

Boika Sokolova and Kirilka Stavreva

Operation Shakespeare in Post-Communist Bulgaria

This collection of articles analyses the staging of Shakespeare by Bulgarian theater professionals and amateurs since the year 2000 as an antidote to the social and cultural challenges of the post-communist transition, namely the explosion of consumerist attitudes and the debasement of ethical principles in all walks of life. The opening article, “‘The readiness is all’, or the Politics of Art in Post-Communist Bulgaria,” gives an overview of the changing political landscapes and economic realignments, the rise of *chalga* as an aesthetic and life choice for the new elites, and the use of classical texts as a tool for raising civic consciousness. It develops the conceptual framework for the articles that follow, which discuss individual performances. In order of arrangement, they focus on a “spiritual documentary” about an unfulfilled project of putting on *Hamlet* in the high mountain (“Art Scaling Trauma”), two striking appropriations of *Othello*: a modern Russian play with an embedded *Othello* scene staged at the National Theater “Ivan Vazov” in Sofia and a film about a production of *Othello* in a Bulgarian prison (“*Othello* Transformations and Transfusions”), a haunting sequel to *Hamlet–Wittenberg Revisited*—written for and produced by the experimental theatre Sfumato in Sofia (“The Undiscovered Country”), and a significant production of Shakespeare’s tragedy at the National Theater (“‘Shall we be, or not?’, or *Hamlet* as an Axiom for Cultural Survival”). The final article (“Time out of Time in the “Open Theater” of a Bulgarian Village”) discusses the tradition of yearly Shakespeare performance at a small Bulgarian village, a tradition that has connected it to the world. As they stand, each article can be read as a self-contained text which is contextually connected to the material discussed in “‘The readiness is all’, or the Politics of Art in Post-Communist Bulgaria,” and to the other pieces in this cluster.