

OXFORD SHAKESPEARE TOPICS

Published and Forthcoming Titles Include:

- Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres*
Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres*
Peter Holland, *Shakespeare and Film*
Jill L. Levenson, *Shakespeare and Twentieth-Century Drama*
Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare and Race*
Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language*
Steven Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible*
Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Reading*
Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women*
Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*
Zdeněk Strábrný, *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe*
Stanley Wells, ed., *Shakespeare in the Theatre. An Anthology of Criticism*
Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time*

Oxford Shakespeare Topics

GENERAL EDITORS: PETER HOLLAND AND STANLEY WELLS

Shakespeare and Eastern Europe

ZDENĚK STRÁBRNÝ

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

for stylistic improvements and for trimming my script to the required word limit.

My wife Mariana has supported me all the time more than words can say.

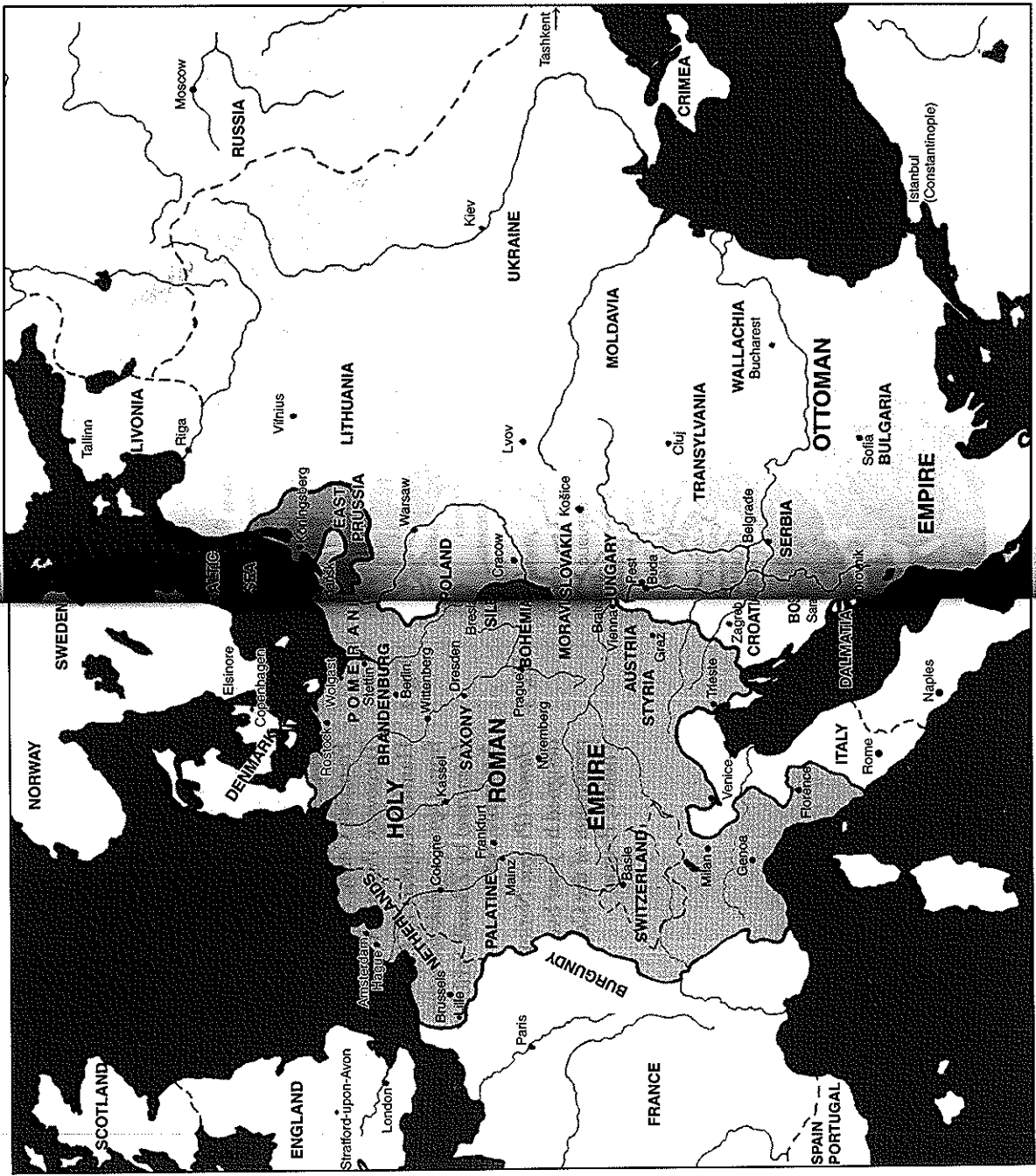
Prague
July 1999

Z.S.

Contents

<i>Maps and Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	I
1. In the Beginning	6
2. Shakespeare under the Tsars	26
3. Shakespeare and National Revivals	57
4. Shakespeare after the Bolshevik Revolution	77
5. Shakespeare behind the Iron Curtain	96
6. Post-Communist Shakespeare	136
<i>Notes</i>	148
<i>A Select Bibliography</i>	154
<i>Index</i>	157

- Map 1. The Holy Roman Empire and Eastern Europe in Shakespeare's Time x-xi
- Map 2. Eastern Europe Today
(*Maps drawn by Silvie Svatošová*) xii-xiii
- Fig. 1. Pickleherring (1621). Reprinted from *Dějiny českého divadla (A History of Czech Theatre)*, vol. 1, eds. František Cerný, Adolf Scherl, and Evžen Turnovský, Prague: Academia, 1968 xiv
- Fig. 2. Hamlet, sculpture by Otto Gutfreund. Reprinted from *Dějiny anglické literatury (A History of English Literature)* by Zdeněk Stříbrný, vol. 1, Prague: Academia, 1987. 75
- Fig. 3. *Hamlet* (Prague National Theatre, 1959), designed by Josef Svoboda. Reprinted by kind permission of the Central Archives of the National Theatre, Prague. 116



Map 1. The Holy Roman Empire and Eastern Europe in Shakespeare's



Map 2. Eastern Europe Today

Introduction

In Eastern Europe, more than anywhere else, Shakespeare's plays have recently been appropriated for political interpretations, as will be shown in the latter parts of this book. Although such a topical approach to Shakespeare may be of special interest to the Western reader, I shall also try and explain how major East European poets, dramatists, novelists, translators, and critics, as well as actors, directors, designers, film-makers, composers, and other artists, have contributed to a better knowledge and appreciation of his work. The earliest example is the Prague engraver Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-77), whose drawings and etchings of seventeenth-century London have become an indispensable visual source for the modern reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe, opened on the Bankside in Southwark in 1996-7. My intention is to give Eastern Europe its due and thus contribute to a fuller survey of Shakespeare's impact on the whole of Europe.

