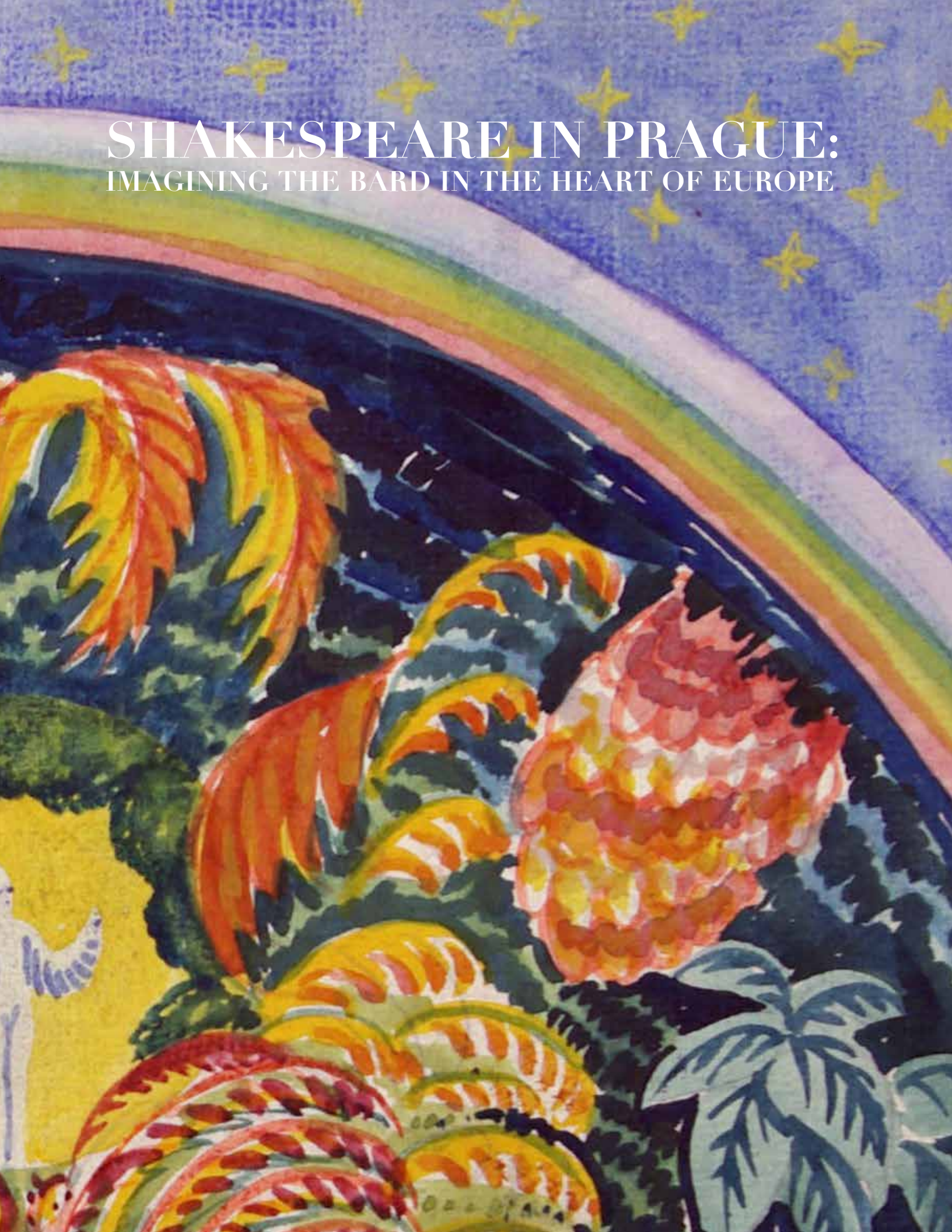
SHAKESPEARE IN PRAGUE:
IMAGINING THE BARD IN THE HEART OF EUROPE



SHAKESPEARE IN PRAGUE: IMAGINING THE BARD IN THE HEART OF EUROPE

A collaborative exhibition presented by:

Columbus Museum of Art

The Ohio State University's College of Arts and Sciences Arts Initiative

Arts and Theatre Institute, Prague, Czech Republic

National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic.

Cover image: Vlastislav Hofman, stage design for the production of *The Tempest,* (detail), 1920. Watercolor, 13 3/4 x 15 1/4 in. (35.1 x 38.8 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Left image: Vlastislav Hofman, stage design for the production of *The Tempest,* (detail), 1920. Watercolor, 14 3/4 x 17 in. (37.4 x 43.2 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

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Guest Curator: Joe Brandesky
Historical Collection Curator: Vlasta Koubská
Contemporary Collection Curator: Barbora Příhodová

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INTRODUCTION

Joe Brandesky, PhD
The Martha W. Farmer Endowed Professor of Theatre
The Ohio State University at Lima

The plays and poetry of William Shakespeare have inspired artists and audiences around the world. That does not seem radical in the globalized world of the present, but how and why does Shakespeare resonate so clearly with non-English speakers in central Europe, or, for that matter, the rest of the world? One hears these audiences discussing the sometimes wholesale reworking of Shakespeare's plays with the remark "what have they done to 'our' Shakespeare." So, which key elements have contributed to the popularity of Shakespeare's plays? Undoubtedly, the yearnings, strengths, weaknesses, heroism, and foibles contained in the plays are not unique to one linguistic tribe of humankind. These qualities, and more, added to the situations faced by Shakespeare's protagonists and antagonists in his comedies, tragedies, and histories, embody universal aspects of humanity, irrespective of specifically native concerns. But the uses for which the Bard's plays were employed in central Europe during the turbulent twentieth century, particularly in terms of political and social commentary, are what stands out in this exhibition. The visual examples of Czech, Moravian, and Slovakian approaches to staging Shakespeare over the last one hundred years reflect, in fact, a brief history of the region combined with representative responses to the most important artistic movements on the continent over that span of time. A succinct review of the history and geography of the region serves to contextualize the visual innovations of the designers featured in this exhibition.

The part of central Europe under consideration here is the Czech Republic (comprised of Bohemia, Moravia, and a portion of Silesia) and Slovakia. As a point of reference, Prague is farther west and north of Vienna. Bratislava, Slovakia, and Brno, Moravia, are a short train ride east and north, respectively, from Vienna. The area has always been a crossroad for nations, beginning with Paleolithic peoples, Celtic tribes (the Romans called those in present-day Czech Republic the *boii,* from which Bohemia derives), Germanic and Hunnic peoples, and many others.

Political, economic, and military prominence came to the Kingdom of Bohemia with the ascension of Bohemian-born Charles IV (1316–1378) to Holy Roman Emperor. He made Prague his capital city and made many improvements, not the least of which was the stone bridge across the Vltava River that bears his name to this day. It is said that during his reign, Bohemia was the most powerful state in Europe. The next generation witnessed the rise of the Reformation in Bohemia through the writings and teachings of Jan Hus (1369–1415). Influenced by the English theologian John Wycliffe, Hus was burned at the stake by the Catholic church in Constance in 1415, thus creating a national figure whose significance is still marked by a national holiday in the Czech Republic. The tumultuous conflicts between Protestants and Catholics that marked this era illustrate an aspect of the long-standing antipathies that divided the antagonists: German/Catholic and Czech/Protestant.

Alexandr Vladimir Hrska, stage design for the production of *As You Like It* (detail), 1923. Color chalks, partly complemented with tempera, 12 5/8 x 19 1/2 in. (32.7 x 49.5 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

During the sixteenth century, England shared religious sympathies with Bohemia and found a relatively tolerant ruler in the second Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf II (1576–1611), who used Prague as his capital. Rudolf II was deeply eccentric and devoted to developments in the arts and sciences. Among the colorful individuals invited to his court were John Dee and his assistant, Edward Kelly, in 1584. Dee, a famous astrologist, alchemist, and magician, was rumored to have been sent as a spy by none other than Elizabeth I. Direct connections between England and Bohemia led to the first performances of Shakespeare's works in the Czech lands—a tradition that remains vital to this day.

The essays in this volume examine specific aspects of the tradition of Shakespeare in the heart of Europe. The first, "Shakespeare in the Czech Lands" by Pavel Drábek, notes that English traveling actors toured continental Europe, visiting Prague in 1602 and Bratislava in 1618. The history of Shakespeare's texts in central Europe is explored from the seventeenth century through their appropriation by proponents of the Czech and Slovak National Revival movement (c. 1848–1918). Drábek explains the ways Shakespeare was used to represent the wishes, hopes, and aspirations of a group of people without a home until the creation of Czechoslovakia after the Treaty of Versailles.

