and compelling delivery that set the individualistic tone for the production. Similarly, it was his very presence and iconic status rather than the words themselves that reinforced the connection of *Hamlet* with popular culture. This connection would soon penetrate such quintessentially Soviet genres as Soviet *estrada* (a popular genre equivalent to variety stage entertainment).

For example, the defining moment of Alla Pugacheva’s (one of the greatest stars of *estrada*) rush ‘into the spotlight’ of Soviet pop culture was her performance of the 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. The melody, by the Bulgarian composer, Emil Dmitrov, received a new arrangement and lyrics, wherein the Harlequin figure describes their fate as a tired clown who has been playing Hamlet privately for themselves for many years and who could reveal their tears if only they could remove their mask – which they cannot. As in Vysotsky’s song, the phrase ‘I am Hamlet’ (*Ia Gamlet*) echoes Aleksandr Blok’s 1914 poem with the same title. Pugacheva’s acting, in particular during the introspective section of the song, which contrasted with the overall merry tune, turned the song into what one reviewer considered as a ‘real theatre, one of both experiences and presentation, a synthetic theatre of *estrada*’. This reviewer was evidently drawing attention to the incongruity of associating such a low-brow genre as *estrada* with high-brow culture, and to the duality of private and public in the figure of Hamlet.
Less explicit than Vysotsky or Pugacheva in his self-identification with Hamlet, Dmitri
Shostakovich had already been expressing his personal affinity for a number of years. Following his two incidental scores for the tragedy (1932 and 1954) and his music for
Grigori Kozintsev’s celebrated 1964 screen adaptation, Shostakovich had two further
counters with Hamlet in the post-Thaw era, specifically with the figures of Hamlet
and Ophelia. The first of these is the opening song of his 1967 cycle, Seven Romances
on the Poems of Alexander Blok (Op. 127), for which he chose one of Blok’s early
poems, ‘Ophelia’s Song’, written in 1899. What likely 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 personal tragedy of Hamlet and
Ophelia’s love. In this regard, Blok, in his poetic output, assumes the roles of both
Hamlet and Ophelia. Unlike his later poem, ‘I am Hamlet’, with its overt self-
identification with the Danish prince, in ‘Ophelia’s Song’ he speaks through Ophelia,
recounting her grief and longing for her beloved’s departure to faraway lands.
Shostakovich’s setting of this song – unusually for female voice and cello, since it was
written for the famous husband-and-wife musicians Galina Vishnevskaya and Mstislav
Rostropovich – 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, one vocal and one instrumental
and symbolic. The interrelations between the voice and the cello soon reveal the dramatic
roles assigned to them as Ophelia and Hamlet respectively. By juxtaposing transulence
and light (the soprano’s register) with density and darkness (the cello’s modal inflections
as well as its natural register), Shostakovich, like Blok, indulges in role-play: assuming
the masks of Hamlet and Ophelia in turn and shifting roles back and forth, in effect
finding both (conventionally) male and female aspects in the embodiment of the play’s
title character.

Something similar, albeit with a stronger self-accusatory tone, may be detected six
years later, when Shostakovich made an equally dark but still more philosophical
musical commentary on Hamlet and Ophelia’s relationship. This was his song
‘Hamlet’s Dialogue with his Conscience’, the third in the 1973 song cycle, Six Poems
of Marina Tsvetaeva for voice (contralto) and piano (Op. 143). Tsvetaeva’s three
Hamlet poems (the other two being ‘Ophelia to Hamlet’ and ‘Ophelia in Defence of
the Queen’) were originally published in 1924 as a cycle titled Hamlet. Four years
later she included them as autonomous lyrics in her collection, After Russia. ‘Hamlet’s Dialogue’ is placed last: Ophelia’s emancipated voice, which had spoken
the poetic truth in the two previous lyrics, is replaced by that of Hamlet’s conscience,
which addresses him by 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 grad-
ually deflected, and the poem ends with Hamlet questioning his love for Ophelia: ‘I (per-
plexed) loved her??’ The italicised word is in effect a ‘stage direction’, an indication of
how the text might literally be read in front of an audience, although it could also function
as a clarification of tone for the sake of the reader. Given Tsvetaeva’s seemingly harsh judgement of Hamlet, Shostakovich’s choice of poem might appear to contradict his long-time affinity with the tormented character of Prince of Denmark, as shown in his film music for Kozintsev and in his Blok setting of 1967. However, his Tsvetaeva setting removes both the indication ‘perplexed’ and, more importantly, the final question marks. Turning the question into a statement, and thus asserting Hamlet’s love for Ophelia, provides further evidence of the composer’s compassion for the Danish Prince.