In discussing Eastern Europe, it will be useful to bear in mind that our present geographical notions and names are in many instances different from those of the age of Shakespeare (cf. Maps 1 and 2). At that time, the greatest power in Europe, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, encompassed not only Germany and the Netherlands, part of Italy, and a piece of France but also many countries which are now considered to belong to Central or East Central Europe: for instance, the mostly Slavonic Kingdom of Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), the Archduchy of Austria, and the Archduchy of Styria (south Austria). The emperors were chosen by seven electors and crowned by the Pope until 1562 when their coronations started to take place without the Pope's blessing. The capital of the whole Empire from the fifteenth century was Vienna, but in the fourteenth century and again between 1583 and 1612 it was Prague.

Since 1438 the Empire had been ruled, with one exception, by the powerful dynasty of the Habsburgs of Austria whose family domain also included the western part of Hungary and almost the whole of Slovakia (now the Slovak Republic). Another branch of the Habsburgs, much better known in Shakespeare's England, ruled in Spain,

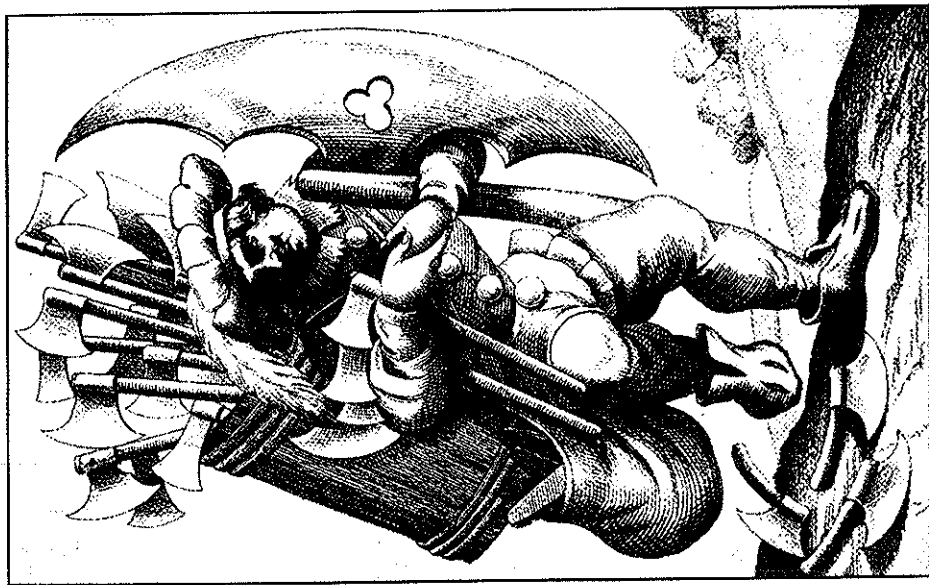


Fig. 1. Pickleherring (1621)

surprising number of old religious plays was also staged. Evidently, the strolling actors tried hard to satisfy pious patrons and citizens but also appealed to more secular and popular taste, so that they often enlivened their performances with additional jigs and acrobatics. Indignant protests against 'their jugglery, leaps, dances, songs and fantasies' have been preserved in a number of places in East Central Europe, supporting the chorus of Puritan voices in Germany and Britain itself. Sometimes the strollers were forbidden to continue their performances because they had shown 'disgraceful things', as in the east Prussian town of Elbing (Polish Elbląg) in 1606.¹

Aristocratic patrons, on the other hand, tended to be much more permissive and sympathetic, as again in England. Even the pious young Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Styria (south Austria) praised ten performances at the Catholic archducal court in Graz in 1608, starting with *The Prodigal Son* and ending with another biblical play, *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, which was very pleasurable and moving, without 'the least bit of love-making in it'. The other performances were also 'vastly agreeable' or 'very enjoyable', with the exception of a 'terrifying play' about two brothers, *King Louis and King Frederick of Hungary*, 'with King Frederick stabbing and murdering everybody non-stop'.² Among the ten plays performed in Graz, probably two were by Marlowe, one by Dekker, and two were possibly related to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* respectively.

The most convenient way for the English Comedians to visit the Continent was through the Protestant part of the Netherlands or the Protestant Kingdom of Denmark. When the Earl of Leicester landed in Flushing in 1585 as commander of the English forces supporting the Dutch Protestants against the Spanish rulers of the Catholic part of the Netherlands, his entourage was enriched by several musicians and fifteen players, including the famous comedian Will Kemp. Leicester recommended his players to the King of Denmark, Frederick II, who had just completed a spacious, strongly fortified Renaissance castle, Kronborg, adjoining the port of Elsinore, a strategically vital entrance to the whole Baltic.

Of all places it is Elsinore (now Helsingør) which provides the first unquestionable records of English 'instrumentalists' and actors performing outside Britain. In 1585 they played in the courtyard of the

In the Beginning

I

Plays by Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists were already being staged in Eastern Europe during his lifetime. By the end of the sixteenth century, English actors had reached an unprecedented professional standard and, as their numbers were growing even in the face of Puritan opposition, they were looking for other places besides London to show their skills. Especially during plague epidemics and periods of sharp competition among acting companies, they went on tour not only in England and Scotland but also across the Channel. Their visits to the Continent represent one of the most intriguing chapters in the annals of British and European theatre.

