

Sibel İzmir\* 

## Transformative Potential and Utopian Performative: Postdramatic *Hamlet* in Turkey

**Abstract:** Turkey is among those Non-Anglophone countries which have had a keen interest in Shakespeare and his plays for over two hundred years. When it comes to the staging of Shakespeare in Turkey, especially when protagonists or leading roles are considered, “overacting” is one of the most notable techniques highlighting, presumably, the spirit of the Renaissance and Jacobean times. Still, in recent years, there have been some productions which try to challenge and deconstruct the traditional ways of staging a Shakespearean play. One of such productions is *Hamlet* of Istanbul State Theatre, directed by Işıl Kasapoğlu in 2014, in which the director makes use of postdramatic theatre techniques. As the play begins, the audience sees a huge red jewel box which has been placed onto the centre of the stage. Soon after it is opened, it becomes clear that the character coming out of the box is playing and enacting not only the role of Hamlet but also many other roles in the play. Disrupting the habitual Shakespearean staging which heavily relies on mimesis in a closed “fictive cosmos” (Lehmann 22), the production, more strikingly, allows for an innovative Shakespearean acting as an innovative Shakespearean acting possible as the actor acts out all the major roles, such as Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, etc., in such various ways as holding dummies in his hands and enacting their roles in monologues and dialogues. Fusing Hans-Thies Lehmann’s theory of postdramatic theatre with Jill Dolan’s argumentation on utopian performative, this study will investigate how postdramatic theatre techniques challenge the traditional Shakespearean performance and contends that postdramatic theatre techniques used in Kasapoğlu’s *Hamlet* contribute to the utopian performative and the possibility of creating a utopian impulse in the audience. The paper thus will claim that postdramatic performance of *Hamlet* renders a utopian performative possible by presenting a transformative potential in the audience members which engages in our present moment.

**Keywords:** utopian performative, postdramatic *Hamlet* in Turkey, postdramatic theatre, Jill Dolan, Hans Thies-Lehmann.

---

\* Atılım University, Turkey. [sibel.izmir@atilim.edu.tr](mailto:sibel.izmir@atilim.edu.tr) / [sibeleceizmir@gmail.com](mailto:sibeleceizmir@gmail.com)

## Introduction and the Context

Writing about William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and exploring this much-studied play in the context of staging utopias might seem interesting, weird or even unsettling. How to put *Hamlet* side by side with the concept of utopia, let alone staging it with a utopian impulse? As a tragedy abundant in horrific images and content including homicide, regicide, bloodshed, incest and treason, it is undoubtedly far away from a political project involving an ideal space. With the growing interest in adaptation studies, especially after the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a great number of Shakespeare's plays have been reproduced and rewritten across genres. Shakespeare's kings, queens, bastards, servants, villains, lovers, fairies, ghosts and many other characters find a glimpse of the new and sometimes the better (or the worse) and obtain a voice in those brand new worlds, taking the shape of stage productions, novels, movies. Appropriation has thus become a way for many directors and theatre companies to challenge the conventional methods of performing a Shakespearean play.

Turkey has also recently witnessed various non-conventional stagings of Shakespeare's plays. *Hamlet* is one of the plays Turkish directors and audiences alike most cherish. Out of the numerous *Hamlet* productions, *Hamlet* directed by Işıl Kasapoğlu, staged by Istanbul State Theatre in 2014, undoubtedly stands out owing to its anti-illusionist methods and solo performances, making extensive use of postdramatic theatre techniques. Putting together Hans-Thies Lehmann's theories on postdramatic theatre and Jill Dolan's argumentation on utopian performative, this study analyses how and in what ways the techniques of postdramatic theatre as employed in Kasapoğlu's *Hamlet* may put in motion the utopian performative in Dolan's understanding of the term. This postdramatic staging of *Hamlet* potentially creates moments of utopian performative when it selectively and overtly emphasizes the theme of corruption in Shakespeare's text. The production, by foregrounding the theme of corruption and contextualizing it in the present moment, encourages the audience to assume a critical perspective and "reinvest our energies in a different future" (Dolan 2). This study demonstrates that staging and adapting a play by Shakespeare in a specific context underlines the present agenda and focuses on how the play resonates with it to the extent that it makes the staged production break with conventional theatrical techniques that historically would reconstruct or reflect Shakespearean theatre par excellence. As Katharine A. Craik puts it, Shakespeare's works are "not only capturing emotional experiences that belong to the past but are also reimagining and reinscribing, in new ways, the interconnected actions, events and encounters, which make up affective life now" (3). The way Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is reimagined by Kasapoğlu allows the viewers to think about and within the present time due to the interaction of this postdramatic staging with the particular political context leading to a momentary utopian performative.