This reversal extends to the overall dialogue embodied in the poem. Although Tsvetaeva does not clarify which words belong to Hamlet and which to his conscience, with each verse including statements from both roles, it would be reasonable to assume that it is the conscience that evokes the image of Ophelia’s death and Hamlet’s complicity in it, and Hamlet who counters these accusations with his protestations of love. If this view is accepted, Shostakovich’s setting reverses the roles, or at least their impact: Hamlet’s ‘conscience’ is restrained by setting his words to repeated notes, whereas his voiced defence features a wider variety of intervals, rhythm, and dynamics – far from placytory in effect. Only in the second verse, which contains the image of Ophelia’s garland, does Shostakovich move away from his initial repeated notes, instead deploying a variation of Hamlet’s first protestation of love and thus beginning the process of the fusion of the two roles earlier than Tsvetaeva. In this respect, too, Shostakovich is mounting a defence of Hamlet – against Tsvetaeva’s proto-feminist reading.

The urge to justify and forgive Hamlet suggests an underlying guilt and search for redemption on Shostakovich’s part. He had moved a long way from his arguably feminist representation of Katerina Izmailova in his scandalous 1931–32 opera, The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District (itself an inversion of the original Leskov tale). A prominent part of his agenda in his late works was self-validation, both of himself and of the Soviet artist within society. This was one of the guiding principles in his choice of ‘civic’ (grazhdanskaia) poetry, at least since 1962 when he had selected Evgeny Evtushenko’s ‘A Career’ for the finale of his Symphony No. 13. At a more personal level, perhaps with an eye to his own rather torrid love life, self-validation may be perceived once again in the nuances he introduces to his Tsvetaeva Hamlet setting. From Shostakovich’s songs to Vysotsky’s and Pugacheva’s performances, Hamlet adaptations in song thus provide a mirror not only of the social context (in this case, the constraints on freedom and the notion of individualism during the Stagnation era) but also of the personal preoccupations of the creative artist seeking in the Danish Prince his/her own salvation.

Hamlet moves: The tragedy as ballet

There is no more fundamental way of freeing Hamlet from the constraints of text than by removing words altogether, as ballet of necessity does. Yet due to the genre’s historically deep-rooted conventions, in terms of choreography, costumes, pantomime, set pieces, and so forth, ballet adaptations have historically had difficulty taking advantage of this freedom, being often burdened by an inheritance of traditional meanings. When it comes to the Soviet Union; however, the picture is more complex: not only does ballet impose its own messages on the audience, but also, with the defection of dancers to
the West from the 1960s onwards, Soviet ballet came to be closely associated with politics and the power struggles of the Cold War. Unlike the songs discussed above, the political dimension was extrinsic to the works themselves, being imposed by context and unforeseen events. Ballet’s obligation to remain conventional, for the sake of conventionally trained dancers, points towards the contemporary sociopolitical climate, specifically the place of ballet as a weapon in the Cold War cultural competitions. At the same time, as will be seen, the urge of commentators to find hidden messages in productions of *Hamlet*, regardless of the intention of the adaptors, reveals the status of the tragedy as a facilitator for political interpretation and a mirror for audience pre-conceptions, irrespective of the political agenda of any specific production.

It is tempting to suggest that 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.\(^{29}\) As Nancy Isenberg has observed, 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’.\(^{30}\) After the Sadler’s Wells ballet’s revival of Robert Helpmann’s 1948 one-act *Hamlet* ballet with the title role assigned to Nureyev (1964), the Soviet reply came in the form of a 1969 ‘choreographic suite’, produced as a telefilm by the studio ‘Ekran’, starring the Latvian Maris Liepa and set to a medley of Shostakovich scores to the 1932 theatre production and the 1964 screen version of *Hamlet*. Directed by Sergei Evlakhishvili (who later directed other televised adaptations of literary classics, such as *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Richard III*) and lasting some 40 minutes, the Suite was designed as a syrupy love story centred on the romantic/sibling triangle of Hamlet, Laertes, and Ophelia. Using a minimalist and austere setting of a beige staircase against a beige and blue background, the choreography alternated – conventionally – 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 functioned as catalysts of the lovers’ misery, while Gertrude’s brief appearance had only accessory significance.

