



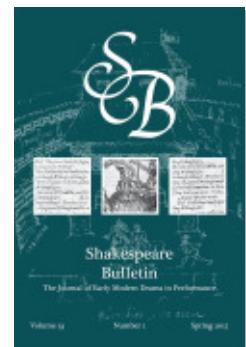
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Hamlet (review)

Carla Della Gatta

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stares down from on high and the charismatic performer strutting below provided a visual touchstone for the play: this old King can never live up to his younger self. We usually have to wait for Cordelia's "nothing" to split Lear apart. In this production, his internal divisions were shown immediately and viscerally.

There were lots of things that didn't quite work in this high-concept production, and I don't quite rank Keach among the very top performers of this Lear-filled decade. But it was probably the best entrance I've ever seen.



Hamlet

Oregon Shakespeare Festival, 2010

CARLA DELLA GATTA, *Northwestern University*

The audience enters the theatre. Hamlet, dressed in a suit, is seated at his father's funeral. In silence, Dan Donahue places his hand on the coffin of his dead father. It is the silence of mourning. Blackout. "Who's there?" Shakespeare's words have now been heard. Hamlet speaks to the Ghost. The Ghost gestures his reply in sign language. The Ghost is deaf. I later learn that the actor is deaf. Howie Seago as the Ghost combines American Sign Language with his own translation of the written poetry. He creates a new language to speak to Hamlet. There is not an interpreter for the other characters onstage, or the audience. Hamlet signs to the Ghost; he verbalizes most of the Ghost's lines. The oral narrative of the king's murder is conveyed through Hamlet's low resonant voice. "I am thy father's spirit." Haunting words, the only oral sounds from Seago.

Silences and sounds interweave in rhythm with Shakespeare's dialogue. In Gertrude's chamber, Hamlet silently screams when he sees the Ghost. When he signs to his father, with his hands moving, she knows he is talking to the dead king. Rap music is the rhythm of the players: lines beaten, repeated, rapped, and deleted. The player Lucianus shifts from rap to spoken word. He slows to silence. Poison is poured in the ear of the deaf brother. Hamlet verbalizes the mutiny for all to hear.

Ophelia, constantly interrupted, cannot get her words out. Alone with Hamlet, she exposes a recording device taped to her body. Silence and pain come between them as others monitor their words. He yells, performing his anger for the device, but kisses her passionately through her

tears. Their silent embraces reveal the tenderness and passion that they cannot articulate because they are being taped.

A symphony of sounds and silences: Hamlet's slyly dark voice, Ophelia's utterances, the Ghost's silent signs, the players' rap performance, Gertrude's cries, and eerie music designed by Paul James Prendergast. Sharp, clashing foils as Laertes and Hamlet duel cut the quiet air onstage. "The rest is silence." The silent mourning Hamlet felt at his father's death in the opening scene comes full circle at the end. The Ghost reappears to hold and kiss Hamlet's dead body. The dead king kneels, cradling his slain son. Thunderous applause.



Variations on Measure for Measure

Adapted by Charles Marowitz

Tygres Heart Shakespeare Company, Portland, Oregon, 2000

MICHAEL W. SHURGOT

In 2000 Jan Powell, then Artistic Director of the (alas) now long defunct but once dynamic Tygres Heart Shakespeare Company in Portland, Oregon, invited Charles Marowitz to open the THSC season with his adaptation of *Measure for Measure*. As a prelude to his production Marowitz published "The Making of *Variations on Measure for Measure*" in the Spring 2000 issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin*. There, he described his approach to Shakespeare's play and his production: "[T]he whole point of *Variations* is to tell a story through Shakespeare's fable different from the one originally intended" (7). He explains that, "For me, the nexus of *Measure for Measure* is its insight into man's deep-seated malevolence—with the façade of a fairy tale about bad people getting just deserts in a world wisely superintended by a benevolent deity" (8).

To accomplish his production goals, Marowitz radically altered *Measure*. He cut numerous scenes and characters, including Mariana and the bed trick; the comic sub-plot involving Froth and Elbow; and Abhorson, Barnardine, and the Duke's efforts to save Claudio and counsel Julietta. Marowitz also cut the Duke's lines about torches and virtues (1.1.32–35), and indeed all vestiges of virtue from his production. What remained was a stream of physical and psychological sexual violence directed at Isabella, from her initial appearance at the nunnery to the final, terrifying stage image.