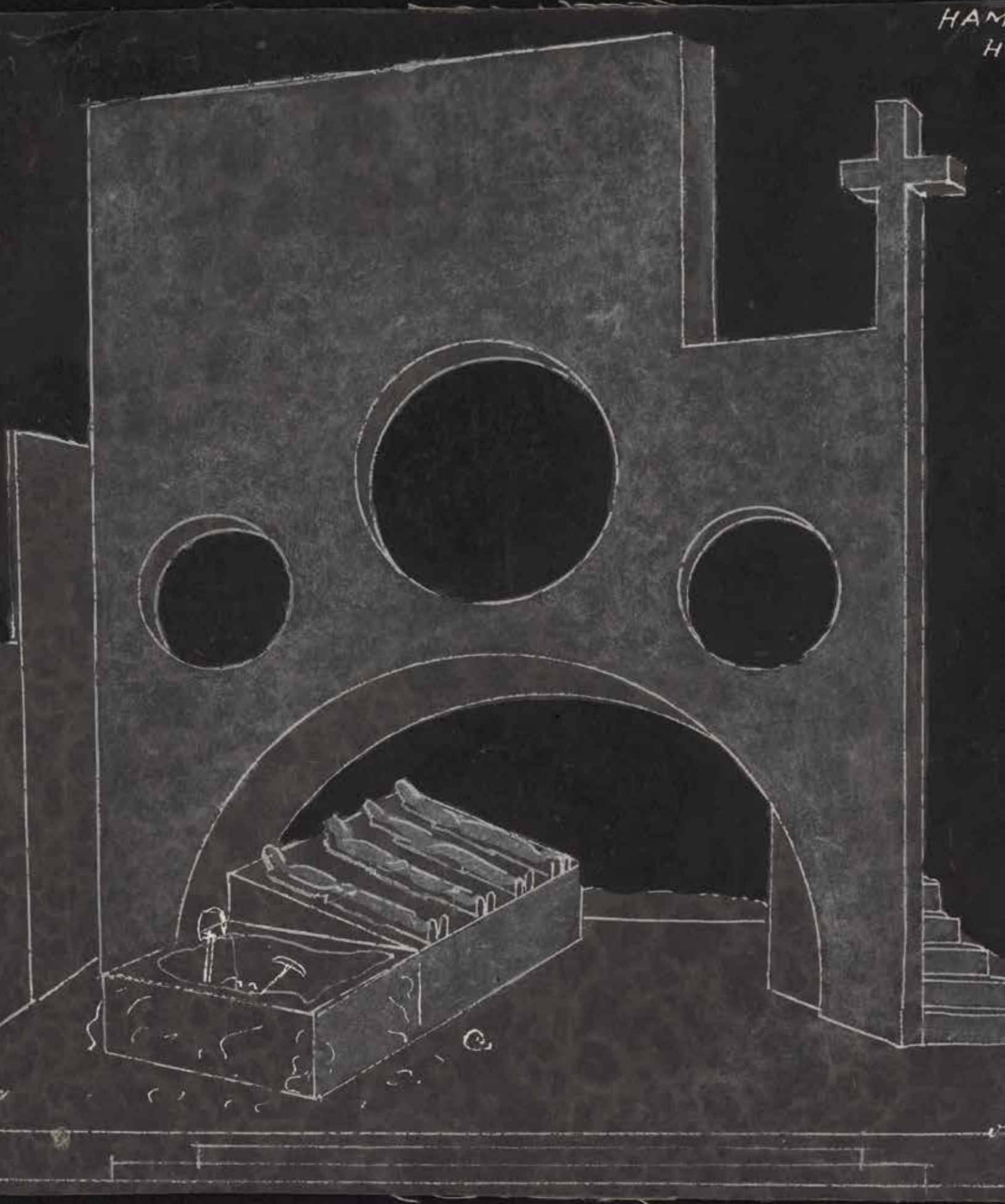
The First Republic (1918–38) of Czechoslovakia witnessed the wholesale integration of Czechs and Slovaks into European culture. Vlasta Koubská enumerates the flow of avant-garde artistic tendencies in the design work of three Czech designers (all with the first name František, meaning Francis) of the period: Zelenka, Tröster, and Muzika. Two of the three designers used Shakespeare productions to comment on the tyranny and injustice of the war years: Zelenka in *Richard III* (designed in the Terezín ghetto in 1943) and Tröster in *Julius Caesar* (1936). Muzika's designs display the hallmarks of surrealism used in the service of stage design. His production of *The Tempest* (1941) includes the ever present profile of Ariel designed into the setting. The essay also refers to a specifically Czech adaptation of art movements called poetism. Derek Sayer helps define poetism in his book *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century—A Surrealist History* by quoting artist/theoretician Karel Teige from his 1924 "Poetismus":

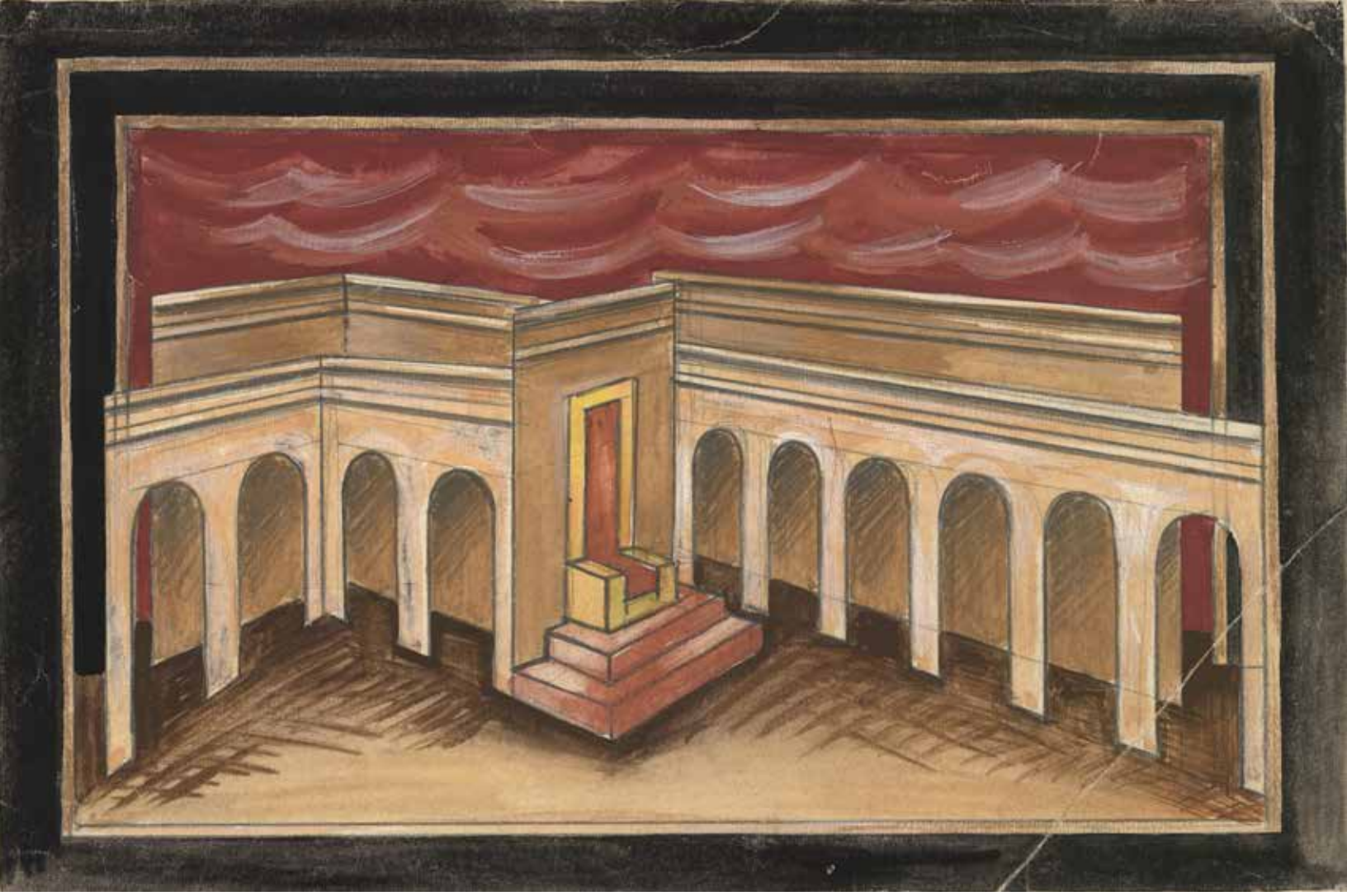
> They found poetry in "film, in the circus, sport, tourism and in life itself…the poetry of Sunday afternoons, outings, glittering cafes, intoxicating alcohols, bustling boulevards, and spa promenades." (Sayer 2013, 199)

Clearly visual art was transformed in these years and the impulses found in surrealism and other avant-garde movements were manifested onstage by artists such as Zelenka, Tröster, and Muzika.

Pavel Drábek refers to redefinitions of Shakespeare's relevance to audiences in successive generations. The final essay in this catalogue, written by Barbora Přihodová, serves to illuminate the approach of two contemporary Czech scenographers, Jan Štěpánek and Jana Preková, in productions of *King Lear* (2013) and *The Tempest* (2010). The descriptions of their working methods and production designs can be seen as the logical extension of the avant-garde tradition begun in the First Republic. These two artists are among the most contemporary designers and their success at articulating a new visual lexicon for their productions of Shakespeare in central Europe continues to stimulate responses from current audiences.

Vlastislav Hofman, stage design for the production of *Hamlet,* 1926. White india ink colored with watercolor, 9 1/2 x 9 3/4 in. (24.1 x 24.9 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.





Josef Čapek, stage design for the production of *The Comedy of Errors,* 1930. Pencil and watercolor, 8 1/4 x 11 3/4 in. (21.08 x 30 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic.

Shakespeare in Prague: Imagining the Bard in the Heart of Europe examines the history, depth, and quality of Shakespearean productions in this non-Anglophone region. The contributions of Czech and Slovak artists to world culture can be clearly seen and bodes well for continuing explorations of the significance of the works of William Shakespeare.