Archival documents are scattered, tantalizingly brief, or lacking in more exact data. Nevertheless, the names of the principal actors, managers and popular clowns as well as the main routes of the English Comedians, as they were usually called, are known. We also have basic information about the staging of their plays, the stage properties and costumes, and the financial rewards they received. Several lists with the titles of their plays and some texts of the plays in German adaptations have survived. Evidently, the most attractive engagement for them was a long stay at the court of a rich aristocratic patron combined with shorter visits to the fairs and festivals of prosperous towns. They produced their plays in the halls of imperial, royal, or ducal palaces, fencing schools, town halls, town squares, inn-yards, or even churches and churchyards.

All the main genres of Elizabethan drama, i.e. comedies, romances, tragedies, and histories, were brought to the Continent. Moreover, a

town hall to a huge crowd of excited people and next year they returned, with Leicester's recommendation, to perform for several months at the royal castle. Among them were three men whose names were to appear as 'principal actors' in the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's collected plays (1623), including Will Kemp. Evidently, Shakespeare received first-hand information about Elsinore, Denmark, Norway, and Poland from his fellow actors.

From Denmark the English players apparently went to Germany in 1585 and again in 1586, probably without Kemp. In 1587 they possibly paid their first visit to Gdańsk, the key port for the so-called Baltic route which became much frequented by them in the first half of the seventeenth century, taking them along the sea-coast further east to Elbing, Königsberg (Kaliningrad), and Riga, or west to Stettin (Polish Szczecin), Wolgast, and Rostock.

The principal trailblazer of the English Comedians on the Continent was Robert Browne, who was in Leicester's entourage in the Netherlands in 1585, appeared again in Leiden in 1590, and continued to lead relays of actors on long tours mostly through Germany for about thirty years. In 1592 he gave performances at the court of Duke Henry Julius of Brunswick, a scholar and dramatist whose plays show the influence of Elizabethan drama. After staying at the Duke's residence at Wolfenbüttel until June 1592, Browne and his men went to perform at the autumn fair at Frankfurt am Main which had developed into the central European mart for the sale of cloth, wine, and many other articles, including books. The Frankfurt international fairs, held regularly in both spring and autumn, guaranteed appreciative and generous audiences so that they were visited by strolling players regularly for several decades.

The early performances of the English Comedians on the Continent were described by the Elizabethan traveller Fynes Moryson who watched both secular and religious productions by continental players in places as far apart as Leiden, Frankfurt, and Prague, comparing them to the visiting English professionals. He found the continental productions so 'dully penned, and worse acted' that 'when some of our cast [off] despised stage players came out of England into Germany, and played at Frankfurt in the time of the Mart, having neither a complete number of actors, nor any good apparel, nor any ornament of the stage, yet the Germans, not understanding a word

they said, both men and women, flocked wonderfully to see their gesture and action'. A similarly enthusiastic response was received by the English Comedians at Leiden where 'many young virgins', according to Moryson's gossiping anticipation of modern groupies, 'fell in love with some of the players, and followed them from city to city till the magistrates were forced to forbid them to play any more'.³

Although Moryson's comments appear harsh and puritanical, he was undoubtedly right in observing that the English Comedians impressed continental audiences not by the power of their words, which could not be understood, but by their physical action and additional jigs and the high jumps of the tumbler, accompanied by plenty of music. Gradually, however, the English companies also employed German and Dutch actors, becoming more and more international and playing more and more in German. They were also able to adapt themselves to the different religious creeds of their patrons, not excepting the Catholic faith of the Habsburgs.

The most important patron of Robert Browne and other English actors proved to be Maurice of Hesse, a learned Calvinist, who maintained acting troupes for long periods at his court in Kassel where he finally, in 1611, built a spacious theatre called the Ottoneum. Browne was in Kassel as early as 1594 or 1595. In 1596 the Landgrave wrote to his agent in Prague asking him to give assistance to his comedians in case of their visit to that city. Obviously, Browne and his men had to supplement the Landgrave's hospitality with further income gained by touring vast territories in and outside Germany, going as far as Prague and possibly even Gdańsk.

Apparently the most adventurous and adaptable of all the strollers who joined Robert Browne on the Continent was John Green. He had won a reputation for playing first virgins and wives and later on jolly clowns. It was probably thanks to him that the popular comic character called Pickleherring was introduced to the Continent. Green's name first emerged in Browne's company in 1603 in Lille, which was then within the Spanish Netherlands ruled by the Habsburgs. After performing with Browne in Ghent, Paris, Lille again, and Strasbourg, he separated from his master in Frankfurt in 1607 and struck out with his own group far into new territories in the east, as distant from each other as Gdańsk on the Baltic Sea and Graz in south Austria. According to indirect but convincing evidence, he was the principal actor of

*John
Green*

the company who performed at the Catholic court of the Styrian Habsburgs in Graz in 1608, as discussed above.

After an extended return to the Spanish Netherlands, Green's troupe made another long journey to Gdańsk in 1612 to play at the newly built wooden public arena, the so-called Fencing School. Gdańsk was a populous and wealthy international port and trade centre with arguably the largest English colony on the Continent. The erection of the spacious arena was an additional attraction for strolling players who visited it frequently for two or more weeks, with special attention to the traditional St Dominic Fair in August.