The Soviet phenomenon of the TV ballet film (*khoreodram*) adaptations of Shakespeare had started in the mid-1950s, and it shows the gradual stripping of the tragedies to a romantic core, excising all political and sociological subplots, and resisting any political interpretation. This is particularly true for *Hamlet*. Here the dilution of secondary roles in favour of the main protagonists was as much a matter of convention and practicality as of creative choice. In particular, choreographers seem to have preferred to base their ballets on the contrasts between mass scenes with cameo backgrounds and intimate settings with just a few main dancers. 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 by Lentelefilm was a 19-minute suite choreographed by and starring Nikita Dolgushin, which was most likely influenced by Kozintsev’s film, especially its black-and-white cinematography and setting at the gates of Elsinore. In 1988, Lentelefilm issued a conflation of three mini-ballets based on Shakespeare tragedies: *Pavana mavra* (the title taken from José Limon’s 1949 *The Moor’s Pavane*, based on *Othello* and using music by Henry Purcell), *Hamlet*
(choreographed by Natalia Ryzhenko and using Tchaikovsky’s music for the tragedy), and *Romeo and Juliet* (to Tchaikovsky’s Fantasy-overture). Here *Hamlet* had only four main characters: the Prince, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius. In compensation it featured an over-elaborate visual style, being set in several different locations, mostly with heavy decor making extensive use of montages for flashbacks.

Beyond Soviet responses to Helpmann, the influence of his concept may also be detected in post-Cold War adaptations. In her 1991 tele ballet, *Meditation on the Theme of Hamlet* (*Razmyshlenie na temu Gamlet*), Svetlana Voskresenskaia reduced the tragedy to four characters, as in Ryzhenko’s version: Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius. Voskresenskaia’s choreography depicts Hamlet as a man caught between two worlds: the constraints of external reality and inner turmoil. The transition between these comes in the form of changes of costume for himself and the other three main characters (Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius), from highly ornate and heavy clothes to shimmering silver unitards. In place of Tchaikovsky’s music, which accompanied Helpmann’s ballet, here a medley of Shostakovich’s works – including his score for the 1932 *Hamlet* and for Kozintsev’s 1964 film, his Fifteenth String Quartet, and his Fourth Symphony – provides the musical canvas. Voskresenskaia, who had already turned to Shostakovich (a selection from his symphonies, in particular the Seventh) for her 1985 ballet, *Dangerous Shadows*, succeeded in matching the music for *Hamlet* to her at times highly stylised choreography by means of deliberate cutting and mixing.

Shostakovich’s music continued to nourish *Hamlet* ballet adaptations beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union, the latest example being the 2015 production by Declan Donnellan and Radu Poklitaru at the Bolshoi Theatre. This adaptation used material from his Fifth and Fifteenth Symphonies. Prior to the premiere, Poklitaru explained that his and Donnellan’s interpretation was designed to show Hamlet’s dealing with loss, and through his death finally accepting it rather than addressing any philosophical questions and providing an answer to ‘To be or not to be’. The production received mixed reviews, and the result of aligning Shostakovich’s music with a choreography that was dominated by mime was, according to the press, questionable and even at times ‘forced’. Updated to the twentieth century and extensive visual and multimedia effect, this was, according to one of the principal dancers a theatre (drama) production on a ballet stage. In the final scene, following Hamlet’s death, the stage was invaded by Fortinbras’s armed soldiers in non-descript uniforms. This was widely interpreted as a political gesture, alluding to contemporary political events, from the 2002 Moscow theatre hostage crisis (Nord-Ost siege) to the east Ukrainian crisis. In the absence of any evidence of the intentions of the directorial team, and bearing in mind Poklitaru’s own earlier admission that politics are not a suitable theme for choreography, such interpretations testify only to a psychological urge to find subtextual meanings in any adaptations of *Hamlet*.