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SHAKESPEARE IN THE CZECH LANDS

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Shakespeare's Home

Shakespeare's plays are populated by characters from far and wide, including the half-fictional Bohemia: the villain Barnardine of *Measure for Measure* is "a Bohemian born" (*MM* 4.2.132); the clown Feste in *Twelfth Night* **(fig. 1)**, speaks of "the old hermit of Prague, that never saw pen and ink" (*TN* 4.2.13–14); and, of course, the most beautiful scenes of *The Winter's Tale* are set in the Kingdom of Bohemia, featuring a coast, a flock of sheep grazing on sea ivy, and a scavenging bear (*WT* 3.3.57). Apart from these poetic flashes, there are also direct connections between the Czech lands and Shakespeare's England. The Jesuit Edmund Campion, who was captured and executed on his mission to England in 1581, was hiding in Shottery near Stratford-upon-Avon, exactly in the months when the young Shakespeare would probably have frequented the village while dating his future wife, Anne Hathaway. Just before his fatal mission, Campion had spent eight years during his noviciate in Brno, Olomouc, and Prague (Úředníček 2011). And in turn, in the following decade, English traveling actors began touring continental Europe, including performances in Prague (probably in 1595, certainly in 1602), throughout Bohemia (1607), in the Silesian town of Krnov (Jägerndorf, 1610), and in Bratislava (Pressburg), (1618) and many times afterward (Limon 1985, 109–11). Among the plays performed by these strolling companies were Shakespeare's own works or versions of them—*The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, and King Lear*—reworked for the castle theater of Český Krumlov (Drábek 2016, 747; Stříbrný 2000, 21–22). It is tempting to ponder that Shakespeare's plays were performed in the Czech lands during his lifetime.

Fig. 1. Jan Sladek, stage design for the production of *Twelfth Night* (detail), 1946. Gouache, 19 1/4 x 24 in. (49 x 61.1 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

The legacy has survived. Shakespeare and English drama in general had a significant influence on German Baroque theater, both professional and amateur, through ample adaptations of the popular plays of the London stage. Another important influence was on Jesuit drama, especially through the works of Joseph Simons, who was inspired by a number of Shakespeare plays. The Silesian dramatist Andreas Gryphius reworked the "rude mechanicals'" scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* **(fig. 2)** in his popular play *Absurda Comica* or *Sir Peter Sqeuntz* (i.e. Quince). And last but not least, Shakespearean influences have formed and shaped puppetry—one of the staples of central European traditional theater—in the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries such as Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* or William Rowley's *A Shoemaker: A Gentleman* (Rudin 1980, 95–113). Their variants can be found in many puppet plays. These popular stories further inspired original works of art, such as Antonín Dvořák's early opera *Král a uhlíř* (The King and the Collier, 1871 and 1874). The story of *King Lear* is among the most popular Czech and Slovak fairy tales. Known as *Sůl nad zlato* (Salt above Gold), it features also in folk ballads. It is unclear if the folk stories hatched Shakespeare's play or, vice versa, if their origins are even more complex, though shared (Drábek 2016, 746–60).

It is this shared history of four centuries that forms the bedrock of Shakespeare's cultural presence in central Europe. The plays are not seen as foreign or imported, and though they have to be retranslated for nearly every generation and every change of cultural taste, they reenter their ancient domicile, in the very heart of European culture.

Shakespeare and Perdita Ars Bohemica

In the 1760s, Shakespeare was re-discovered by theater makers. Despite its decisive influence, Shakespeare's work had almost fallen into oblivion throughout Europe. His plays were performed in radical adaptations—if they were performed at all. Until the late 1830s *King Lear* was staged in Nahum Tate's toothless version with a happy ending, and other plays experienced similar fates. Voltaire, the influential French thinker and dramatist of the eighteenth century, had little appreciation for Shakespeare, calling him "this barbaric mountebank" when he ventured to "point out to Frenchmen the few pearls which were to be found in this enormous dunghill" (1776). Even as Voltaire wrote these damning words, Shakespeare's works were beginning to gain their fame (Heylen 1993, 28). Mediated through German theater companies that staged versions of Shakespeare in search of rewarding great roles for their leading tragedians—Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet and Ophelia, Richard II and his queen, Richard III and Queen Anne, Shylock and Portia, Othello and Desdemona, Coriolanus and Volumnia, and even the obscure Timon of Athens—the first versions in Czech started to appear. In 1782, two anonymous prose adaptations were published in the South Bohemian town of Jindřichův Hradec: *Kupec z Venedyku nebo Láska a přátelstvo* (The Merchant of Wenedig, or Love and Friendship), and *Makbet, vůdce Šottského vojska* (Macbeth the General of the Scottish Army) **(figs. 3, 4)**. These prints became very popular and were reprinted several times. While they were aimed at literary readers, the unnamed author clearly wrote with the theater in mind when adapting the plays: "Since not all people may be present at such a comedy (as they are performed mostly in the main cities), therefore this is introduced and presented to the 'Czecho-readers'" (Drábek 2012, 340). The popularity of these prints and their obvious theatrical potential even inspired folk dramatist František Vodseďálek to pen *Komedie o dvou kupcích a Židoj Šilokoj* (A Comedy of Two Merchants and the Jew Shilok, 1815).

Fig. 2. Vlastislav Hofman. Stage design for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (detail), 1933. Crayon drawing and color chalks, 19 1/4 x 25 5/8 in. (49.02 x 65.02 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 3. Josef Wenig, stage design for the production of *Macbeth,* 1916. Watercolor, 19 1/2 x 15 1/2 in. (49.4 x 39.4 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 4. Josef Wenig, costume design for the production of *Macbeth,* 1916. Watercolor, 10 3/4 x 5 in. (27.5 x 13 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

In 1786, when the first provisional Czech playhouse was erected in what is now Wenceslas Square in Prague, one of the first titles performed was *Makbet. Truchlohra w pěti gednánjch, od Šakespeara* (Makbet. A tragedy in 5 acts, by Shakespeare), translated by Karel Hynek Thám. This was the first known occurrence of Shakespeare's name in Czech—all the more surprising given that the German versions from which Thám worked do not mention "the onlie begetter." Thám also addresses his readers with an enlightened preface:

> This tragedy was composed by Shakespeare the Englishman in the English tongue, who has excelled above all other makers in composing sad heroic dramas and exceeded them, having caused himself immortal glory in posterity; this tragedy then having been translated from English into German by many was also produced in German theatres; now it also comes to light in Czech. If my countrymen receive it from me with gratitude, in short time I intend to publish that excellent and most sublime tragedy called *The Highwaymen* by Friedrich Schiller, a German Shakespeare, in the hope that [my countrymen] shall receive greater benefit from it than from the innumerable coarse and unwieldy books in Czech (Drábek 2012, 340).

It is from this moment in the mid-1780s that Shakespeare's works assumed their central place in central European theater repertoires. A Czech *Hamlet* (unfortunately lost) appeared shortly after Thám's *Makbet,* shadowed by an anonymous parody entitled *Hamlet the Prince of Liliput.* In 1792, Prokop Šedivý created a powerful version of *King Lear*—in a pregnant, visceral language and with a tragic end!

Fig. 5. Josef Wenig, (detail), stage design for the production of *The Merchant of Venice,* 1909. Watercolor, 14 1/2 x 9 5/8 in. (36.6 x 24.5 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

In the late eighteenth century, although records fail, there probably were more Czech versions of Shakespeare's plays, judging from their popularity in the German-language theaters and from the repertoires of the itinerant companies that traversed central Europe in those decades. The Napoleonic wars in the early years of the following century brought a relapse in cultural activities (especially after 1815 when the anti-Napoleonic and profoundly anti-modern Holy Alliance was signed between Prussia, Russia, and Austria) affecting all of Austria's dominions, including the Czech lands, not to mention the downtrodden Slovakia (Upper Hungary). Shakespeare ironically became a dangerous representative of a degenerate Western culture—one that destroyed the old order and brought about Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. When in 1822 journal editor Josef Linda wished to publish an excerpt from Shakespeare, he did so with a highly political apology, assuring the reader that the works were innocuous. To emphasize his point, he even "improved" on Shakespeare and smuggled in a bit of the establishment's propaganda. When Antonín Marek published his translation of *The Comedy of Errors* (Omylové, 1823), he did so only under a pseudonym. Also, he selected a play that would not cause offense. In the end, it was based on Plautus's comedies, which were taught in schools.

Slovakia at the time, despite its cultural oppression from the Hungarians, was paradoxically more conducive to Shakespeare: its intellectuals often got their education at the liberal Protestant universities in Germany (namely in Jena). Around 1820, the first translation of *Hamlet* in literary Slovak (which was very close to Czech) was made, soon followed by another written by Michal Bosý. Publishing under the protective pseudonym Bohuslav Križák/Křižák (Crusader), Bosý also translated extracts from the magical scenes of *Macbeth* and parts from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.* However, after this flourish of activities of the 1820s and 1830s, Slovak Shakespeare had to wait until the start of the next century before it reached the theater stage.

Fig. 6. Josef Wenig, stage design for the production of *The Merchant of Venice,* 1909. Watercolor, 14 1/2 x 9 5/8 in. (36.6 x 24.5 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 7. Karel Purkyně, *Procession of Characters from Shakespeare's Plays I - VI*, 1864. Oil painting on canvas. National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic.