Thanks to the vision and initiative of the Polish scholar and writer Jerzy Limon of Gdańsk University, a new foundation has been formed, *Theatrum Gedanense*, whose goal it is to reconstruct a Shakespearean theatre on the historic site of the original playhouse. A special feature of the Gdańsk theatre will be its rectangular design, copied from an old engraving by a Dutch artist, Peter Willer, first printed in 1687.⁴ The original structure depicted by Willer, which differs from the round or polygonal shape of the Globe, was probably modelled on London's Fortune, the chief rival of Shakespeare's theatre from 1600 until 1621. Meanwhile, a fairly exact replica of the Globe itself—a simple but attractive wooden structure built by modern technology—has been opened in a large amusement park in Prague (on 21 July 1999) with a Czech version of *Romeo and Juliet*. The name of the new theatre, Globe '99, alludes to the fact that the original London Globe was opened exactly 400 years ago. Thus, following the lead of the new London Globe, there will be theatres in Slavonic Europe in which Shakespeare's plays can be staged in conditions similar to those in his own time.

In 1615 Green's company revisited Gdańsk from Wolfenbüttel and in 1616 they were back again, this time by sea from Denmark. Their usual petition asking the city authorities for permission to perform was signed, on behalf of all the group, by both John Green and a new actor. He was Robert Reynolds, Robert Browne's son-in-law, later to stand out as jester and leader of his own company. From Gdańsk, Green and Co. went to Warsaw but soon they undertook a long tour to other places, such as Olomouc (German Olmütz, in Moravia), Vienna, and Prague. In 1617 spectacular festivities took place in Prague, celebrating the proclamation of Ferdinand II of Styria as the future king of

Bohemia. The old and ailing Emperor Matthias came to Prague in person to persuade the predominantly-Protestant estates into accepting the Habsburg succession after his death.

As a relief from the tense political negotiations, a masque of great formality and scenic splendour was performed by the foremost Bohemian and Moravian noblemen dressed in highly mannerist costumes. The most spectacular feature was saved for the ending, when all the participants paid a solemn tribute to an allegorical female figure hovering high up in the clouds and representing the Habsburg House of Fame. Moreover, at least one English and one German professional company played during the festivities. According to the Emperor's register of expenses, John Green of London was paid 200 florins.

Despite all the glory and the power, the strictly Catholic and absolutist Habsburgs were growing increasingly unpopular in largely Protestant and Slavonic Bohemia, and in 1619, after the death of Emperor Matthias, the Bohemian estates refused Ferdinand II as king of Bohemia and elected instead Frederick, Elector Palatine of the Rhine, the leader of the Protestant Union. One of their political aims was to win the support of Great Britain, since Frederick was the husband of Elizabeth, daughter of James I. During their betrothal celebrations in London in 1613 a number of plays had been produced, almost half of them by Shakespeare. Therefore it is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that Frederick and Elizabeth, who were both patrons of London theatre companies, might have brought about an early flowering of genuine Shakespearean drama in East Central Europe.

At all events, they invited the most experienced and distinguished continental stroller Robert Browne to come to Prague during his fifth and last tour. When he started the tour in 1618, he was most probably well informed about the activities of other English strollers on the Continent, and some collaboration or even temporary fusion with them can be supposed. We know for certain that Robert Reynolds, who had been with Green at Gdańsk in 1616, played with his father-in-law Browne at Strasbourg and possibly also at Frankfurt in 1618. Some scholars have speculated that it was the combined Browne-Green concern which visited Rostock and Gdańsk in July 1619 before going to Prague.

Although no direct records of this visit have been preserved, we can assume that Browne's company came to celebrate the coronation of

Frederick and Elizabeth at Prague Castle in November 1619 and possibly also the birth of their son Rupert at the very end of the year. King James I, however, remained lukewarm in the Bohemian cause, although many of his subjects were in sympathy with it and some, from both England and Scotland, went to Bohemia as volunteers in the Protestant army, supported by the Water Poet John Taylor and his verses 'An Englishman's Love to Bohemia'.

But the defeat of the Protestants at the battle of White Mountain near Prague in November 1620 forced Frederick and his wife to take flight and thus for a long time to bury Czech hopes of an independent political, religious, and cultural life. While the royal couple were called the 'Winter King and Queen of Bohemia', in remembrance of their only Bohemian winter of 1619-20, the Czech lands were exposed to Counter-Reformation and Germanization by the victorious Habsburg Emperor and King Ferdinand II. In England, the Elector Palatine's or Palsgrave's Men were active from 1612 until 1625, and the Queen of Bohemia's Men (formerly Lady Elizabeth's Men) played at least until 1632. By that time, Elizabeth presided over her 'Court of Bohemia' in The Hague, where she and her husband found their final refuge.

Robert Browne's men returned from Prague via Nuremberg to Frankfurt in March 1620 for the Easter fair. They were first refused permission to perform because of 'the dangerous course of war events' but finally their supplication was granted in view of the 'always unobjectionable' behaviour of their master. This is the last but telling piece of information we have about Robert Browne on the Continent.

II

John Green seems to have taken his men home to England in 1620 but in 1624 he appeared again in Ghent and then at the court of the Elector of Saxony, John George I, in Dresden and Torgau in 1626-7. A thorough catalogue of plays has been preserved from Dresden, listing forty-two performances between 31 May and 4 December 1626. If we compare this catalogue to the older survey of Green's performances at Graz in 1608, we notice that eight titles are identical but many new items are added. The most remarkable among the new items are *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, *The Tragedy of*

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, *The Tragedy of Lear, King of England*, and again *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. These are the first recorded performances of *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* on the Continent. Two more of the listed items call for closer attention: *The Comedy of Joseph, the Jew of Venice*, which was probably based to some extent on *The Merchant of Venice*, and *The Tragicomedy of the Clever Thief*, which has been suspected of having some relation to the character of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*. The latter play was evidently most appealing, as it was performed three times during the Dresden festivities. The striking increase in Shakespearean repertoire can be best explained in connection with the publication of the First Folio in 1623, which made Shakespeare's plays easily available to all companies. This may be particularly the case with *Julius Caesar* and *The Winter's Tale*, which were published in the Folio for the first time and soon became very popular in Germany and East Central Europe.

From Dresden Green and his men took the risk of travelling to Nuremberg but were not permitted to perform there. Falling back on the route of their old master Browne they went on to Frankfurt, the strollers' paradise. There they received the badly needed permission to play during the autumn fair of 1627. As in the case of Browne, no more records have been discovered on Green after Frankfurt.