Unlike *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* had to wait until the late 1960s to attract original Soviet ballet music, as opposed to previously composed scores. None of the three major *Hamlet* ballets that ensued could match the success of Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet* or even the Georgian Aleks i Machavariani’s 1957 *Othello*. Of the three *Hamlets* to original scores, two came from outside the metropolitan hub of Moscow/Leningrad:
Tbilisi, Georgia, in the case of Revaz Gabichvadze’s, and Almaty (Alma-Ata), Kazakhstan, in the case of Aida Issakova’s. These premiered in 1971, a few months after the Kirov’s premiere of Nikolai Chervinsky’s *Hamlet*. The story of Chervinsky’s ballet again comes with overtones of Cold War tensions, albeit only accidentally and post factum: the role of Hamlet was assigned to the young Mikhail Baryshnikov, who soon after the premiere in December 1970 rejected the academism of Sergeev – he famously told the choreographer that he was not going to stand for half an hour in a ballet position (*attitude*) that would signify ‘To be or not to be’. Soon afterwards, while on tour in Toronto in 1974, Baryshnikov defected to the West. 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 premiered in New York in January 1976. Here political aspects are not intrinsic, so much as foisted on Sergeev’s essentially conventional production by subsequent events and hindsight.38

**Theatre versus opera: From individuality to political allegory**

While Soviet ballet at this time struggled to free itself from the shackles of convention, opera was, by its very nature, less aesthetically constrained; which is not to say that Soviet operatic adaptations of Shakespeare had not inherited a raft of problems.

The question of the compatibility of opera with Shakespeare’s works has long been debated. In Russia, as writings of the country’s most prominent musical figures of the nineteenth century reveal, there was a particular resistance to the way this had been handled by Italian composers. This harsh reaction had much to do with nationalist agendas, and with it came a Russian sense of superiority when it came to understanding the works of Shakespeare. Although most of the earliest independent (non-incidental) musical responses to Shakespeare in Russia came in the guise of symphonic poems, notably by Balakirev and Tchaikovsky, Russian and Soviet composers tried their hands at operatic adaptations, with varied results.39

For *Hamlet*, this task was addressed by just two Soviet composers: the Georgian Alexi Machavariani (completed in vocal score in 1967, in full score in 1977) and the Leningrad/Petersburg-based Sergey Slonimsky (completed 1991, premiered 1993). They did so not only through subtle character delineation and text manipulation, but also by incorporating elements of sociopolitical commentary conveyed by means of musical style. These elements were embodied both in the libretti and in the musical scores, and featured, respectively, a nationalist subtext and an allegory of society in decline. In this vein, each opera reflects its contemporary political-cultural turning point.

In the case of Machavariani, who started work on his opera towards the end of the post-Stalin Thaw and completed it at the height of the Brezhnev Stagnation, the change in cultural atmosphere would play a decisive role…

Identifying himself with the Danish prince, but with a nationalist spin, 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 symbolic of the war between new and old ideas – truth and justice versus falsehood and treason. Criticising those productions of the tragedy where the title-character is depicted as
weak and indecisive, Machavariani described his Hamlet as a brave, strong person who is capable of true love and at the same time of great disgust for evil, while 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. What sets this adaptation apart, however, is the allegorical nationalist agenda. In Machavariani’s reported words, ‘This is a personified tragedy signalling the renaissance of a man. I see common features in the fate of Hamlet and Georgia’. Accordingly, having selected Ivan Machabeli’s translation from the original, he insisted that his opera be first performed in the Georgian language. This condition, together with other circumstances such as his twice turning down membership of the Communist Party, his insistence on his Georgian identity while abroad, and jealousy aroused 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 remains to this day unstaged.