Contextualizing the present moment by way of a presentist approach has become popular in many adaptations in theatre. As it is proposed by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes in *Presentist Shakespeares*, we should certainly “recognise the permanence of the present’s role in all our dealings with the past. We cannot make contact with a past unshaped by our own concerns” (3). Evelyn Gajowski further explains that “presentism has developed as a theoretical and critical strategy of interpreting Shakespeare’s texts in relation to contemporary political, social, and economic ideologies, discourses, and events” and it “has consequently challenged the dominant theoretical and critical practice of reading Shakespeare historically” (675). Nevertheless, it does not mean that in a presentist evaluation of a literary or dramatic text, history does not matter. On the contrary, the past and the present are to keep their intricate and inseparable bond as historicism cannot exist without a latent presentism (Grady 115). Highlighting the value of the intersection of the past with the present in works of art, especially in theatre, is an element that not only enriches our perceptions about the original work (produced in history) but also has an illuminating effect on the reception of it (produced in present). When postdramatic techniques are employed by Kasapoğlu in *Hamlet* for the Turkish political/historical context to resonate in the production, *Hamlet*’s discursive references to the theme of corruption in particular serve as a presentist stimulus that can affectively and intellectually move the cast and the audience, thus creating a utopian performative with the Turkish political context as the difficult and yet necessary emotive background.

The year 2013 in Turkey was marked by civil unrest which was sparked by the Turkish government’s plans to demolish Gezi Park on Taksim Square in Istanbul in order to erect a shopping centre. When democratically held environmental protests against the demolition of the park were met with violence from the government and over 100 people were injured, some seriously, they soon turned into massive demonstrations against the government. The police used tear gas and water cannons to raid the protesters, but the unrest continued and grew in size as artists, intellectuals, and opposition MPs joined in (Letch *The Guardian*). As Ali Bilgiç explicates in his article, although the protests started with a pro-environmental agenda, they “quickly became a form of resistance against neo-Ottomanist conservatism [...] and the protests rapidly became ‘transenvironmental,’ where environmental concerns connected with issues such as a general lack of democracy, human rights violations, and economic problems” (267). Later in the same year, Turkey was shaken by another crisis known, also internationally, as “The 2013 corruption scandal” or “17-25 December Corruption and Bribery Operation,” involving several key politicians in the government, the family members of cabinet ministers as well as a number of famous bureaucrats and businessmen. Although the corruption allegations were severely denied by the government and MPs, a cabinet reshuffle

soon followed which shook the public deeply and remained on the agenda for months to follow, just like the Gezi upheaval beforehand.