As the Thirty Years War was dragging on, those English actors who remained on the Continent were looking eastward for safer places. The most attractive refuge for them was offered by the royal court in Warsaw, where John Green's men had already performed in 1617 before going on the long tour to Prague. In the same year and again in 1618 Green's companion George Vincent was sent by the Prince of Poland, Vladislaus, to bring new supplies of performers and theatre materials directly from London, as attested by two passports granted to him by the Privy Council for his return to Poland. The most remarkable among the acquisitions was Richard Jones, a well-known London actor and a seasoned stroller who first visited the Continent with Browne as early as 1589. This time Jones evidently decided to settle in Warsaw for a longer stay because his wife joined him in 1618 with George Vincent's second expedition.

Since the King of Poland, Sigismund III, remained more or less neutral during the Central European war and his son and successor Vladislaus IV concluded a separate peace with Sweden in 1635, the

court in Warsaw acquired an unusual importance for all artists. Unfortunately, most of the archive materials in Warsaw were destroyed during the numerous wars that devastated the country, and the rest of the collection of old records was burned in an air raid in the Second World War. In spite of that, it is clear that English actors became permanently attached to the Warsaw royal court not only between 1616 and 1620 but also in the periods about 1628-32 and 1636-44, or even longer. In 1637 King Vladislaus IV opened a theatre hall within the royal castle, designed by the Italian architect Agostino Locci for productions of Italian operas. Here English Comedians found a technically developed stage and a new source of inspiration for their own performances to become more elaborate and visually impressive. They could make good use of the changeable scenery, illusionistic decorations, serious music, and complex machinery. Apart from finding refuge from the horrors of the Thirty Years War, they could experiment in new trends of European staging.

In comparison, similar attempts in England were hampered by the Civil War and the closing of public theatres by the Puritans in 1642. The royalist theatre manager William Davenant was imprisoned several times during the Commonwealth period, with the result that he could fully develop his activities only after the Stuart Restoration in 1660 when his adaptations of Shakespeare, operatic in scenery and neoclassicist in diction, were applauded by the London audiences, who were now smaller and less socially representative.

Besides the royal court in Warsaw and the city of Gdańsk, which belonged to the Polish crown as part of what was called Royal Prussia, the most appealing place for the English Comedians was Königsberg (now Kaliningrad), another Baltic sea-port and trade centre with a rich cultural and intellectual life. The University of Königsberg, founded in 1544, reached its highest reputation thanks to such professors as Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century or Alexander Schmidt, whose *Shakespeare-Lexicon*, published in 1874-5 and reprinted many times, has remained one of the most useful reference books for translators all over the world.

In Shakespeare's time, Königsberg was the capital of so-called Ducal Prussia (later known as East Prussia) which was ruled by the electors of Brandenburg, who belonged to the mighty Hohenzollern dynasty. That is why the 'dukes in Prussia', although they were vassals

of the kings of Poland, were able to maintain a good deal of independence. In 1525 Ducal Prussia became the first Lutheran state in Europe and in 1613 it was converted to Calvinism, in sharp contrast to the Catholic Vasas in Warsaw. Rather than in small and provincial Berlin, the electors of Brandenburg often preferred to reside at their impressive castle at Königsberg, where they could entertain their guests in the 'Old Great Hall', which was also used for musical and theatrical performances.

The most striking figure among the English Comedians patronized by the electors of Brandenburg was John Spencer, who headed his company from at least 1604, performing plays in Berlin, Königsberg, Gdańsk, Elbing, probably Warsaw, and many places in Germany and the Netherlands. He played for Protestant nobles and citizens, both Lutheran and Calvinist, as well as for Catholic audiences, including Emperor Matthias. He and his men had to turn their coats quickly not only in the theatre but also in real life. According to Catholic sources, Spencer, his wife and children, and all his actors were miraculously turned from Protestantism to their true mother the Catholic church by a Franciscan friar in Cologne in 1615. It is difficult to judge from this distance how far their conversion was sincere and durable. Spencer was active until about 1623 and became widely popular as a clown called Hans Leberwurst (i.e. Liverwurst) and later Hans Stockfish.

Several times he and his company visited Pomerania, a west Baltic region, which was (like Brandenburg) part of the Empire. It was ruled by the dynasty of the Greifens who were Slavonic in origin but Germanized through long political and personal relations with the Duchy of Brandenburg. One of the enlightened Greifens, Duke Philip Julius, paid two visits to London and in 1602 he attended several performances by both adult and boy actors. Back at home, he repeatedly invited strolling English Comedians to his court at Wolgast, recommending them for performances at other Pomeranian towns, especially Stettin (Polish Szczecin), the capital of East Pomerania. Besides John Spencer's men, whose longer visits to Pomerania can be traced from 1606, it was Richard Jones and his companions who found employment, after their four-year service at the royal court in Warsaw (1617-20), at the ducal court at Wolgast in 1622 and possibly again in 1624.

The first collection of the English Comedians' plays published in Germany in 1620 and again in 1624 probably also came from Pomerania. It was entitled *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien* and its German is clearly tinged with Low German dialect interspersed with many Anglicisms. The editorship of the plays was claimed by Friedrich Menius, a practising lawyer in Wolgast, who probably attended the performances of the English players at the court of Duke Philip Julius, noting and memorizing the text and reconstructing the plays on the basis of his notes. He may also have procured some texts from the English Comedians themselves, especially from those who were preparing to return to England as the continental war was breaking out.