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’. Casting the opera in three acts and with only six main roles, Machavariani decided to reduce the role of Horatio radically, a choice that invites comparison both with the theatre productions of the 1930s and with Slonimsky’s opera, regarding not only Horatio but also the secondary roles in general. Slonimsky had a sociodramatic reason for removing Horatio from the libretto of his dramma per musica. He centred his opera on the theme of the faceless crowd (tol’pa), who, as in Musorgsky’s famous opera, Boris Godunov, are ready to acclaim any dictator so long as they are safe. Slonimsky personified this crowd in the figures of two gravediggers of old and new generations, who feature in a Prologue and Postlude added to Shakespeare’s text. He has explained that ‘the idea was to prove that the slogan “vox populi vox dei” (glas narodi glas bozhe) is not true.’ Horatio 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.’ Taking the view that only pure instrumental music would be capable of telling the truth, Slonimsky assigned 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.’

The composer has described the essence of the tragedy as residing in the prince’s loneliness caused by his debt to his father, which prevents him from being himself and forces him to follow the will of his father and accomplish the duty that has been entrusted to him. Apart from this, Slonimsky has referred to the importance of religious and moral values for Hamlet and even for his company (friends and foes), 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 Boris Pasternak’s ‘perception of a hidden strength and religious motivation in the character and the role of Hamlet’. Pasternak, whose translation Slonimsky drew on for the libretto, similarly believed that ‘From the moment of the ghost’s appearance Hamlet renounces himself (sic) in order to “do the will of him who sent him”’. The idea of self-denial and succumbing to a higher will also point to Andrey Tarkovsky’s final film, The Sacrifice (1986), where the protagonist sacrifices himself
and his family to save humanity from an imminent nuclear attack. The case of Tarkovsky’s own engagement with *Hamlet* is rather different, however. Despite dreaming of creating a film version of *Hamlet* and incorporating Hamletian themes into his completed films, Tarkovsky only managed to direct a theatrical version of the tragedy for the 1976–77 season of the Moscow Lenkom (Leninskii Komsomol) Theatre. The mixed reaction to this production means that very few materials concerning it are available.\(^47\) However, the published discussion between Tarkovsky and his crew, some short clips and interviews, as well as Tarkovsky’s diary entries on his work on the production and later on his plans regarding the film version of *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’s translation for his staging (perhaps due to Pasternak’s status with the intelligentsia and his translation being considered as the most suitable one for the theatre), Tarkovsky had serious reservations about it, preferring Mikhail Morozov’s ‘literal translation’.\(^48\) For Tarkovsky:

> the true tragedy of *Hamlet* consists of the fact that he still turned into a vulgar person (*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?\(^49\)

Tarkovsky believed that the drama of *Hamlet* was not 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.’\(^50\)

The fact that Tarkovsky convinced the chief 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 characters 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.\(^51\) 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 Lenkom ensemble, stated in an interview: ‘Ophelia is a normal human being. And I don’t really know if she loves Hamlet out of love or 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 (*krepliia* *baba*)’, Tarkovsky described a scene featuring Hamlet and the two women: while classical music is playing, Hamlet is lying in his dirty clothes pondering about his having to become a ‘swine (*svoloch*)’ to complete his task; at this moment Ophelia gets up from the ever-present onstage 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’.\(^52\) Ophelia’s striving for power is clearly a
radical departure from the marionette-like characteristics she possessed in Kozintsev’s 1964 film.

Compared to this multilayered and somewhat Machiavellian Ophelia, Slonimsky’s heroine follows a more Pasternakian/Russian reading of her as an ethereal, luminous (svetlaia, literally bright) innocent figure, who is 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’.53 Pasternak, and hence similarly Slonimsky, strives to convey ‘a sense of sorrow at the destruction of a fragile precious beauty’.54 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. Slonimsky 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. As a result, the last 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 like Slonimsky, 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’ in Hamlet’s murderous acts, whether directed at Laertes or at Claudius: ‘what triumph? To spill blood is humiliation.’55 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.56

Conclusion

Despite their radically different approaches, Tarkovsky’s and Slonimsky’s solemn endings and the latter’s sceptical view of Fortinbras share the pessimism that dominated the later years of the Soviet regime, and which is a running thread in Yurchak’s authoritative account.57 They are clearly far removed from a successful production of Hamlet during the Stalin era by Sergei Radlov (1938), for example, with its Norwegian prince appearing on a white horse and Prokofiev’s positive, if complex, accompanying music, with the emergence of a sunny final C major. In this sense, Tarkovsky and Slonimsky return the play to an emphasis on doubt, guilt, scepticism, and idealism rather than the political focus that has come to be associated with Russian and East-European Hamlet, a concept whose widespread currency owes much to Jan Kott’s seminal book, Shakespeare Our Contemporary.