In the mid-1830s, a new generation of Czech intellectuals and theater makers appeared. Educated at Prague University (now called Charles University), they were knowledgeable in German, French, and English, and profoundly influenced by the Romantic movement. Josef Kajetán Tyl staged his version of *King Lear* in 1835—somewhat conciliatorily concluding it with a happy ending—and he made a medley of the Falstaff scenes from *King Henry IV Part 1*. His artistic rival and the leading actor of his age, Josef Jiří Kolár, countered with his *Macbeth* (1838), *The Merchant of Venice* (1839) **(fig. 5, 6)**, *Hamlet* (1853), and a Viennese adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1846; after J. F. Schink). Significantly, Kolár was the first to translate directly from English, although his were theatrical, abridged versions; it was only in the 1850s that he completed them for publication. In the 1840s, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* were also staged, this time already piously working from Shakespeare's English original. It was this moment of the Romantic movement of the late 1830s and 1840s that formed the critical mass of Czech Shakespearean culture: from then on, there was no going back. Shakespeare assumed the central place in Czech culture, first in the theater and soon on the literary scene. Between 1855 and 1872, the Czech Museum published the first collected plays of Shakespeare—the first complete oeuvre in a Slavic language. This was dovetailed by the "Shakespearean Decade" in the Czech Provisional Theater (Prozatímní divadlo) in Prague, which produced a series of great Shakespearean plays, culminating in the anniversary year 1864. Soon after, Shakespearean productions were staged in Pilsen and other Bohemian and Moravian cities.

By 1864, Shakespeare's role in Czech culture had developed into something more than a theater classic, a trend that would grow in importance over the next century and a half. While in 1847, F. M. Klácel had written of the classical trio Shakespeare-Goethe-Schiller, within two decades the English playwright had decisively overshadowed the two Germans and become a spokesman for the oppressed Czech culture. The myriad-minded Shakespeare plays evolved into a sounding board for the entire culture and its millenarian desire for emancipation. The anniversary celebrations of 1864 became a national manifestation with thousands of people (often clad in folk costumes) flocking to Prague for the festivities. Hailed by five productions—*Much Ado about Nothing, Coriolanus, Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice,* and Rossini's opera *Otello*—the program of the great day comprised a performance of Hector Berlioz's "symphonie dramatique," *Romeo et Juliette,* a commissioned festive March (Pochod) by Bedřich Smetana, and a tableau vivant with a procession of characters from Shakespeare **(fig. 7)**. The evening concluded symbolically: extracts from the plays were performed, and an allegorical character of Perdita, representing *Perdita Ars Bohemica* (the lost art of Bohemia), gave a festive oration. The entire celebration was both popular and profoundly political. It marked a moment of great expectations for the Czech nation, the citizens of which hoped to be recognized as more than mere minions of the Habsburg monarchs. Three years later, those hopes would be finally shattered: the Austrian Empire elevated Hungary in the act of Compromise (*Ausgleich*), and the Czech nation continued as no more than one of the dominions, despite its industrial, political, and social advancements as the empire's strongest economy. Politically this was a prime disaster, culturally it was a boon: while Budapest was building its magisterial houses of the Hungarian parliament, Prague laid the cornerstone of the Czech National Theater with Shakespeare as its most prominent dramatist—a supreme expression of the English dramatist's cultural momentum for the "lost art of Bohemia."

Shakespeare as a Cultural Vertical

Throughout the traumas and turmoils of the twentieth century in central Europe, Shakespeare retained the seminal cultural position, and his canonical role evolved with even greater complexity. Shakespeare has often played the unsettling role that Ovid did for the mutilated Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*: brutally robbed of other means of expression, Lavinia *"takes the staff in her mouth, and guides it with her stumps and writes."* Her frustrated father, Titus, looks upon this, wondering: "O, do ye read, my lord, what she hath writ?" Audiences in states of oppression have often assumed this attitude toward the messages mediated through Shakespeare's word, wondering what is meant under the guise of the classic. The Bard's plays have served as metaphors and great symbols for sharing an intimate social and political experience with onlookers. To advocate a particular political message (as has often been claimed) would have been too dangerous and also too naive, given the complexities of the political reality. The art—the poetry, its metaphors, clandestine symbols, and ironies—was a space of indeterminacy that allowed spectators to resonate with, share in, and be members of an ineffable and imagined community, one that could never be established in reality and expressed aloud. Going to see Shakespeare in the theater was partly an act of escapism and partly an act of confrontation with a spiritual, immaterial stability, as if embracing the envoy of Sonnet 55:

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
> But you shall shine more bright in these contents
> Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time.

Face to face with the "sluttish time" people had to endure and survive, Shakespeare's works have been a cultural vertical, a symbolic lodestar to help one navigate.

The distance of a long-dead classic from a master of another tongue, who—unlike any living artist—could not have any vested interests or axes to grind, has been a great advantage. The works have had to be translated and retranslated, and reimagined, and the perennial question has been one from *Hamlet*: "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, | That he should weep for her?" What is Shakespeare to us? What are we to Shakespeare? Why should we care for him and what is his relevance for us? Throughout the twentieth century, a new translation of the works appeared and the canonical plays were reproduced again by a new generation of artists, directors, scenographers, composers, and actors. They all kept asking the Hecuba questions about Shakespeare: during World War I and its 1916 anniversary of Shakespeare's death; during the young Czechoslovak state in the 1920s; again, throughout the Nazi threat and occupation in the late 1930s and the 1940s; again, in the new realities of the Communist regime and its gradual degeneration and collapse; and, again, in the disconsolate and wildly inebriated years after 1989. Shakespeare was the ever present companion, and through his works the culture reflected on itself.

The Hecuba questions are existential and profound, and have been asked explicitly at every production of Shakespeare's plays and tacitly at every individual readerly engagement with the suggestive and provocative beauty of his work. The answers to this essentially philosophical inquiry can never be conclusive: it is commensurate with the asking after the purpose of our existence, lives, and all that we value. Shakespeare has been a perennial question for several centuries now. In the context of the Czech and Slovak cultures, the theatrical grappling with his work has been very productive.

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THE SEARCH FOR PLAY, FATE, AND DREAM IN SHAKESPEARE'S SCENOGRAPHIC SPACE: ZELENKA, TRÖSTER, AND MUZIKA

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Visual adaptations of Shakespeare's dramas, one of the key components of productions, have been influenced by a number of art styles. Historical forms that solidified on most nineteenth-century stages prevailed until the early twentieth century. These mostly consisted of traditional illusory devices that deepened the scenic space through perspective-painted backdrops and wing flats. The paintings ranked from standard decors to specific set compositions influenced by classicist, romantic, or realistic paintings. The gradual development of scenic lighting had a great influence on the emotional appeal of the sets: it ranged from tallow and wax candles to gas burners and electric light with a magical effect.

On the occasion of William Shakespeare's 300th birthday in 1864, ravishing celebrations took place in Prague, reaching their peak at a theatrical feast on April 23 at the New Town theater. Popular tableaux vivant and spectacular structures comprised of live costumed characters were designed by the distinguished Czech painters Karel Purkyně and Antonín Gareis. *Jessica Kidnapped* from *The Merchant of Venice* caused a sensation due to its double lighting—an artificial moon and torch fire. Spectators were fascinated by the image of Richard III courting Anna at Henry IV's coffin, Coriolanus in front of Rome, a scene from *Cymbeline*, or shepherd celebrations from *The Winter's Tale.* The inspiration for the tomb scene from *Romeo and Juliet* was a painting by German artist Peter von Cornelius. However, the biggest success was the final parade of Shakespearean characters, whose costumes were designed by Purkyně. Accompanied by famous Czech composer Bedřich Smetana's festive melodies, characters in picturesque groups inspired by Shakespeare's plays walked slowly across the stage. Modern Czech stage design in the early twentieth century saw the interconnection of influences of the most distinguished European art styles. The so-called avant-garde artists began to articulate the dramatic space for newly adapted Shakespearean productions with a new point of view influenced by Austrian art nouveau, German expressionism, Russian constructivism, French cubism and surrealism, and many other art styles. The clash of these influences in the area of what is now the Czech Republic produced an exceptionally fertile experimental environment, in which many non-traditional productions were created. The visual form of Shakespeare's plays changed substantially and became one of the dominant parts of the productions, which significantly supported current interpretations of Shakespearean texts.

Karel Purkyně, *Procession of Characters from Shakespeare's Plays I - VI,* 1864. Oil painting on canvas. National Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic.

Fig. 2. František Zelenka, stage design for the production of *As You Like It,* 1926. Watercolor with pencil, 11 3/8 x 12 1/8 in. (29 x 30.8 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

The artistic association Devětsil was established in 1920 and it soon expanded to become the most important avant-garde art organization of the 1920s in Bohemia. Five years later, young theatermakers, led by directors Jiří Frejka and Jindřich Honzl, created an experimental theater section of Devětsil. The Osvobozené divadlo (Liberated Theater) manifested real poetism in the production of *The Breasts of Tiresias* (1926), created by Otakar Mrkvička, Karel Teige, and František Zelenka (1904–1944).

In 1926, Karel Hugo Hilar, the head of drama at the National Theater, a director, and a tireless fan of experimental theater, approached Zelenka, a twenty-two-year-old technical university student, about making the set designs for two of Shakespeare's comedies. Zelenka used a playful and poetic style inspired by the irony, pranks, and exuberance of student entertainment. In accordance with new trends in modern theater, his design for *As You Like It* was composed of various props and dynamized with a staircase located in the front **(fig. 2)**. This simple design foreshadowed three basic settings. The preserved designs make it clear that Zelenka was engaged with the shape of trees symbolizing the forest of Ardennes, the form of the central arcade building, and a new scenic element—swings, which enriched the scenic expression with dynamism, motion, and youthful energy. The central location in the forest was assembled from modules, which seemed to be shaped from wood and enlarged segments of the constructed set. The actor's dynamic actions were supported by "ladders," which were actually stylized tree branches. Swings made of planks were hanging on ropes above the stage. Zelenka had many versions of costumes in mind—those inspired by commedie dell'arte or caricatures of folk costumes accented with many colored ribbons and bands.