Highly interesting and amusing as these German prose versions are, from both the linguistic and the theatrical point of view, they are a far cry from the English originals, as far as we know them. They give us a good idea of how drastically the English plays were garbled in the process of adaptation to the particular demands of continental audiences. Out of the eight plays and seven farces and jigs printed in this collection, two are related to Shakespeare. *Julio and Hippolita* echoes the name of Shakespeare's Queen of the Amazons from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the title heroine, but the action reveals more resemblance to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Closer to Shakespeare is *The Most Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*, and it is certainly significant that the only preserved copy of the First Quarto of Shakespeare's tragedy, printed in 1594, was discovered in 1904 as far away as Sweden, very close to Pomerania. Another surprising discovery in those far-off regions was the seventh extant copy of the Second Quarto of *Hamlet* (dated 1605) which was unearthed in 1950 in the University Library of Wrocław (German Breslau), the capital of Silesia.

When the peace treaty between Poland and Sweden was signed in 1635, ending the war that started in 1626, exceptionally favourable conditions were offered to English Comedians by the Polish Kingdom and the Duchy of Prussia until about 1655, when a new war, known in Poland as the Swedish 'Deluge', broke out. Between 1636 and 1644 in particular the cultural triangle Warsaw-Gdańsk-Königsberg was highly frequented. At least two actor-managers active there at that time deserve special mention: Robert Archer who, according to his own statement, served the King of Poland 'for many years', and Robert Reynolds. The latter was, as mentioned above, the son-in-law of

Robert Browne, an associate of John Green, and leader of the Elector of Saxony's players in the late 1620s. He built up his reputation as a widely popular comedian playing the part of Pickleherring.

According to the lively account of another English traveller, Peter Mundy, who visited Denmark, Russia, and Prussia in the years 1639-48 and stopped at Gdańsk in 1642, Reynolds's Pickleherring was much talked of and admired because he 'could so Frame his Face and countenance that to one half of the people on the one side he would seem heartily to laugh and to those on the other side bitterly to weep and shed tears'.⁵ Mundy has also preserved the valuable information that Reynolds died in Warsaw shortly after 1640 and his wife was awarded an 'allowance' by the Polish King for her 'maintenance' in the city of Gdańsk. The support of the Polish royal court for English Comedians was so renowned that they sometimes introduced themselves, when they went on tours through Germany, as the Polish Comedians. More popularly, they advertised themselves as 'Pickleherring's company'.

III

Since Pickleherring became so exceptionally popular, a brief enquiry into his origin and development seems to be pertinent. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* 'Pickle-herring' is defined (under 2) as 'A clown, a buffoon, a merry-andrew' with the addition that this application originated in German and not in English as Grimm's Dictionary had stated. Another etymological explanation, shared by Joseph Addison, supposed that Pickleherring was first a Dutch comic character. This view seems to be supported by art historians who have observed that in some Flemish illuminated manuscripts of the fifteenth century a herring was placed over the Fool's cap as an emblem of folly. More substantial evidence, however, can be found in the English medieval Sword Play preserved at Revesby, in which the Fool and his 'first son' Pickle Herring are the chief leaders of all the dancing, singing, jumping, and playing with swords.⁶

Recent research tends to confirm that the name and the fame of Pickleherring were spread by the English Comedians, especially John Green, George Vincent, and Robert Reynolds. In print, Pickleherring appeared quite prominently on the extensive title-page of the *Engelische*

Comedien und Tragedien of 1620 which introduced him among the chief characters and presented him as the protagonist of two of the additional farces and jigs. In one of them, entitled *A Merry Pickleherring Play about Beautiful Maria and Old Henry*, the title heroine lived in Gdańsk at the 'Long Market', which can still be visited today in the Old Town of the city.

Such topical allusions were abundant in ballads and broadsides about Pickleherring and his adventures in East Central Europe. A broadside published in 1621 is adorned with a striking engraving of Pickleherring wearing a long doublet with big buttons, loose hose, large boots that could be kicked at his adversary, and a smart cap decorated with a fox brush as a sign of his cunning. His face, embellished with a bristling moustache, is half in bright light and half in darkness. Over his shoulder he is carrying a huge pedlar's pack overloaded with broad axes, while more axes are lying on the ground or resting in his arms, including one that is almost as big as himself. In the accompanying text Pickleherring explains that he has given up acting to become an ironmonger and now he is hurrying to Prague to sell his broad axes to the Bohemian heretics and iconoclasts. It is remarkable how quickly the Catholic propagandists appropriated Pickleherring for their satirical attacks against the image-breaking zeal of the defeated Protestants, as soon as the Calvinist Winter King was obliged to leave Bohemia to its fate.

In Elizabethan England, pickleherring-Picleherring seems to have been a common fare both in real life and on the stage. The notoriously dissolute writer Robert Greene was rumoured to have died after a meal in which he had overindulged in wine and pickled herring. Similarly, the brilliant stylist Thomas Nashe was commiserated with for having 'shortened his days by keeping company with pickle herrings'. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* Peter Pickle-herring is identified as one of the godfathers of Gluttony. Shakespeare's Sir Toby Belch wishes a plague upon 'pickle herring' that make him belch in the morning (*Twelfth Night*, 1.5.116-17). It may be significant that Sir Toby's curse comes exactly at the moment when the clown Feste first appears in the play. Later on (3.1.32-3), Feste jokes that 'fools are as like husbands as pilchards are to herrings' (in A. Schmidt's *Shakespeare-Lexicon* Pilcher=pilchard is defined as 'a fish of the genus Clupea, much resembling the herring'). These puzzling allusions in *Twelfth*

Night seem to hint at some connection between 'pickle herring' and the fool, between the 'corrupter of words' Feste and Pickleherring who, in the performances of the English Comedians, was twisting words in both English and German.

Perhaps the most remarkable parallel to the Pickleherring of the English Comedians can be seen in the Bohemian rogue Autolycus, Shakespeare's most original creation in *The Winter's Tale*, where the tide of the romance turns from the obsessed violence of the Sicilian court to the entirely fictitious sea-coast and countryside of pastoral Bohemia. From his first entrance (4.3), Autolycus, more frequently than Feste, arrests the attention of the audience by his songs, as did Pickleherring on the Continent, the more so that the other English players could not be understood by foreign audiences.