One may ask about the validity of the relationship between these events which shook the Turkish social and political landscape and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which in its core may be read as a play about an intellectual with humanistic values whose father was killed by his uncle and whose main ethical dilemma concerns not only this murder, but also the marriage between his mother and uncle that he sees as unlawful and incestuous; his is the drama of the inability to act and to take revenge. Therefore, on the surface, it may not seem plausible to relate Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with the aforementioned Turkish political and social context. The crucial relation is established only indirectly between the plotline of *Hamlet* and the events in Turkey through the way *Hamlet* was directed by Işıl Kasapoğlu. His deployment of postdramatic theatre techniques with specific dramaturgical effects, the foregrounding—sometimes overemphasizing—of the theme of corruption as verbalized by Hamlet in the playtext, and more importantly, the date of the staging, following the Gezi upheaval and the alleged corruption scandal, are meaningful and not accidental. Through the focus on the political in *Hamlet*, Kasapoğlu's production contained the affective and potentially transformative potential for the audience members who could not help but read the production along the presentist lines and relate Hamlet's speeches on corruption in general to the situation in 2014, thus providing the fleeting frames for a strong, potentially cathartic emotion, becoming a utopian performative in the process.

### **Theatre, Utopia and Utopian Performative**

Theatre is undeniably a utopian space in itself regardless of the genre or content of the play performed on the stage. According to Siân Adiseshiah, theatre is utopian since it creates a “shared performance between theatre practitioners and audience that takes place in a collective space (or ‘no-space’)” (3) and can be at the same time anti-utopian because traditional and conventional stagings make use of the “modes of hierarchy, exclusivity and discipline that are inscribed in the economics, cultural forms and institutions of bourgeois theatre” (3). However, as explained above, in a postdramatic production it would be possible to employ techniques that avoid an anti-utopian enactment and thus potentially lead to a creation of a pro-utopian impulse. Such a utopian configuration in theatre and theatre's potential to create a utopian space has been the focus of attention of writers, scholars, directors and theatre practitioners. Jill Dolan, in particular, discusses the notion of a utopian performative that underlines the importance of relatability of theatre and may serve as an artistic setting for inspiring social change with the emotional and intellectual needs of its audience.

Dolan's seminal book *Utopia in Performance. Finding Hope at the Theatre* (2005) reconfigures, as its title suggests, the connection between theatre and utopia as, to her, "Utopia can be a placeholder for social change, a no-place that the apparatus of theatre—its liveness, the potential it holds for real social exchange, its mortality, its openness to human interactions that life outside this magical space prohibits—can model productively" (63). Dolan describes theatre as a place of live performance bringing people together to exchange experiences of creating meaning and imagination where "fleeting intimations of a better world" can be captured (2). She bases her argument on various contemporary performances and explains that each of them created "both affective and effective feelings and expressions of hope and love" (2), not solely on individual basis but communally. Dolan explicates what she means by utopian performative:

*Utopia in Performance* defines and charts what I call *utopian performatives*. Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. [...] Utopian performatives [...] make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better. (5-6)

As it is clear, Dolan emphasizes that utopian performatives contain emotionally effective moments, moments that lead to an "affective vision" of a better world. This affective moment has a fleeting connection with utopia as a philosophical and political construct; Dolan's utopia in theatre is "a utopia always in process, always only partially grasped" (6). Significantly, such moments of fleeting emotion give audiences the opportunity to think and contemplate critically, in the Brechtian sense. As a matter of fact, Dolan does not hesitate to accept that utopia in theatre does not necessarily mean that one needs to find a representation of a better place or world on the stage (reminding her readers of the literal meaning of utopia: "no place"); on the contrary, by citing from such Marxist philosophers as Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, she confesses that she yearns for the presentation of alternative worlds on the stage. Such alternative worlds are possible in utopian performatives as they resist fixed and static structures. Exploring how performance can be used as a way of creating an emotionally meaningful and intense experience in the present moment that can transcend the current reality and inspire a hopeful vision for the future through "utopian performatives", Dolan believes that the enunciation of certain actions can create an effective outlook on a world that could potentially be improved through heightened experiences of aestheticism, generosity and connection (5-6). The author argues that live performance creates a space for people to

come together, share meaningful experiences, and imagine a better world. The book investigates how different kinds of performance can bring about a sense of a larger public in which people feel connected to each other and share a vision for a future filled with hope and a more radical humanism (2).