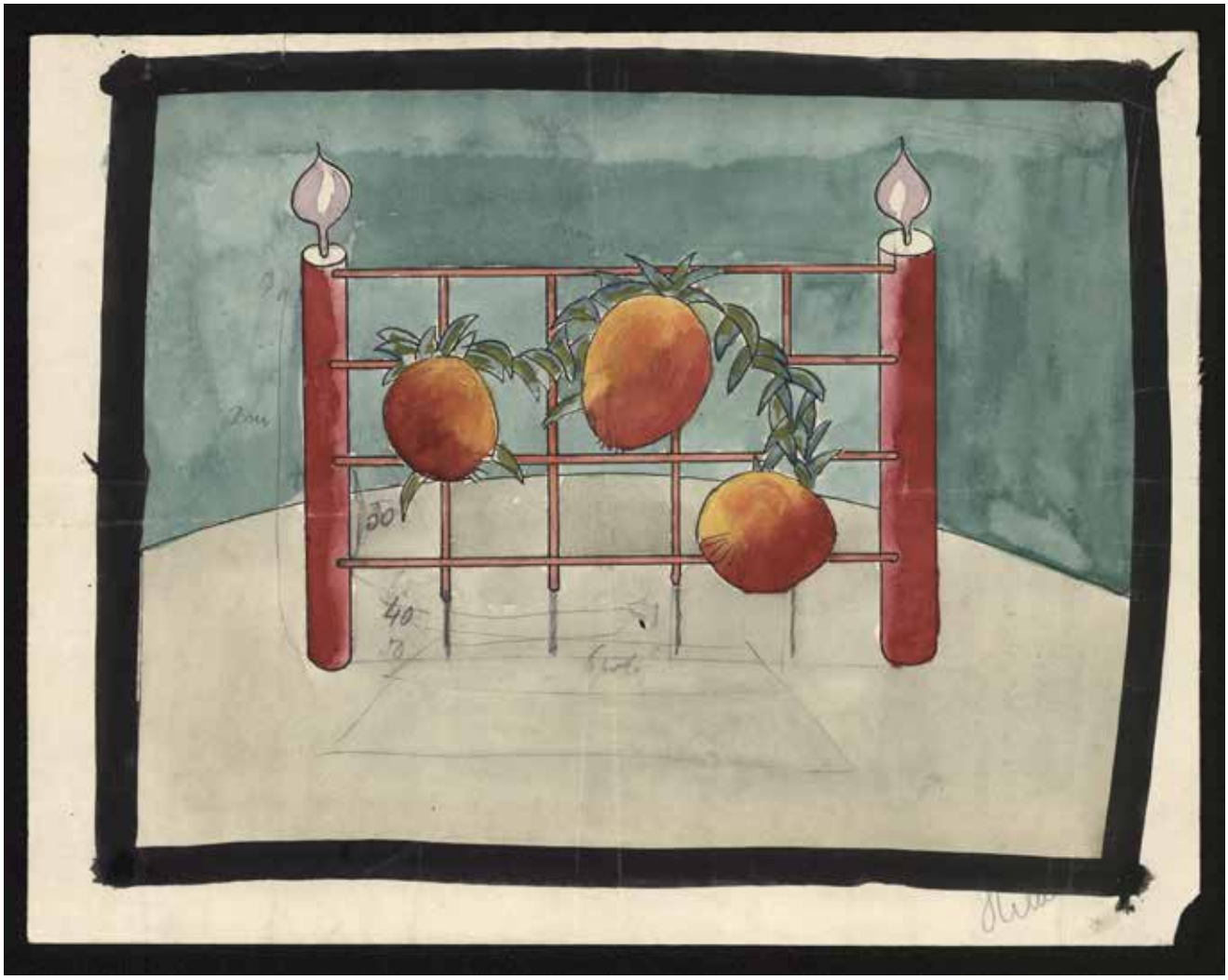

Fig. 3. František Zelenka, stage design for the production of *Much Ado about Nothing,* 1926. Watercolor with pencil, 9 x 11 1/2 in. (22.86 x 29.21 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

The stage design for *Much Ado About Nothing* (staged as *Blažena a Beneš*) was inspired by circus performers **(fig. 3)**. The chairs were replaced with swings and the space of an office desk was occupied by a big board. "Swings, ladders and boards are supposed to introduce busier and more varied motion on the stage and make the body more vivid and stimulated: let the body be uprooted from its rest with its soul..." (Jindřich Honzl, quoted in Marešová, 16). Zelenka did not want to create the visually refined space of classical plays for the National Theater. The two-meter-high garden wall made of laths with hanging orange pumpkins or cucumbers was used to dynamize the actors' movement vertically. Zelenka then interconnected constructivist tendencies and the distinctive kind of poetism typical of the Czechs. The key role was ascribed to costumes **(figs. 4, 5)**. He achieved cheerfulness and effervescence by distorting the silhouettes and combining varied and often exaggerated colorfulness with an absurd mix of traditional and modern textile materials.

During eighteen years of theater activity, Zelenka designed more than 130 productions for the stage. As an artist of Jewish origin, he had to stop his artistic activities in 1939 because of the Nuremberg Laws, which forbade Jews from such work. Thanks to the support of some friends, he managed to make set designs for several productions in secret with the last one in 1941, another production of *As You Like It.* Zelenka and his family were interned in the Terezín ghetto in 1943 where they spent fifteen months. During that time, Zelenka participated in the preparation of many illegal and official productions. Between 1943 and 1944, he designed and/or directed approximately 27 productions and gave about 50 lectures. Zelenka placed demands on himself despite his situation and he tried to create high-quality works under brutal conditions. He believed that his family would survive the cruel conditions in Terezín and return back to normal life in Prague. Unfortunately, Zelenka, his wife, and their eight-year-old son, Martin, were transported to Auschwitz in 1944 where they perished.

Fig. 4. František Zelenka, costume design for the production of *Much Ado about Nothing,* 1926. Watercolor on paper, 9 3/4 x 7 in. (18 x 25 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 5. František Zelenka, costume design for the production of *Much Ado about Nothing,* 1926. Watercolor on paper, 16 1/2 x 11.4 in. (42 x 29 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

While in Terezín Zelenka prepared two productions of works by Shakespeare: *Richard III* (1943) and *Measure for Measure* (1944). According to archival materials and the remembrances of survivors, neither of the plays had a premiere; however, we know that the rehearsals of *Richard III* were probably directed by W. Freud **(fig. 6)**. In a line drawing from June 19, 1943, Zelenka designed a complicated set with the recurrent motif of a pointed arch evoking a gothic environment. The central area of the set is a base for three staircases oriented to the platform with the emblem of the letter "R" and a motif of a face and a lion's leg. A line of four columns with nooses in a row creates a cruel impression on the left part of the stage, and the white bone on the back drop probably symbolizes bloodthirst and hatred. The drawing illustrates one of the cruelest periods of modern human history in which the perpetrators sought to destroy human dignity and values. Using the dramatic texts of William Shakespeare, Jewish prisoners had the opportunity to remind themselves that those attributes could still prevail and any autocrat would eventually be defeated. Richard III, one of Shakespeare's most sophisticated villains, is a comprehensible archetype of evil. It is not difficult to guess the contemporary associations that the theatermakers in Terezín could apply to the main character. The final scene of the evening before the battle, in which Richard III is haunted by the ghosts of people he killed and who wish him bad luck, must have elicited a very familiar impression. Although Zelenka and his family did not come back from Auschwitz, Kamila Zelenková, Zelenka's mother, survived the holocaust. She saved the paintings from Terezín and sold them to the state in the 1950s.