There is no question that a political stance (though not necessarily addressed at or directly commenting on Soviet power) was at the heart of some of the most important Soviet Hamlet adaptations, such as Kozintsev’s famous film. But, as this discussion has aimed to show, the antagonistic relationship between the artist and the authorities also worked in subtler ways.58 While the context of retightening of control in the post-Thaw years inevitably shaped the mindset of creative artists, these artists also functioned at an
individual level, where they were facing not only outside pressures but also issues connected with their own creative identities. Such manifold negotiations resulted in Hamlet adaptations of these late Soviet years being far more complex and multilayered in their conception, realisation, and reception than might appear from the outside.

Following the Soviet era, despite such examples as Valerii Fokin’s 2010 production at St Petersburg’s Alexandriinsky Theatre, which to a certain extent reinstated the element of political allegory, the overall Hamlet landscape is at first glance very different by comparison. Facing the post-Soviet trauma, when state subsidies for the arts more or less collapsed, creative artists seem to have taken refuge in farce and grotesquerie. As Bartoshevich scathingly puts it, the contemporary Hamlet is more likely to carry a smartphone than a book when declaring ‘words, words, words’.59 Hence, although recent Russian Hamlets enjoy immediate accessibility and effect, in particular for younger generations, thanks to their dazzling visual-multimedial stagings and superficially daringly conceptual ideas, their depth of field is questionable. Even in the operatic repertoire, there are instances of what Bartoshevich qualifies as ‘postmodernist grotesque’: Vladimir Kobekin’s opera, Gamlet (Datskii) (Rossiiskaia Komediia (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’ni Teatr), fell back on a Shostakovichian-Prokofievian satirical musical language and extensive use of crude jokes.60

Hence, while the Thaw and Stagnation responses to Hamlet examined in this article should help us understand the background against which their post-Soviet counterparts have continued to operate, especially with regard to the manipulation of Shakespeare’s text, it remains to be seen whether the most recent manifestations will provide comparable enrichment and food for thought.

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Notes

1. Personal communication with the show’s creative team, 16 November 2020.
2. The words were ‘Fearful, I am fearful for man’. For more information see Michelle Assay, ‘Hamlet in the Stalin Era: Stage and Score’, (PhD dissertation, Universities of Sorbonne and Sheffield, 2016), p. 85, https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/17711/1/ASSAY-Michelle-2016-these-format-source.pdf, accessed 20 March 2022.
3. Assay, ‘Hamlet in the Stalin Era’, pp. 97–154.
4. Although the exact margins of this period are arguable, they are conventionally understood as 1964 to 1985; the beginning is defined by the ousting of Nikita Khrushchev, while the ending by the advent of Glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (reconstruction) under Mikhail Gorbachev.
5. The idea of Hamlet as a mirror has been widely written about. See, for example, Eleanor Rowe, Hamlet: A Window on Russia (New York: New York University Press, 1976), and Aleksei Bartoshevich, ‘Gamleyt nashikh dnei’, in Bartoshevich (ed.), Shekspirovskie chteniia (Moscow: Moskovskii Gumanitarnyi Universitet, 2010), pp. 209–16.
6. Aleksei Bartoshevich, ‘Hamlet for Russia and the Russian Hamlets now’, ISA Annual Conference (Stratford-upon-Avon., August 2014), unpublished paper. Bartoshevich has referred to this idea in many other writings and public addresses.
7. David Roesner, ‘The Politics of the Polyphony of Performance: Musicalization in Contemporary German Theatre’, Contemporary Theatre Review, 18(1), 2008, p. 46.
8. Laurence Senelick and Sergei Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theater: A Documentary History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 555.
9. Senelick and Ostrovsky, The Soviet Theatre, p. 555.
10. See, Lev Loseff, On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature (Munich: Otto Sagner, 1984), p. x.
11. Bartoshevich, ‘Hamlet for Russia and Russian Hamlets Now’, unpublished paper, European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) Conference, Gdansk, 2017.
12. David Sillito, ‘Hamlet – the Play Stalin Hated’, BBC News Magazine (23 April 2012), http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17770170 (accessed 20 March 2022).
13. Above all, Alexei Yurchak, Everything Was as it Was, Until it Was No More (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
14. Birgit Beumers, Yuri Lyubimov at the Taganka Theatre: 1964–1994 (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), p. 101.
15. For a detailed description of the production, see Beumers, Yuri Lyubimov, pp. 109–17.
16. I am grateful to Alexei Bartoshevich for his papers on Hamlet, which he contributed to seminars on ‘Shakespeare and Central Eastern Europe’ for the ESRA Conferences in 2017 and 2019 (Rome).
17. For a video of the opening see, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZxRXxFb8Hc (accessed 20 March 2022).
18. Vysotsky, Sochineniia v 2 tomakh (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1991), Vol. 2, p. 64.
19. David MacFadyen, Red Stars: Personality and the Soviet Popular Song, 1955–1991 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), p. 210. See also Olga Partan, ‘The Jester-Queen of Russian Pop Culture’, The Russian Review, 66(3), 2007, pp. 483–500. For
the video clip of the song, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQlCQoDQvVw (accessed 20 March 2022).