From the time of the early tours of the English Comedians the clown, who was expected to learn foreign languages quickly, formed the chief link between the actors and the spectators, introducing other characters and commenting on the action. It is certainly interesting that in the new Oxford edition of *The Winter's Tale* Autolycus' essential function is also described as bridging 'the gap between stage and audience'. To strengthen the bridge and get the laughs and applause of the spectators both Autolycus and Pickleherring, like other clowns, used asides and, even more frequently, bawdy and body language, full of sexual allusions. We hear from the joking servant that Autolycus' songs fit both men and women of all sizes and that 'the prettiest love songs for maids' are 'without bawdry', which is strange because they include such burdens as 'jump her and thump her'. The Bohemian princely shepherdess Perdita can see through all this farcical nonsense and asks the servant bluntly to forewarn Autolycus 'that he use no scurrilous words in's tunes' (4.4.214-15). It is worth remembering that about the same time the young Austrian Archduchess Maria Magdalena found the English Comedians in Graz perfectly decent, evidently to counterbalance moralistic complaints about their obscenity.

In his opening song, Autolycus enthuses over 'a quart of ale' as 'a dish for a king', displaying the most pronounced feature of Pickleherring: his obsession with food and drink. Revealing his own *curriculum vitae* (4.3.85-98), Autolycus states that, among many other employments and activities, he went about with the puppet show of the Prodigal Son. This reminds us of the continental comedians' repertory

in which the biblical play of the same title was used to win the favour of devout patrons. When Autolycus re-enters (4.4.218) wearing a false beard as his 'pedlar's excrement' and carrying his pedlar's pack, he calls forth the image of the mustachioed and overloaded Pickleherring hurrying to Bohemia with his hardware of axes, sharply different from Autolycus' software of sheets, ribbons, laces, and gloves. Advertising one of his sensational printed ballads as being 'very true, and but a month old', Autolycus resembles Pickleherring involved in the most topical religious and political events of the day.

Finally the dance of the twelve 'men of hair' who are both 'saltiers' (i.e. leapers) and satyrs (*The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.324-40) is reminiscent of the exploits of the English tumbler or leaper who became a great favourite with the merry wives and virgins of Frankfurt, as described in a racy German poem printed in 1597:

The tumbler also did us please,
He sprang high in the air with ease.
In dancing he had not a peer,
A joy it was to see him near.
His hose they fitted him so tight,
His codpiece was a lovely sight.
Nubite maids and lecherous dames
He kindled into lustful flames.⁸

All this persuades me to see *The Winter's Tale*, and especially Autolycus, as an illuminating parallel to the ways used by English Comedians in applying their native traditions and patterns of comic acting to their productions on the Continent. By an uncanny historical coincidence it was this Sicilian-Bohemian romance which was selected as one of the fourteen plays to be performed for King James's daughter Elizabeth and her fiancé the Elector Palatine during the two months of celebrations preceding their London marriage in 1613. By that time rumours were circulating at the royal court about the bridegroom's expectations of being crowned King of Bohemia within a few years.

Sometimes individual scenes were picked up from all over Shakespeare and adapted for Pickleherring farces or inserted into other plays to which Pickleherring was added. Autolycus' tricks can serve again as an example, as his knack for picking the pockets of credulous Bohemian rustics was freely imitated. The demand of continental audiences

for Pickleherring was so insatiable that he had to be introduced even into tragedies. This, of course, did not go against the grain of Elizabethan and Shakespearian drama. The difference was not so much in quantity as in quality: Shakespeare's Fool in *King Lear* easily surpasses all continental Pickleherrings by the subtlety of his wit and the significance of the role he plays in the structure of the tragedy.

Perhaps the best example of Pickleherring's extended role is the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* which was first performed on the Continent, as far as we know, in 1604, and survived to score a great success after the Thirty Years War. As soon as the Peace of Westphalia was finally signed in 1648, English Comedians started to revisit their favourite haunts in Germany and East Central Europe with added vigour, the more so as the revolutionary Parliament in London passed a harsh order in February 1648, branding stage players as rogues punishable by fines, imprisonment, and public flogging. Frequent visits of English Comedians in the post-war period are recorded in Vienna, Prague, and Gdańsk. Some new places are also added to their routes, such as Innsbruck (west Austria) and Bratislava (the present capital of Slovakia). When *Romeo and Juliet* was performed in Prague in 1658 at a high-society banquet, it prompted a curious yet typical note in the diary of the Archbishop of Prague. Leaving aside the star-crossed lovers, he singled out for his praise Pickleherring, 'who was very good and funny'.⁹

The Court Library of Vienna holds a manuscript of a German version of *Romeo and Juliet* dating from the second half of the seventeenth century and bearing unmistakable allusions to a number of towns in south Bohemia and north Austria.¹⁰ The most conspicuous features of the play, however, are the general deterioration of language, crammed with obscenities and banal clichés, as well as the special stress laid on the horrors of war. Instead of Shakespeare's Prologue and the scuffling scene between the servants of the Capulets and the Montagues, a formal opening is provided for with the Prince condemning 'war and devastation', when 'one race is destroying the other' and common people are 'bleeding from the heavy yoke' of the enmity. Immediately, peace is concluded with great pomp and highfalutin speeches from Mundiage (Montague) and the Prince. Starting where Shakespeare ends, the German version never gains the growing tension of Shakespeare's tragedy. Nor does it capture Romeo's and

Juliet's growth in individuality and the intensity and passion of their love.

Easily the liveliest but also the crudest scenes are dominated by Pickleherring, who is developed from the minor part of Shakespeare's clownish servant Peter and also steals some saucy bits from the Nurse. When Juliet is advised by the Nurse to 'leave perjured Romeo' and take Count Paris for her husband, Pickleherring prods the young heroine to have them both and, moreover, take himself for her bridegroom, too: 'Has not the Turkish Emperor more wives than one can count? Why should it not be permitted to take 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10 wives or husbands? I should not have far to go if in Kollschin, Budweiss, Gopplitz, Freystradt, Linz, and in this town I would find out husbands or wives who desire, nay who have, more than one wife or husband.'