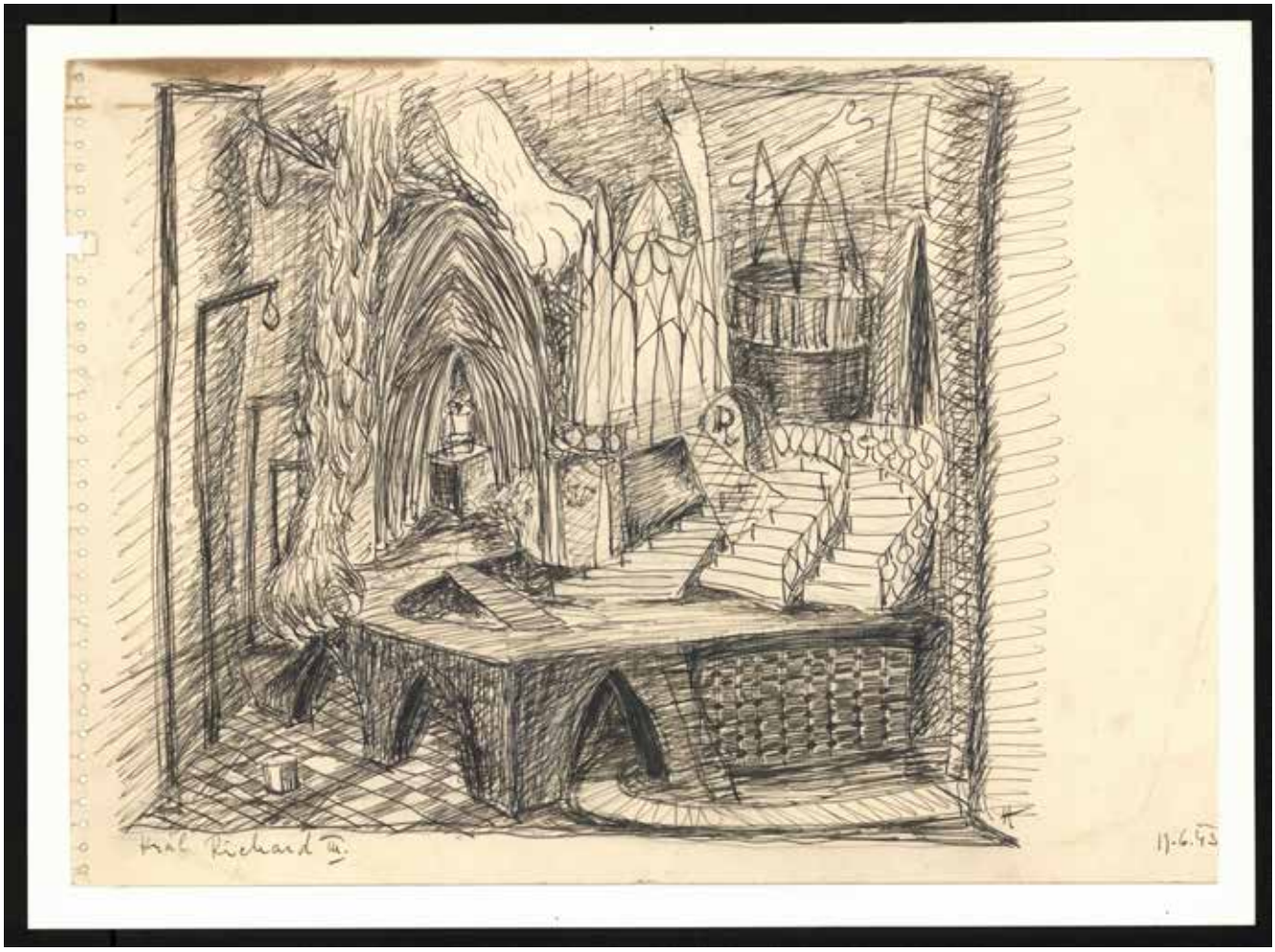

Fig. 6. František Zelenka, stage design for the production of *Richard III,* 1943. Pen and ink on paper, 11 3/8 x 15 3/4 in. (28.96 x 40.01 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

One of the most distinguished Czech stage designers was František Tröster (1904–1968), who entered the artistic world in the 1930s. He made stage design a new independent discipline, one not just defined by architecture, sculpture, or painting on the stage. He articulated his new mission by applying the distinctive participation of the designer in the creation of a dramatic piece. His exceptional cooperation with the director Jiří Frejka was an ideal breeding ground for extraordinary and impressive productions. Tröster distributed scenic objects on an elaborate ground plan. However, his intention in the scenic demonstration was not the expression of material, tangible, and physical values as had been typical in previous generations. He wanted to express the intangibles: "space, motion, time, rhythm, light, colour—these are intangible things such as an idea, feeling or music" (Tröster, n.p.). Tröster used many new methods in his work, including a revolving stage, modern lighting techniques, photo or film projections, the destruction of scenic objects, and elaborate kinetic systems. His first stage design for Shakespeare was *The Winter's Tale* (1935), which he and director Viktor Šulc interpreted as a hymn to life and nature and a symbol of passing time **(fig. 7)**.

Fig. 7. František Tröster, stage design for the production of *The Winter's Tale* (detail), 1935. Combined technique, 19 1/4 x 19 3/4 in. (49 x 50 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photograph by Filip Skalák.

Fig. 8. František Tröster, stage design for the production of *Julius Caesar* (detail), 1936. Pastel on Paper, 9 3/8 x 13 3/8 in. (24 x 21 cm). Private Collection. Photograph by Filip Skalák.

Julius Caesar (1936) became the leading representative of Tröster's "monumentalization of dramatic reality" **(fig. 8)**. The production featured great attention to detail under the influence of film techniques. Critic Vladimír Jindra wrote that Tröster's approach to design was about "clarification, accents and its shift to the top of a semantic hierarchy" (Jindra 1980, 23). For Tröster, the stage design was an inseparable part of a dramatic moment, without which it would lack significant impact. The drama was rhythmatized by unusual changes in viewing angles. Common perspective alternated with dynamic or worm-eye's views in order to actively attract viewers' senses. Tension was increased by the inadequate scale of a huge corner, plinth, or impressive and dangerous suspended horse leg. Everything was much bigger than the actors, who seemed to perish under the burden of the scenery's scale. It was necessary to speed up dramatic time, to fill or empty the space without interrupting the continuity of the plot where mass sequences took turns with the intimate performances of several actors. Conspiratorial sequences were followed by official ones, including battles, tents, apparitions, bottom views, top views, miniatures, and mass sequences. The scenes shifted with a swing. Tröster understood Caesar as a representative of false power because the production was being prepared at the time when Hitler and Mussollini were ascending to the heights of their careers and newspapers were full of portraits of a little Italian Duce sitting in a grandiose environment **(fig. 9)**. Tröster wrote, "... art historians know effects very well—they go back to the baroque Jesuit times: breaking the axes in sculpture and architecture... leaders appeared on plinths, balconies, they spoke to disorganized crowds from the balcony at Palazzo Venezia..." (Tröster 1968, n.p.). The exceptional nature of Tröster's understanding of scenic space was illustrated by Oscar Niemeyer at the Second Biennial of Stage Design in São Paulo in 1959: "The beginning of modern stage architecture must be dated back to 1936 where the premiere of *Julius Caesar* took place" (Niermeyer 1959, 3).

Fig. 9. František Tröster, stage design for the production of *Julius Caesar,* 1936. White ink on paper, 13 3/4 x 18 in. (17.5 x 24.5 cm). Private Collection. Photograph by Filip Skalák.

Other designs were created by Tröster for *Julius Caesar* (1936) but were not used on stage. It became acceptable for scenic space to be surrounded by "stone blocks with carved" fragments of Pompei's bust (JBS 1936). The idea, springing from the spirit of an anthropomorphic understanding of nature, was used many times and was linked to surrealism in particular. The exaggerated scale evoked an individual, omnipresent power one cannot escape because it is rooted in everybody and everything.

Tröster's 1937 design for *As You Like It* displayed playfulness on the basic stage with two round raked stages with reverse inclination, which overlapped each other. One was covered in black grass and the other in green grass. The audience saw actors from a bottom or top view depending on the rotation of both inclined circles. The pictures were framed by projection screens where, according to Jindřich Vodák, "forest tree greenery lit with the sun" portrayed a flickering forest of Ardennes (Vodák 1937, 6). Tröster understood Shakespeare's comedy as a scenic fairy tale, where people shut their minds and escaped to the countryside to seek pleasant experiences. This explains the separation of the forestage with the court of Athens from the magical forest of Ardennes by three translucent curtains in order to create an atmosphere of liberation from the weight of the scorched town using gradually opening curtains and brightening lighting effects. The feeling of dew was created by transparent, plastic leaves with yellow, green, and blue cellophane patches.

Fig. 10.

Fig. 12.

Fig. 11

Fig. 13.

Fig. 14.

Fig. 15.

One of the new means that brought dynamism, tension, and excitement to the space was a "crack" in the backdrop. It psychologically deepened the space of the drama, became the expression of mysterious unspoken meanings, and enriched the text with sensations. Audiences peaked into unknown spaces of the unconscious with the desire to reveal the secret. This idea was probably used for the first time in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1938) **(fig. 10)**. It changed the perspective from an operational to an expressive issue. Tröster provided descriptions from his production notes: "... I don't like it when a curtain rouses the audience from their dream. It is a very bad device, it may swiftly interrupt the balcony scene and bring the audience back to present reality. I envied the shifting images of filmmakers. They use it to attain a soft change from one scene to another..." (Tröster 1968, n.p.). He scattered individual objects that were visually embodied in a dreamy landscape onto the scenic revolving stage: a balcony with a stairway resembled a harp, a bedroom looked like a huge cleft in the cut-out of a night sky, and a tomb was like the tragic clash of white floes. Tröster used select materials in a very particular way because the structure and performance of material always greatly participated in its successful emotional impact: "... a cleft of a night sky, shiny blue transparent cellophane, an unmade bed with white sheets, Mantua itself white with black background, like in the south, and a garden made of green stripes of what looked like wet transparent cellophane seemed to be white like marble. The basic colour chord: black, white, blue..." (Tröster 1968, n.p.). He placed a black-lace cylinder on the rim of the revolving stage and lit it from the inside to create the play of a ghostly night-light.

It is interesting to follow the origin of the scenic version of Tröster's wartime production of *Hamlet* (1941) at the Municipal Theater at Královské Vinohrady **(fig. 11)**. Its essence was a ruptured backdrop like the one in his *Romeo and Juliet*. The simple and ingenious idea of opening the upper part of a cleft into the black space of the drop made it possible to define an exact and original shape—a parabolic cut-out object. This geometric shape acquired several new meanings. It symbolized "an insidious valley" you cannot escape as well as an open and hopeful future space. The shape is exact, pure, and simply perfect. It also resonates with the traditionally understood perspective line of illusory designs. The technique resulted in a brilliant merging of traditional methods of understanding scenic perspective condensed with the latest means of expression.

