



**Irene R. Makaryk and Marissa McHugh, ed. *Shakespeare and the Second World War: Memory, Culture, Identity*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2012.**

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All through the ages, Shakespeare's literary oeuvre has occupied a canonical status in world literature, primarily because of its universal relevance in terms of thematic preoccupation, characterization, and setting amongst several literary components. Though widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist, Shakespeare has been translated into every major living language and is performed more often than any other playwright. His

dramatic works have been repeatedly adapted and rediscovered by new movements or perspectives in scholarship and performance. Even now, his plays remain highly popular and are constantly studied, performed and reinterpreted in various social, cultural and political contexts throughout the globe. One of these contexts is the Second World War. Regarded as the longest, bloodiest and deadliest conflict in history, World War II was fought predominantly in Europe and across the Pacific and Eastern Asia, pitting the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and Japan against the Allied nations of Great Britain, France, China, United States and the Soviet Union. It is the most widespread war in history with more than one hundred million people serving in military units from over thirty different countries, and death tolls estimated to be between fifty and eighty-five million fatalities. Despite the fact that theatre stands as a “simulacrum of the cultural and historical process itself, seeking to depict the full range of human actions within their physical context, has always provided society with the most tangible records of its attempts to understand its own records” (3), the role of Shakespeare during the Second World War had not yet been given sustained, critical and detailed scholastic documentation. Herein lies the relevance and necessity of *Shakespeare and the Second World War* – as a writers’ quota to fill the scholastic lacuna. Most of the war’s belligerents showed affinity with Shakespearean works as a depiction of their society’s self-image. Divided into fifteen illuminating, diverse, and yet coherent essays by seasoned and erudite academics, *Shakespeare and the Second World War* is a small sampling of reviewed and extended essays from “Wartime Shakespeare in a Global Context/*Shakespeare au temps de la guerre*” – an international bilingual conference that took place at the University of Ottawa in 2009. Within the spatial and temporal context of the war, Shakespeare’s oeuvre is recycled, reviewed and reinterpreted in the chapters. In a Manichean manner, these essays cannot be collectively pigeonholed as either pro or anti-war. In fact, there is a sort of ambivalence with vacillating opinions by the writers.

Irena Makaryk’s “Theatre, War, Memory and Culture” serves as the introduction to the book. In this explorative piece, Makaryk gives an eagle-eyed and lucid summary of all the essays in the book. Since the Nazi regime saw the theatre as a channel of political brainwashing and propaganda with a narcissistic outlook, Werner Habicht’s essay “German Shakespeare, The Third Reich and the War” analyzes the vacillating

reception of Shakespeare throughout the war by the Nazis. This is without prejudice to the fact that Shakespeare had been already ensconced in the German literary curriculum but was later seen in a skeptical manner (as a foe) during the war. Habicht further gives instances of the fluctuating acceptance of Shakespeare especially when it is not in consonance with demands of official ideology. Zeno Ackermann's "Shakespearean Negotiation in Perpetrator Society: German Productions of *The Merchant of Venice* during the Second World War" delves into the controversial Shakespearean play within the context of the Holocaust. Because the Nazi regime used the play as a tool for racial propaganda, depicting Shakespeare as a Jew hater, there have been arguments and counter-arguments with every production of the "vexed" play. The essay rests on the tripod questions of the reception of *The Merchant of Venice* as it relates to the Nazis' anti-Semitism and the Holocaust; any change in the acceptance of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1933 when the National Socialist Party came into power; and how much "angst" the Shakespearean character of a Jewish avenger exudes in the apostles of anti-Semitism. In his explication of the issue at hand, Ackermann explores how *The Merchant of Venice* became a "problem play" from the perspective of its contradictory stance to Zionism. The essay ends with how a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* depicts dual but binary functions of encouragement and resistance. Mark Bayer's "Shylock, Palestine and the Second World War" specifically focuses on Shylock from an avant-garde perspective. The writer views the play, again *The Merchant of Venice* as a signification of Zionist cause cum the aptness of violence against non-Jews. Within the context of the Israeli (Zionist) and Arabic conundrum, this essay analyzes the semantic implication of the play. Consequently, *The Merchant of Venice* was used as a Zionist propagandist tool and a metaphor for miserable Jews who held their Christian foe in total contempt. Using Ali Ahmed Bakathir's Arabic adaptation of the play, *The New Shylock* (1945), Bayer infers that the Old Shylock predicts the New Shylock who demanded more than a pound of flesh. The demand of the pound of flesh in Bakathir story is deconstructed as a case of sovereignty over Palestine. In Nancy Isenberg essay "Caesar's Word Against the World: Mussolini's Caesarism and Discourses of Empire," Mussolini's use of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as a pattern of governance constitutes the thematic thrust. During the war, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was used to propagate fascist beliefs and as a result coalesced support for the fascist government. In collaboration with Givacchino Forzano, Mussolini adapted the play to depict his

administration as one that was sent to preserve the nation from degeneration. Tina Krontiris's essay "Shakespeare and Censorship During the Second World War: *Othello* in Occupied Greece" comes next. In the essay, the writer expatiates on the state of censorship of all intellectual and cultural engagements in Greece and *ipso facto*, how theatre was affected. Despite the fact that Shakespeare was not allowed at the National Theatre of Greece, private theatres covertly staged his plays. An instance is the case of *Othello*, which was staged in one of these theatres but the eponymous character was deliberately cast in a different manner when compared to that of Shakespeare. The writer resolves that this was a counter-racist portrayal of Othello especially within the German occupied territory.