Pickleherring cracks jokes over the very corpses of Tybalt, whom he calls 'a parcel of snot... bleeding like a pig', and of Juliet, who is 'stretched out like a log' and appears to him 'as stiff as a frozen stockfish'. The ending of the German adaptation is highly didactic and religious: Capulet and the Friar warn against the imprudence of youth and the destructiveness of love, while the Prince offers consolation in faith in an afterlife.

What Heaven may take here, again can Heaven give,
We must remember that we shall for ever live.

Pickleherring's all-pervasive popularity can be finally confirmed by further pictorial evidence. In a Silesian edition of the widely disseminated language textbook *Orbis sensualium pictus* (1667) by the Moravian humanist and educational reformer J. A. Comenius, an engraving of a stage performance shows Pickleherring strutting and dramatically gesticulating at other characters in the reconciliation scene of *The Prodigal Son*. Comenius had to leave Bohemia after the defeat of the Protestants and live in exile, residing in England in 1641-2. He was not only the first to use pictures systematically in the teaching of languages but conceived of the whole educational process as a play inspiring pupils to creative participation, as in his cycle of school dramas entitled *Schola ludus*, first published in Hungary (1656) and in Amsterdam (1657).

The painted backcloth and wings as well as the baroque curtain represented in the Silesian engraving remind us that the continental

stages were progressing, under the influence of court masques, Italian opera, and French pastorals, towards more and more elaborate sets. The most energetic exponent of the new trends in continental staging in the period about 1646-60 was George Jolly (alias Joris Jolliphus), one of the last major English Comedians. Jolly is well known in the annals of English theatre as a dangerous rival of Sir William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew, the two Restoration courtiers who tried hard to assert their theatrical monopoly after 1660. Before that Jolly had become so successful on the Continent that in 1654 he could advertise his performances as offering 'good instructive stories... repeated changes of expensive costumes, and a theatre decorated in the Italian manner, with beautiful English music and skilful women'.¹¹

As far as we know, Jolly was the first of the English actor-managers to bring women upon the boards. Although he was, according to available evidence, a violent, rapacious, and unscrupulous manager, ready to use his fists in asserting his authority or discouraging competition, he has been acknowledged as 'the first English producer to use the modern stage'. His greatest successes on the Continent were scored in Frankfurt, where his performances were visited by Charles II with his exiled courtiers in 1655. This gave Master Jolly and his company the opportunity to style themselves 'The King's Servants'. They also played during the coronation of Emperor Leopold I at Frankfurt in 1658, embellishing their repertory with the evergreen *Prodigal Son*.

Given Jolly's adventurous spirit, it is not surprising to find his company, sometimes fused with some other strolling group, visiting such far-off and dispersed places as Gdańsk, Stockholm, Vienna, Nuremberg, Basle, and Cologne. His performances in 1659 shocked the traditionally conservative Viennese public by being 'spiced with the most scandalous obscenities'. At the beginning of 1660 he was expelled from Nuremberg because of a violent quarrel. All this must have prompted Master Jolly to think of returning home to cash in on his acquaintance with King Charles II whose restoration was in the air as much on the continent as in England.

The early reception of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists in East Central Europe proved that their plays were unusually adaptable to any geographical location, staging condition, social milieu, and religio-political situation. The high professional standard of the

English Comedians was appreciated, with predictable exceptions, at the imperial, royal, and ducal courts in Vienna, Graz, Prague, Warsaw, or Königsberg, at the international fairs of thriving commercial centres such as Gdańsk, and at many other larger or smaller towns in Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Silesia, Poland, Prussia, Pomerania, or Livonia. The popularity of the comic characters, particularly Pickle-herring, was so great that they were incorporated not only into many comedies but also into tragedies and, in special adaptations, into puppet shows. There is a record of 'merry English figures' shown in Prague in 1666-7. Such puppet shows also continued to attract popular audiences much further east down to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For instance, a puppet play about Doctor Faustus was performed in Moscow in 1761. In short, the impact of the English Comedians in Central and Eastern Europe was very strong and lasting, inspiring the development of the native theatre in its entire artistic and social gamut reaching from the grass roots of popular theatricals up to the royal and imperial courts.

FURTHER READING

A basic book is Albert Cohn's *Shakespeare in Germany in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1865, repr. Wiesbaden, 1967). The subtitle gives a succinct description of the contents: *An Account of English Actors in Germany and the Netherlands and of the Plays Performed by Them during the Same Period*; in addition, German adaptations of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are presented both in the original and in English translations. Five early German Shakespearean adaptations translated into English are introduced and edited by Ernest Brennecke, *Shakespeare in Germany, 1590-1700* (Chicago, 1964); besides the adaptations of *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* very free offshoots of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Twelfth Night* are included. E. K. Chambers's *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923) has a chapter on 'International Companies' with a sub-chapter on 'English Players on the Continent' in vol. ii. Chambers's work was continued by G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1941-68) and Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928). Some of Cohn's and Chambers's errors were corrected and new facts were presented by Willem Schrickx in two articles in *Shakespeare Survey*, 33 (1980) and 36 (1983). The latter essay supplies valuable information about Pickleherring. New documents about the English

Comedians in Poland and the whole Baltic area were published and discussed in a broad context by Jerzy Limon, *Gentlemen of a Company: English Players in Central and Eastern Europe, 1590-1660* (Cambridge, 1985). Current English scholarship is represented by Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1996). Recent American research is presented by Simon Williams in his illustrated *Shakespeare on the German Stage, 1586-1914* (Cambridge, 1990). A number of books on the subject have been written in German. Even those who do not read German can have a look at Emil Herz, *Englische Schauspieler und englisches Schauspiel zur Zeit Shakespeares in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1903) because it contains five maps showing the routes of different companies of English strollers all over Europe.