

## PERFORMANCE REVIEWS<sup>\*</sup>

*The Globe to Globe Hamlet Tour:  
A Celebratory Performance in Elsinore.  
Elsinore Conference 2016  
Shakespeare, The Next 400 Years  
Kronborg Castle, Helsingør  
21 April 2016*

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### CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

*Cast:* Keith Bartlett, John Dougall, Ladi Emeruwa, Phoebe Fildes, Miranda Foster, Naeem Hayat, Beruce Khan, Tom Lawrence, Jennifer Leong, Rāwiri Paratene, Matthew Romain, Amanda Wilkin.

*Directors:* Dominic Dromgoole and Bill Buckhurst.

*Designer:* Jonathan Fensom.

*Music:* Laura Forrest, Bill Barclay.

*Produced by* Shakespeare's Globe.

This production of *Globe to Globe Hamlet* at Hamlet's castle in Elsinore was the concluding show of the two-year-long tour of the Shakespeare's Globe project before the company's return to the Globe in London, where the tour had opened on 23 April 2014. Sixteen actors and actresses had travelled across the seven continents

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<sup>\*</sup> *Sederi* collaborates with [www.ReviewingShakespeare.com](http://www.ReviewingShakespeare.com), the first website devoted to scholarly reviews of and writing about worldwide Shakespearean performance (theatre, film, TV) for a general audience. Reviews about Shakespearean performances worldwide submitted for publication to *Sederi* are sent to the team of specialists managing *ReviewingShakespeare*, and they will decide whether the review might also be suitable for publication on their webpage. Inversely, a selection of reviews of Spanish and Portuguese productions of Shakespeare's plays submitted to *ReviewingShakespeare* are also considered for publication in *Sederi*.

to confirm Dominic Dromgoole's idea that "Shakespeare can entertain and speak to anyone, no matter where they are on earth" (Globe to Globe Web 2016). Indeed, after touring throughout 197 countries and performing in front of hundreds of thousands of spectators, the mission had been accomplished. The tour was even granted UNESCO patronage for its commitment to different local communities and its promotion of culture, and many people had applauded this wonderful initiative. Besides, the show in Elsinore Castle aimed to celebrate Shakespeare's double anniversary; namely, 400 years since his death and 200 years since the beginning of the oldest Shakespeare performance tradition at Kronborg. But what made the 21<sup>st</sup> of April in Helsingør most special was that the production was double as well. There were two occasions to see the play: one of them was public, in the afternoon, and the other one was private, in the evening. This last performance welcomed the Shakespearians taking part in the 2016 Elsinore Conference (entitled *Shakespeare: the Next 400 Years*) and some special guests, the Queen of Denmark among them. While the royal visit could have been remembered as a mere anecdote, the presence of the queen actually contributed to the meta-theatrical dimension of *Globe to Globe Hamlet*, which also deployed various challenging and ironic twists with regard to Shakespeare's play.

The meta-theatrical perspective adopted by the touring company could be seen even before the performance started, as the portable stage they had been carrying all around the world was a theatrical survival kit consisting, basically, of a structure made of sticks, a red curtain, three or four trunks on the stage and musical instruments hanging from the wall and ready to be played by any of the performers. There was no simulation, no intention of hiding the theatrical structure. Actually, these actresses and actors recalled the Hamlet-directing-the-actors scene, and the aesthetics of the whole play seemed to pay homage to *The Mousetrap*: they were travelling actors in a travelling play performing changeable roles and perspectives on the old text. Such a sense of movement and fresh spontaneity resulted in one of the most humorous versions of *Hamlet* onstage, turning the tragedy into a comedy at some points, especially during the first part.

Naeem Hayat, born in East London of a Pakistani family, played Prince Hamlet, providing the mythical character with a new de-

centralized and post-colonial identity that was far from the typically masculine solemnity of other Hamlets, focusing on the (anti-) hero's vulnerability and paranoia instead. By contrast, Ophelia (Phoebe Fildes) appeared as a girl full of life in a pinkish flowery dress — as those that can be found at Brick Lane or Spitalfields Market in London. In fact, the characters' costumes contributed to the joviality of their performance, as these were designed as a hybrid between the Middle Ages and the postmodern hipster aesthetics. It is also worth mentioning Keith Bartlett's take on Polonius and his hilarious and onomatopoeic performance, which made the audience laugh all throughout the first part of the play, and the Claudius-Gertrude tandem (John Dougall and Miranda Foster), both dressed in velvet red capes, as if to note their complicity.