20. B. Serebrennikova, Pevtsy sovetskoi estrady (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), quoted in MacFadyen, Red Stars, p. 220.

21. Shostakovich quotes as his source Blok, Sochineniya v dvakh tomakh (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1955), vol. 1, 11; see Isaak Glikman, Story of a Friendship (London: Faber, 2001), p. 141, letter of 3 February 1967.

22. Shostakovich also arranged this cycle for voice and chamber orchestra in 1974, as Op. 143a.

23. Olga Hasty, Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journeys in the Worlds of Word (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 72.

24. From Shakespeare’s own description of Ophelia’s death, Act 5 Scene 7.

25. Hasty, Tsvetaeva’s Orphic Journeys, p. 71.

26. For more on Shostakovich’s song cycles, see Caryl Emerson, ‘Shostakovich and the Russian Literary Tradition’, in Laurel Fay (ed.), Shostakovich and His World (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 183–226, esp. 209–12; Philip Ross Bullock, ‘The Poet’s Echo, the Composer’s Voice: Monologic Verse or Dialogic Song?’, in Pauline Fairclough (ed.), Shostakovich Studies 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 207–28; Francis Maes, ‘Between Reality and Transcendence: Shostakovich’s Songs’, in Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning (eds), The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 231–58.

27. See Caryl Emerson, ‘Back to the Future: Shostakovich’s Revision of Leskov’s Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District’, Cambridge Opera Journal, 1, 1989, pp. 59–78.

28. Shostakovich’s opinion about Evtushenko may be found in his letter of 26 October 1965 to composer Boris Tishchenko, Letters of Dmitri Dmitriyevich Schostakovich to Boris Tishchenko (St Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2001), pp. 17–18.

29. For more information on dancers’ defections during the Cold War, see David Caute, The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

30. Nancy Isenberg, ‘Dramatic Leaps and Political Falls: Russian Hamlet Ballet’, in Ruth J. Owen (ed.), The Hamlet Zone: Reworking Hamlet for European Cultures (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), p. 21.

31. For a collection of reviews from various major Russian newspapers and journals, see ‘Prem’era baleta “Gamlet” na Novoi stsene Bolshovo Teatra’, Muzykal’noe obozrenie (17 March 2015), https://muzobozrenie.ru/prem-era-baleta-gamlet-na-novoj-stsene-bol-shogo-teatra/ (accessed 20 March 2022).

32. Raymond Stults, ‘Bolshoi’s “Hamlet” Doesn’t Repeat “Romeo” Success’, The Moscow Times (12 April 2015), https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/04/12/bolshoi-hamlet-doesnt-repeat-romeo-success-a45670 (accessed 20 March 2022).

33. See Natalia Shabalina’s personal interview with Vladislav Lantratov, Shabalina, ‘Gamlet na baletnoj scene vtoroj poloviny XX – nachala XXI vekov’, Vestnik Akademii Russkogo baleta imeni A.YA. Vaganovoj, 58, 2018, p. 91.