An earlier production of *Hamlet* (1936) in Brno brings us to another great Czech designer/painter **(fig. 12)**. The production was directed by Aleš Podhorský and designed by František Muzika (1900–1974). Ten years earlier Vlastislav Hofman had designed *Hamlet* in Prague (1926), directed by K. H. Hilar **(fig. 13)**. That production became one of the pillars of modern scenography that significantly redefined the concept of a traditional text and created a genuinely contemporary drama with civilian adaptation and abstract scenography. It hearkened in some scenes to a prior non-traditional *Hamlet* designed by Edward Gordon Craig and directed by Konstantin Stanislavsky in Moscow (1912).

Fig. 10. František Tröster, stage design for the production of *Romeo and Juliet,* 1938. Pencil and watercolor, 24 1/4 x 13 in. (61.5 x 33.3 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 11. František Tröster, stage design for the production of *Hamlet,* 1941. Tempera, 22 x 22 in. (56.8 x 56.8 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 12. František Muzika, stage design for the production of *Hamlet* (detail), 1936. Combined technique, 11 x 15 3/8 in. (28 x 39 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 13. Vlastislav Hofman, stage design for the production of *Hamlet* (detail), 1926. White india ink drawing colored with watercolor, 9 5/8 x 9 1/2 in. (24.5 x 24.1 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 14. František Muzika, stage design for *The Tempest,* 1941. Tempera on black cardboard, 16.9 x 19.7 in. (50 x 43 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Fig. 15. František Muzika, stage design for *The Tempest* (detail), 1941. Tempera on black cardboard, 16.9 x 19.7 in. (50 x 43 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

Without doubt Muzika followed Hofman's work mostly in the gradation of matter, purity of shape, and distinctive structure of the wall surface. The smooth shape of the design was influenced by Muzika's neoclassicist feel. In this production, the artistic concept was supported by the conflict of reality and dreams, fact and fiction, and the subtle boundary between normality and madness—the main motifs of Hamlet. A review of the production stated: "... Based on the spirit of the drama balancing on the verge of illusions and reality, Muzika elevated the basic dramatic atmosphere into stage super-reality... his poetic imagination resonated with his painterly imagination and transferred them into images full of stage poetry and mystery. He used new scenic materials and provided them with new expression and function..." (Liskutin 1941, 5).

Muzika's imaginative path was significantly developed in *The Tempest* (1941) at the Na Veveří theater in Brno **(figs. 14, 15)**. He transformed a mysterious island into one of dreams, illusions, and visions. Coastal rocks metamorphosed into grotesque masks or the omnipresent, calm, but ephemeral face of Miranda (or Prospero, or Ariel), who saw everything. These and other visions were described by the critic Ivo Liškutín as producing a "mysterious and complicated aura, in which reality unites with dreams, the tragic merges with the comic, and fairy tales and satire become one." A girl's profile appeared like an illusion in rock formations, in nameless vegetation, in the night sky, or on stalagmites/stalactites in the cave. These dripstones simultaneously changed into a human hand, cliffs turned into the bizarre faces of goblins, and night clouds transformed into a universe that can see everything. The poetry of scenic anthropomorphism reached its peak. It was a story full of magic, enchantment, alienation, sadness, and intrigues that represented the understandability of Muzika's imaginative methods when non-human details, or phenomena, are awarded human traits, qualities, or appearance. This way of perceiving nature led to a confirmation of the fact that human beings and nature are part of one universe and are subject to the same laws. The emphasis on such universal links created a timeless impression, particularly during wartime.

A girl's profile was also used in *Twelfth Night* (1944), which seemed to be shaped by ancient turf in disrupted rubble **(fig. 16)**. It evoked a birth together with several shells cast on the seashore. This scene was supposed to give the impression of a spatial reality where visions and dreams materialized. It was a surrealist realism, whose unreal reality on the stage managed to shift the perception of traditional texts toward new and unexpected associations. A newly formulated metaphoric scenic object completely overcame the stage of locality description, naming, or nominalism as a result of observation. Such an object defied logical thinking and contradicted the mechanical transposition of an objective image of the world onto the stage. Muzika's extraordinary visions could, and do, exist independently from dramatic productions. Dramatic topics and a fundamental surrealistic feeling resonated in Muzika's work so intensively that a number of original dramatic topics remained present in his painting even after the end of his scenographic career. The motifs repeatedly appeared in various forms such as cliffs, citadels, cairns, towers, and, according to František Šmejkal, "ghostly buildings—symbols of the ephemerality of human existence, making the past events present, an evocation of the past, a return to archetypal ideas..." (Šmejkal 1984, 82).

All of the three aforementioned avant-garde stage designers for Shakespearean productions from the 1920s to the 1940s significantly contributed to the modern perception of Renaissance texts and vividly demonstrated their perception of the world through Shakespeare's works. Zelenka used his poetic, playful, and unrestrained humor to innovate the view of comedies; Tröster managed to formulate a scenic image as a fatefully understandable sign when trying to capture the elusive quantity of drama; and Muzika made the scenic space more lyrical. He enriched it with distinctive neoclassicist smoothness but he also managed to create an unreal world. All three have irreplaceably changed the view of modern scenography of Shakespeare's plays.

Fig. 16. František Muzika, stage design for the production of *Twelfth Night* (detail), 1944. Tempera on gray cardboard, 19 1/4 x 11 in. (49 x 28 cm). National Museum, Prague, Czech Republic. Photography by Jana Kuříková, Alžběta Kumstátová.

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DEMYSTIFYING THE SACRED AURA OF THE BARD: JANA PREKOVÁ'S AND JAN ŠTĚPÁNEK'S APPROACHES TO STAGING *KING LEAR* AND *THE TEMPEST*

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For centuries, Shakespeare's plays have served as the proverbial "mirror of the world." Forming an undeniable part of the Western canon, they are coated with interpretative conventions and spectators' expectations. The challenge for anyone who attempts to transpose the Bard's work with its complex imagery into the material reality of the stage is to keep its original intricacy, liveliness, and force. As a reply to the challenge, Jana Preková and Jan Štěpánek, two of the leading contemporary Czech scenographers, have devised stage situations, sets, and costumes that dissect the Bard's plays, materializing his figurative language in *King Lear* and *The Tempest* in new, unprecedented ways. Demystifying the sacred aura of the canonical work, Preková and Štěpánek have probed its topicality by creating surreal, evocative environments that combine different visual styles with a number of cultural and historical references. While doing so, they have reconsidered the role of the scenographer within the creative process of staging, and put into effect their specific reading of each play. Their unique approaches to staging Shakespeare also translate to the ways they use renderings to process their ideas toward the realizations on stage.

Jana Preková's *King Lear*

While Edmund—the play's ultimate villain, stylized as the Joker from *Batman* the movie series and dressed as a chef—kneads dough (a metaphor for his evil scheming) in the left part of the proscenium, King Lear, wrapped in a white bathrobe and sporting massive locks of long, gray hair and a full beard, enters the stage dominated by a large (and empty) swimming pool **(fig. 1)**. After he takes a short "swim" (for a while we see only the performer's head ostentatiously moving from one side of the pool to the other), he climbs up on a springboard to listen to his daughters, Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia, publicly proclaim their love for him. One by one, the three women take off their dresses by stepping out of the white backdrop with projections of stylized gowns, and now dressed in swimsuits they step up on starting blocks. The spectacular competition in front of the public gaze begins; the drama is ready to unfold.

The Tempest. Divadlo Šumperk; prem. April 10, 2010; dir. Zdeněk Dušek; set and costumes Jan Štěpánek. Preparatory drawing for set design (detail).

Fig. 1. *King Lear.* Národní divadlo Praha; prem. November 10, 2011; dir. Jan Nebeský; set Jan Nebeský and Jana Preková; costumes Jana Preková; multimedia David Vrbík. Scene I. 1, King Lear and his three daughters in the opening scene by the swimming pool. Photo by Viktor Kronbauer.

Fig. 2 *King Lear.* Národní divadlo Praha; prem. November 10, 2011; dir. Jan Nebeský; set Jan Nebeský and Jana Preková; costumes Jana Preková; multimedia David Vrbík. Final Scene, King Lear and Cordelia/Fool hanging on the wall of an art gallery as living artifacts. Photo by Viktor Kronbauer.

Toward the end of the play we are taken to an art gallery in New York where Regan, Goneril, Edmund, and the rest of the characters of the play—now all styled in black evoking the stereotype of chic, but bored, snobbish visitors—indifferently stroll around two abstract paintings (each night featured different artworks provided by five contemporary Czech painters), an impersonation of the life-size wax sculpture of Pope John Paul II struck by a meteorite (the original was authored by Maurizio Cattelan and displayed at the Venice Biennale in 1999), and the living artifacts of Lear and Cordelia, which hang on the gallery wall. Catharsis did not happen here: even though the main character underwent a fundamental transformation, the rest of the world remained the same, untouched **(fig 2)**.

These are the first and the final scenes of Preková and director Jan Nebeský's *King Lear* (National Theater in Prague, 2011), a production hailed by its reviewers as both the "theatre event of the year" (Hulec, 2011) and a "hodge-podge of horrors" (Potužil, 2011). The design for the unconventional staging—for which significant texts were replaced with citations from the Bible, excerpts from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and references to the Holocaust—grew out of Preková and Nebeský's reading of the play as the darkest image of the human condition. In this vision, human beings find themselves in a continuous state of war and competition in which they participate by both initiating events and felling victims, while voyeuristically observing them at the same time. In a like manner, the set altered the audience's proximity to and distance from the action on stage by exposing them to more intimate scenes of Lear's spiritual journey, emphasizing the individual actors' corporeality and physical action, as well as complex lavish images as if staged within the stage, such as the first scene set by the swimming pool and the final scene at the art gallery.