In many senses, this production offered a simplified iconic version of our over-complicated readings of *Hamlet*, making things clear from the beginning. To stage a play is to make choices, and this *Hamlet* went for more straightforward meanings than academic interpretations. For instance, if Claudius' and Gertrude's complicity was shown through their dress, Ophelia and Polonius's closeness was highlighted through their speech, as they would speak many lines simultaneously. Ophelia's "dishonesty" towards Hamlet is shown through her unambiguous collaboration with her father and the court in spying on the supposedly mad prince: while he is asking her the well-known accusatory "Are you honest?," we can see Polonius hiding behind the curtain, and Hamlet looking at the curtain itself and guessing someone is there when hearing Polonius cough. We can also clearly feel Hamlet's psychotic misogyny when he shakes violently both Ophelia and Gertrude; the former, during the Go-to-a-nunnery scene, and the latter in the queen's chamber, but only until the top patriarch, the Ghost father, tells him to stop. There is no Oedipus complex this time, but only plain family matters. Of course, this sort of malleable simplification allowed the company to focus on the comic side of the play as well as to adopt an interesting variety of cultural tics and expressions from the different parts of the world where the play was staged during two years; on this specific occasion, for example, they introduced some Danish wordplay and expressions and jokes on Danish drinking habits.

One of the climactic moments of this party-like production of *Hamlet*, as mentioned above, was the staging of the play-within-the-

play, *The Mousetrap*. The audience of the play was the real audience that evening at Kronborg Castle, while Ophelia and Hamlet were seeing it from the sidelines. John Dougall, who was playing Claudius, also acted Gonzago, while Miranda Foster (also Gertrude) and a younger man were to “kill” him with poison. The red curtain was used as a makeshift element. When it opened, we could see the “acted” scene; when it closed and opened again, we saw the same actors with different robes, embodying Gertrude and Claudius following the plot in horror. This game of simultaneity provided the audience at Kronborg with a feeling of identification understood in different ways: first, we identified with the imaginary audience of *The Mousetrap*; then, we identified the mocked characters with the queen and king in *Hamlet*; moreover, we understood that the prince was unmasking them very straight-forwardly. Finally, the most brilliant touch—if not the most hilarious—was provided by the presence of Queen Margrethe of Denmark herself, as Naeem Hayat was staring at her and her entourage when reciting the words about “guilty creatures sitting at a play” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.524).

But not everything about this *Hamlet* was parody and humor. While the first part of the play was performed in the depicted comic fashion, the second one, after an interval, developed into the tragedy that any *Hamlet* fan would expect. Very interestingly, Ophelia was the one in charge of connecting comedy and tragedy; actually, she was the thread linking all major characters, and of course this has not been the first time that her role in providing a common tragic space has been highlighted in a production.

When the second part started, Ophelia was already deranged, dressed in white and singing beautiful songs. We had seen her playing drums and other instruments before the interval. Now, she was mentally gone, close to sleepwalking, and the other characters could not but contemplate her distress. Then, a very sad Gertrude narrated her death (a typical option in received productions of the play), and Laertes appeared onstage, a bit overreacting, while the other characters—all but Hamlet, who was still on his way to England—mourned Ophelia’s demise.

The cemetery scene also reflected the changeable and hybrid nature of this production, as it presented a female gravedigger in conversation with Hamlet and Horatio. Nonetheless, the most fascinating moment of this scene takes place when Ophelia enters

singing to her own funeral and proceeds to lie down and be buried (only below a brown mantle). The scene shifts from this moment onwards are quite agile and quick. Soon after Ophelia's burial, the duel between Hamlet and Laertes takes place and all the characters are dead by poison.

However, what started as a comedy could not end as a complete tragedy. Once Hamlet speaks his last words and a new beginning with Fortinbras is announced, reaching the conclusion of the play, Ophelia comes back to the stage unexpectedly, singing lively and resuscitating all the corpses as she is dancing onstage. This way, this production closing the biggest theatrical celebration of Shakespeare's anniversary, seems to inform us that *the rest is not silence*. Indeed, since Hamlet's first collapse, there has been much to say and to perform, much to sing and to commemorate. Indeed, it would be fair to say that the Shakespeare's Globe has magnificently contributed to our happy celebration of The Bard over the last two years. Bravo!

## References

- Globe to Globe*. 2016. "About the Project." Accessed August, 2016. <http://globetoglobe.shakespearesglobe.com/hamlet/about-the-project>.
- Shakespeare, William. 2005. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Arden Shakespeare.

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