The utopian performative often operates on embodied, visual and affective languages in a space of performance which approaches something “not-yet-set but [which] can be felt as desire” or fantasy (Dolan 7). This notion of a performative seems to be similar to Bertolt Brecht’s notion of *gestus* (Dolan 7), which is an action in performance that shapes social relations and allows the spectator to critically contemplate upon them. Utopian performatives are a way of conveying to spectators and actors alike the possibility of a more equitable and just future. They emotionally engage those witnessing them in order to encourage civic engagement that can potentially lead to revolutionary change.

Dolan also discusses how utopias cannot be pinned down to a single prescription by referring to Bloch and Marcuse’s view on art’s potential to express alternatives as she believes that:

Utopian performatives exceed the content of a play or performance; spectators might draw a utopian performative from even the most dystopian theatrical universe. Utopian performatives spring from a complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which take shape in moments of utopia as doings, as process, as never finished gestures toward a potentially better future. (8)

This is how performance uniquely relates to the concept of utopia: it is seen as a hopeful process that continually works towards a better future. Performance has particular characteristics such as temporality and spatiality that allow it to explore the utopian in a unique way, allowing audiences to be slightly disoriented and explore imagined places, which are essential for the process of imagining utopia. Performance also provides a sort of hope, as it is a product of both the present and the past, and can offer predictions and resolutions for the future. The author believes that utopia in performance captures the fleeting nature of time creating a communal epiphany in which existing social structures are put into question (13-14).

Dolan also highlights the idea that performance has the potential to push social and political agendas forward, as demonstrated through the idea of being “passionately and profoundly stirred” in theatre. It acknowledges that people from different backgrounds experience theatre differently, and can draw on those unique experiences to advance their own cause. The author also expresses faith in the idea that emotions experienced during performances can act as a catalyst for social action. In conclusion, the text argues that theatre attendance results in a transformative experience, to serve as a powerful tool for greater

social change (15). In her book, Dolan frequently contemplates on the liminal moment of theatrical reception: the very moment during the performance and just after it when you are physically in the theatre building and have not left it yet. This moment, as pointed out by Elinor Fuchs in her review of Dolan's volume, "becomes her [Dolan's] 'utopian performative,' a modelling of how it would feel to inhabit a better world" (198).

Although Jill Dolan does not mention postdramatic theatre or Hans-Thies Lehmann in her book, there are striking resemblances between the way she discusses utopian performatives that may operate in "dystopian" scenarios and Lehmann's notion of postdramatic theatre. Resisting hierarchies and presenting, rather than representing, an anti-illusionist, anti-mimetic (alternative) world in which neither the text/the plot structure, nor character(s), nor the playwright or director have absolute power, both postdramatic theatre and utopian performative try to reach equity through theatrical production.

## Postdramatic Theatre

Breaking away with all sorts of hierarchies in a staged production is one of the hallmarks of postdramatic theatre. In his ground-breaking book *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans Thies-Lehmann argues that after 1960s many theatre productions in the West toppled the hierarchy of the dramatic text over its production calling for an "equal treatment of the playtext, playwright, director, performers, costumes, décor, etc. in order to subvert the rooted hierarchal order" (Izmir 71). In Lehmann's view, in this new kind of theatre, "staged text (*if* text is staged) is merely a component with equal rights in a gestic, musical, visual, etc., total composition" (46, original emphasis). In other words, postdramatic theatre fosters the idea that the text does not have the upper hand as it usually has in conventional theatre; as pointed out by Markus Wessendorf, the idea is that "the other components of the *mise en scène* are no longer subservient to the text" (2003). Traditional theatre has historically enacted stories using mimesis, with the plotline set in a closed, fictional world. Disruptive elements such as asides or direct audience address have been present, but still they have indicated a unified world. According to Lehmann, postdramatic theatre blurs the line between fiction and reality. In some productions, this is achieved through what Lehmann calls "theatre solos and monologies" (125), which is also the case in the production explored in this study. In his book, he explicates how postdramatic theatre contains theatre solos and monologies with the restagings of classical dramas or narrative texts into one-person monologues. This can include iconic works such as *Faust*, *Story of the Maidservant Zerline*, *Hamlet* and *Orlando*, in which actors have taken on the challenge of playing multiple roles in a single production. Through these efforts, renowned literary works are given new life