The costumes enhanced the sense of the all-encompassing, timeless human struggle while blending the scenographer's and the performer's creative inputs into a whole from which the Shakespearan characters emerge. As the king, accompanied by the double character of Cordelia/Fool dressed as a concentration camp prisoner, gradually experienced his inner transformation, the performer discarded layers of his costumes: first went the wig and the beard, followed by his long johns and underwear. The ultimate moment of Lear's self-recognition was marked by the actor's complete nudity.

By deconstructing the play and situating it in a swimming pool and in an art gallery with visual and textual references ranging from the gas showers and flames of the concentration camps to popular movies and the Bible, Preková and Nebeský created a complex postdramatic space charged with a number of competing semantic layers that allowed the audience, willing to let go their expectations, to experience Lear's existential struggle with an urgent intensity.

Jan Štěpánek's *The Tempest*

Fig. 3. *Richard III.* Klicperovo divadlo Hradec Králové; prem. October 20, 2012; dir. David Drábek; set Marek Zákostelecký; costumes Simona Rybáková. Queen Elizabeth, King Edward, and Duchess of York. Photo by Patrik Borecký.

Fig. 4. *Richard III.* Divadelní agentura Echo Praha—Divadlo Globe Praha; prem. May 26, 2001; dir. Vladimír Morávek; set Milan David; costumes Sylva Zimula Hanáková. Richard and Queen Elizabeth. Photo by Zdeněk Merta.

Unlike *King Lear's* heavy, gloomy exposition of civilization's demons, Jan Štěpánek's *The Tempest* (Divadlo Šumperk; directed by Zdeněk Dušek; with set and costumes by Jan Štěpánek, 2010) used scenography to emphasize the comic potential of the play. In this interpretation, the island is inhabited by a group of rather tragicomic characters: Prospero, in a long pointed hat and a short coat, performed cheap tricks, and seemed more like a tacky caricature than a powerful magician; his helper spirit, Ariel, in a glittery leotard and a tousled wig, threw confetti; and Caliban, dressed in a shirt with a tie, wore a furry cap that made him look like a Monchichi, the immensely popular stuffed toy imported to Czechoslovakia from Japan in the 1980s. These characters—together with Miranda in a tasteless short dress, Fernando in a sailor suit, and the rest of the shipwrecked gentlemen sporting the uniforms of Boy Scouts—each seemed to have stepped out of different stories. Forming a bizarre kitschy mixture, they endowed the fairy tale with a tinge of cheesy humor and cabaret-like craziness. It became clear in the midst of this rave that Prospero's actual power has its limits, and that reality is not what it seems.

Contributing to the atmosphere of showy entertainment was the island itself, an ambiguous shiny silver space with hanging stroboscopes and a square clock that evoked not only the infinite universe with its planets but also the ambiance of discos, or the degraded TV shows from Czechoslovakia or East Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. Filled with optimism and good feeling, those shows had served as an escape from the desolate reality of living under a repressive regime. They embodied the falseness of the system where words have lost their meaning. This was where Dušek and Štěpánek's humorous interpretation acquired more serious undertones, and it was where Štěpánek's idiosyncratic interest in the kitschy aesthetics produced by Socialistic society became an interesting actualization of Shakespeare's themes, exploring the intersections between power, ideology, and reality.

Redefining the Role of the Scenographer and the Scenographer's Reading

As the above-discussed examples show, Preková and Štěpánek represent significant participants in the staging of dramatic text who work in close partnership with directors. Their vision determines the ways the stage space and costumes are articulated, and they are directly involved in the stage interpretation of the play. The scenographers take active part in selecting the themes or motifs of the text to be developed in the productions; their selected emphasis then defines the whole of the performance. As a result, Preková and Štěpánek's work blends with that of the director and the dramaturg. And, as in the case of the final scene of *King Lear* set in an art studio, which was proposed by Preková, at times scenographers intervene in the performance text, rewriting its situations and contexts and adding new semantic layers.

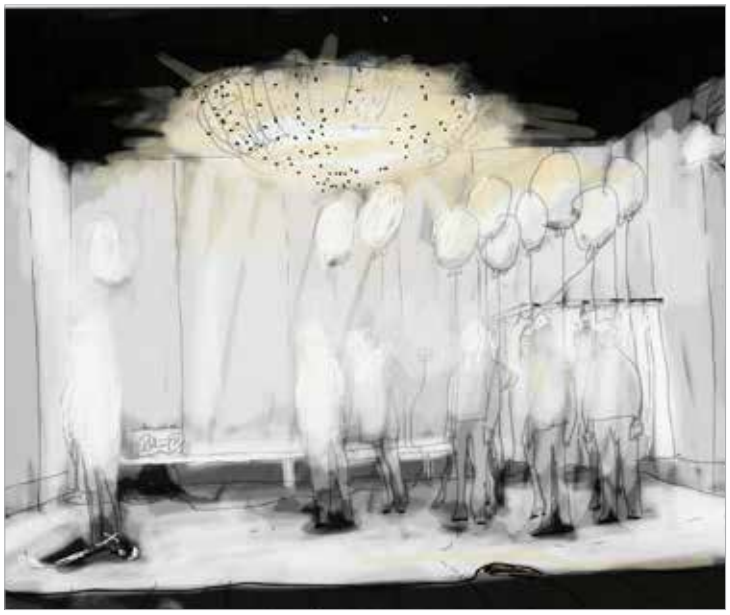

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

Fig. 8.

This particular approach constitutes the first and most important step of the creative process in the scenographer's reading of the play. This in many ways challenges the most common understanding of what it means to read a play. In Preková and Štěpánek's terms, it means interpreting the play freely, like a poem in which any of the words, lines, or images serve as a gateway to another associated parallel image or idea, which emerges from the scenographer's personal reservoir of knowledge, everyday experience, and memory. It is then a matter of the scenographer's discipline to develop only those images and ideas that have an intrinsic relationship with the text. The aim of this reading is to reveal what Preková calls "the inner reality" of the text as its most powerful layer.

While Štěpánek usually interprets the texts by himself, Preková's reading is more mediated by the director's vision. For instance, the construction of the swimming pool in the first scene of *King Lear* was inspired by a set of paintings featuring pools by Czech painter Jaroslav Róna (evoked by Nebeský) and further by an empty swimming pool in Prague's Barrandov (referenced by Preková). In both cases, the reading is devoid of reverence to the Bard, and so not bound to the cultural deposits of past interpretations, scholarly research, or national traditions; however, it may be influenced by any and all of these as a deliberate incorporation of clichés.

The Scenographic Archive and the Performer's Body as the Element of Scenography

Interestingly, for the context of the present exhibition, the ways that Preková and Štěpánek process their reading of the plays toward their materiality on stage represents one of the most striking differences in their respective approaches. Both their backgrounds are in painting, so one could assume that they create ornate, painted renderings. This practice, exercised by many Czech scenographers of the previous generations, enjoys symbolic recognition because the renderings can be displayed like any other artwork, within the parameters of the art market, and, according to Arnold Aronson, "bring us closer to the artist" (Aronson, 30). However, it is only Štěpánek whose working method involves producing a rich scenographic archive. As his renderings for *The Tempest* show, Štěpánek prepares sets of more or less elaborate drawings and paintings that capture different stages of his work: from his immediate, intuitive responses to the text to the more disciplined final outlook of the stage that has been subjected to the rational analysis of the scenographer. Alternatively, Preková is not interested in creating renderings and mostly uses her briefly sketched-out drawings as a communication tool with directors, actors, and scenic workshops. The absence of Preková's scenographic archive is indicative of her specific working methodology. More than designing sets, costumes, and props for the play, the core of Preková's work lies in her carefully *selecting and bringing in* pieces of extra-theatrical material reality such as items of ready-made clothing, furniture, and everyday objects often found in second-hand stores.

Fig. 5. *Winter Tale* (detail). Klicperovo divadlo Hradec Králové; prem. February 16, 2008; dir. Daniel Špinar; set Henrich Boráros; costumes Linda Boráros. Set design.

Fig. 6. *Hamlet.* Švandovo divadlo Praha; prem. December 7, 2013; dir. Daniel Špinar; set Iva Němcová; costumes Lucia Škandíková. Hamlet and Horatio. Photo by Viktor Kronbauer.

Fig. 7. *Hamlet.* Činoherní divadlo Ústí nad Labem; prem. December 6, 2003; dir. David Czesany; set Tomáš Bambušek; costumes Andrea Králová. Scene III. 2, Hamlet, the Player Queen, Gertrude, and Claudius. Photo by Jan Dvořák.

Fig. 8. *Romeo and Juliet.* Národní divadlo Praha; prem. January 23, 2003; dir. Vladimír Morávek; set Martin. Chocholoušek; costumes Zuzana Bambušek Krejzková. Juliet. Photo by Zdeněk Merta.

In his book *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (2014), W. B. Worthen notes that "Shakespeare performance sometimes seems to evoke a specific and relatively narrow sense of genre: performance that depends on, exists to reproduce, [and] is defined by the determining algorithm of Shakespeare's writing" (2). The ways Jana Preková and Jan Štěpánek approach the Bard's plays go well beyond this understanding of stage interpretation. By conceiving imaginative theater designs interwoven from multiple layers of associated meanings, the scenographers claim their right to treat the texts as dynamic structures open to production, rather than reproduction. This strategy is not a mere self-indulgent entertainment but has deep implications for the reception of the canonical works. By demystifying the Bard's sacred aura and transcending the rigid ideas about performing his plays, these scenographers emphasize the works' liveliness while allowing us to find new ways to appreciate their brilliance.

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