Krystyna Courtney's "'In This Hour of History, Amidst These Tragic Events:' Polish Shakespeare During the Second World War" centres on Shakespeare in wartime Poland, a nation caught in the web of Nazi and Soviet domination. Since the intention of the Nazis was to completely obliterate the culture of the Slavs, intellectual activities including theatre, and literary and scholarly publications were censored. Despite the clampdown, Shakespeare was still being performed, especially in Warsaw and Krakow. In a related manner, Shakespeare was not censored in Jewish ghettos, leading to the adaptation of *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* was used to boost the morale of the soldiers. Boris Pasternak's translation of Shakespeare forms the kernel of Aleksei Semenenko's essay "Pasternak's Shakespeare in Wartime Russia." Using *Hamlet* as a lodestar, the essay tries to situate the cultural, artistic, and political settings of Pasternak's translation with the tripartite criteria of the "Pasternak translation in the context of war during the Stalinist period; Pasternak's ethos as a translator and his understanding of Shakespeare in the context of his historiosophy and the deliberate incorporation of Shakespeare" (143). Semenenko further shows how the figure of Stalin was illuminated by Shakespeare during and after the war. While Ryuta Minami's "Shakespeare as an Icon of the Enemy Culture: Wartime Japan, 1937-1945" examines how Shakespeare was used as a representation of the enemy culture and an object of desire in wartime Japan. Alexander C.Y Huang's "Warlike Noises: Jingoistic *Hamlet* during the Sino-Japanese Wars" observes how Shakespeare became a tool of political propaganda during Japan's threatened invasion of China. In the latter essay, the writer shows how special recognition was given to Jian Juyin's 1942 production of *Hamlet* in a Confucian temple.

In "Shakespeare's Stratford and the Second World War," Simon Baker explores the sustained efforts of Stratford-Upon-Avon in keeping Shakespeare alive during wartime. After a careful list of staged plays at the Memorial Theatre in Stratford, the writer asseverates on how war totally changed the relationship between Stratford and Shakespeare.

The next essay – Peter Billingham's "Rosalinds, Violas and Other Sentimental Friendships: The Osiris Players and Shakespeare, 1939-45" – centres on the Osiris Players group, giving attention to its origin, ideals, belief and challenges. Performing Shakespeare in such a tortuous war period, the Osiris Players are placed within a wider context of touring theatre in Britain. Using the then popular production of *Hamlet* (1944), Anne Russell's "Maurice Evan's 'G.I. *Hamlet*:' Analogy, Authority and Adaptation" examines how Evans modified the Shakespearean play so as to help more enlisted men associate with the eponymous character. Despite the re-modification, Russell further submits that the "adapted *Hamlet* revealed that the genre of tragedy is difficult to digest in war time and is particularly resistant to explicit ideological issues" (14). Marissa McHugh's "The War at 'Home:' Representations of Canada and of World War II in *Star Crossed*" is a dissection of the act of warfare on domestic and personal levels. *Star Crossed* – an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* – was set in Holland which was then occupied by the Germans. However, the two lovers' deaths did not create social unity as seen in *Romeo and Juliet*. Written in a personal and first person narrative technique, Tibor Egervari's "Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in Auschwitz" describes a playwright's and theater director's experience in adapting the Shakespearean play for a performance first seen in 1977. Staging that play was meant to show what Shylock is and should have been; redefining the character of Shylock constitutes the fulcrum of the play in Auschwitz. As the last of all the essays, Katarzyna Kwapisz William's "Appropriating Shakespeare in Defeat: *Hamlet* and the Contemporary Polish Vision of War" analyzes the reenactment of the 1944 tragic Warsaw uprising within the context of Shakespeare. Passini's *Hamlet 44* – a 2008 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* becomes the object of analysis. Delving into the success and otherwise of the adapted play, the writer submits that the reenactment makes the war not "to become a lost memory, that the nationally vital cultural themes such as heroic war are not melted into the anonymous mass of unrecognizable culture" (301).

Devoid of cant and highfalutin diction, there is hardly a case of typographical error. This is a product of conscientious and painstaking proofreading, especially on the part of the editors. The avalanche of pictorial illustrations and the infusion of necessary facts are signposts of the verisimilitude and aesthetic quality of the book. In the same realistic manner, *Shakespeare and the Second World War* contains a list of all productions of Shakespeare during the wartime. Being one of those rare books that merges both literature and history in equal proportion, *Shakespeare and the Second World War* is a rich mine of information to scholars, writers, historians, literary aficionados, and all general lovers of knowledge.

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