allowing for direct political address and self-expression. Thus, postdramatic monologues are used to create a sense of reality, blurring the line between the imaginary and real world (Lehmann 125). In other words, postdramatic theatre, through the use of monology, moves away from reliance on representational language, and emphasizes the physical presence of the actor. Monology is thus used to create the effect of isolating the body and voice of the performer, and using their idiosyncrasies as part of the theatrical reality. This is considered a symptom and index of postdramatic theatre, as it is conceptually different from traditional drama (Lehmann 128). Given this egalitarian treatment, postdramatic staging of a text in general has the capacity of reinscribing or restaging texts in utopian/dystopian modes by building bridges between the past and present.

### **Postdramatic *Hamlet* and Utopian Performative in 2014 Turkey**

In order to describe how through postdramatic theatre it is possible to achieve what in Dolan's nomenclature is called a utopian performative one needs to address the ways in which utopian performative is generated through the postdramatic aesthetic of Kasapoğlu's *Hamlet*. Through a spectacular and striking solo performance by Bülent Emin Yarar, Kasapoğlu's *Hamlet* problematises such concepts of conventional theatre as representation, illusion, wholeness, character, and plot structure. The original playtext, translated into Turkish by Sabahattin Eyüpoğlu, was abridged collaboratively by the director, the actor and the dramaturg Zeynep Avcı, making the performance last for one and a half hours. Zeynep Avcı clarifies in an interview that in the creation of the text:

Shakespeare's unique poetry, actuality, universality and, of course, theatrical elements were brought to the fore. It was desired that the audience listened to Shakespeare to the fullest. Some very famous lines were left out.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, Kasapoğlu in an interview states that in the formation of the text the important thing was to be able to say what they wanted to and "to shout." Upon being asked the secret of *Hamlet* remaining topical, Kasapoğlu gives the following answer:

The play visualizes how we live through the dilemmas we fall into and therefore mirrors us. Indecision is modern man's greatest predicament, and Hamlet has a lot to do with the present. This is what makes the classics immortal, they are always up to date.

---

<sup>1</sup> Translations of interviews from Turkish into English are my own unless otherwise stated.



As an established and well-known director with many other successful productions, Kasapoğlu surprised many of his audience members who had expected to watch *Hamlet* staged with recourse to conventional methods of performance and mise en scène and closely following the basic plot known from the drama. The spectators' surprise can be well connected already to the design of the production poster, where the names of the director and other contributors are accompanied by the name of only one actor. This may be something shocking for the audience used to watching conventional ensemble-based Shakespeare performances. Challenging the habits of the audience is not an easy task; however, change in theatre often starts with challenges of this nature that are meant to transform the viewers and their habits and thought processes. As Peter Brook phrases it: "drama is exposure; it is confrontation; it is contradiction and it leads to analysis, construction, recognition and eventually to an awakening of understanding" (42).

The dramaturg Zeynep Avcı underlines this connection with the audience in her interview, arguing that Shakespeare as a playwright "has proven that theatre adds great value to human life as entertainment. I emphasize: entertainment! In other words, he is a man who proves that theatre is a magical art form that wants to entertain people, make people laugh and cry and sometimes excite them about the state of the world" (Avcı online). "Exciting people about the state of the world" while making them laugh and cry resides at the core of the theatre here; that excitement in Avcı's statement has a lot to do with creating an affective understanding of the world through the staging. Even



Bülent Emin Yarar in *Hamlet* (2017-2018)

(© The Turkish State Theatres Refik Ahmet Sevengil Digital Theatre Archive and Library)

though the political context of the production was not mentioned in the interview as such, the phrasing of this passage suggests that while entertainment is the principal preoccupation of “safe” politically conventional stagings, this production promises excitement which in-between the lines is meant to be read politically: after all, that excitement is not connected with the entertaining potential of theatre as magic *per se* but with what happens outside, in the world, in its present “state”.