34. This was the seizure of the Dubrovka Theater during the second Act of a piece called ‘Nord-ost’ on 23 October 2002 by 40–50 armed Chechen terrorists. The siege involved 850 hostages and ended with the death of at least 170 people.

35. For an interpretation based on allusions to the latter see Iris Julia Bührle, ‘Three Hamlet ballets from World War II to the Ukrainian crisis’, Cahiers Élisabéthains, 102, 2020, pp. 69–86, here 82.
36. Poklitaru in interview with Izvestiia had stated that ‘gas war, politics and indeed everything that is of contemporary relevance, are not suitable themes for culture’. See Svetlana Naborschikova, ‘Khoreograf Radu Poklitaru: “Ukrainskaia politika – nadaevshe i uzhe ne smeshnoe tok-shou”’, Izvestiia (11 March 2009).

37. See Anna Gordeeva, ‘V Bolshom Teatre – prim’era baleta “Gamlet” na muzyku Shostakovicha,’ Vedomosti (12 March 2015), http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2015/03/12/izobrazhaya-zhertvu (accessed 20 March 2022).

38. For more on newly composed ballets, see Michelle Assay, ‘Shakespeare and Soviet music’, Christopher Wilson and Mervyn Cooke (eds), Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 642–70.

39. For more on Russian/Soviet Shakespeare-inspired operas see, Michelle Assay, ‘Hamlet’s Soviet Operatic Afterlife’, The Shakespearean International Yearbook, 18, 2021, pp. 102–20.

40. Manana Kordzaia, Alexi Matchavariani: Creator and Time (Tbilisi: n.p., 2013), p. 64.

41. Alexi Machavariani, ‘Opera Gamlet’, Sovetskaia muzyka, 1964/1, p. 152.

42. Reported by the composer’s son, conductor and composer Vakhtang Machavariani – email exchange with the author, November 2015 and June 2020. For a detailed study of the opera, see Assay, ‘Hamlet’s Soviet Operatic Afterlife’, pp. 106–12.

43. Kordzaia, Alexi Matchavariani, pp. 63–4.

44. According to the composer, this classification had to do with his desire to distinguish his work from the traditional genre of opera. The remarks quoted in this and the following two paragraphs are derived from an interview with Sergei Slonimsky at his apartment in St Petersburg, 28 March 2013.

45. Christopher Barnes, Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 171.

46. Barnes, Boris Pasternak, p. 171. See also Anna France, ‘Boris Pasternak’s Interpretations of Hamlet,’ Russian Literature Triquarterly, 7, 1972, pp. 219–22.

47. Robert Bird, Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema (London: Reaktion, 2008), p. 181.

48. ‘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, Time Within Time: The Diaries, 1970–1986 (London: Faber, 1994), p. 121.

49. O. Surkova, ‘“Gamlet” Andreia Tarkovskogo: Besedy na Lomonosovskom’, Iskusstvo kino, 3, 1998, http://tarkovskiy.su/texty/vospominania/Hamlet.html (accessed 20 March 2022).

50. John Gianvito, Andrey Tarkovsky: Interviews (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p. 135.

51. Excerpts available on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dswRWrch3xc (accessed 20 March 2022).

52. Unless otherwise stated, quotes in this paragraph are from Surkova, ‘“Gamlet” Andreia Tarkovskogo’.

53. Rowe, Hamlet: A Window, pp. 149–50.

54. Rowe, Hamlet: A Window, p. 150.

55. Surkova, ‘“Gamlet” Andreia Tarkovskogo’.

56. Birgitta Steene, Ingmar Bergman: A Reference Guide (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 468; for reviews of the production and list of tours, see pp. 688–700.

57. Yurchak, Everything Was as it Was, passim.
58. Michelle Assay, ‘The rumble of continuing life’: Kozintsev’s Hamlet and its distorted reception, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 104, 2021, pp. 3–22.

59. Bartoshevich, ‘Gamlety nashikh dnei’, *Dlia kogo napisan Gamlet* (Moscow: GITIS, 2014), p. 595.

60. For a review of the premiere, see http://www.smotr.ru/2008/2008_stnd_hamlet.htm (accessed 20 March 2022).

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