Kasapoğlu revolutionizes the Turkish tradition of staging *Hamlet* by turning the playtext into a monologue, a practice rarely seen in modern Turkish theatre before.<sup>2</sup> Through such an insistence on the form, the theatrical conventions are de-hierarchized so that a non-hierarchical structure can emerge to further destabilise and potentially subvert the mimetic order but also challenge the politically “safe” ways of narrating things theatrically. The overall effect of achieving harmony of feeling and thought that realises itself as contentment is common in mainstream theatre, especially in comedy; here, it is questioned. What is potentially questioned through the alternations of form is not only, or not solely, the theatrical hierarchy but the hierarchy in the outside world. As Lehmann puts forth,

in postdramatic theatrical practice: different genres are combined in a performance (dance, narrative theatre, performance, etc.); all means are employed with equal weighting; play, object and language point simultaneously in different directions of meaning and thus *encourage a contemplation that is at once relaxed and rapid*. (87, emphasis mine)

Once Kasapoğlu’s production starts, the viewers see a massive red jewellery box placed in the centre of the stage. Shortly after it is opened, it becomes clear that the actor coming out of the box is playing not only the role of Hamlet but also many other roles in the play. Unlike traditional Shakespearean productions, which rely heavily on mimesis in a closed “fictive cosmos” (Lehmann 22), this production from the very onset disrupts hierarchies known from conventional theatre and foregrounds specific scenes/speeches that relate to one pervasive theme and set the tenor of the whole.

The lack of curtain-drawing, again an element rarely seen in Turkish modern theatre, strengthens the already mentioned effect of surprise achieved when the actor emerges out of the red, massive jewellery box. It may well signify the play and the protagonist’s exceptional status but, more importantly,

---

<sup>2</sup> Lehmann points out: “[o]ne aspect of postdramatic theatre revolves essentially around the monologue. It offers monologues of diverse kinds; it turns dramatic texts into monological texts and also chooses non-theatrical literary texts to present them in monologue form” (127).

signals the overarching metaphor underlining the production's focus on corrupt governance. Whatever the box may symbolize, right from the very beginning the viewer is surprised by the production's episodic structure initiated by the famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy (3:1). Subversion of the playtext occurs not only through its cutting but also shuffling the order of the events, as the production uses only chosen scenes from the play: Fortinbras is never mentioned; Laertes has no lines and Polonius, Ophelia and Hamlet address him without getting any answer. Once the jewellery box is opened, the actor utters the first six words, not in Turkish but in English: "To be or not to be;" he then switches to Turkish and looking directly at the audience raises his voice considerably, which allows him to underline what comes through as a heavily politicized message: he exclaims how conscience turns everyone into cowards and ends his speech in tears.

The abrupt beginning of the performance with a recognizable scene from the middle of the play and the mixing of languages create a momentary confusion which leads to a potential rediscovery of communication across multiplying signs. The scene seems to capitalise on what Lehmann discusses as simultaneity of signs which refers to the ideas of parataxis and non-hierarchy: unlike in the case of dramatic theatre, in which signs are communicated at one moment in order to stress their centrality, postdramatic theatre fosters the idea of simultaneity (Lehmann 87). On stage, the sounds of language are presented simultaneously; therefore, they are only partially understood, especially when different languages are spoken. Thus, when the principle of a single dramatic action is dismissed, the audience is given the opportunity of choosing and deciding "which of the simultaneously presented events they want to engage with" (Lehmann 88). Postdramatic theatre attempts to challenge the conventions of dramaturgical techniques and sign density by using techniques such as an abundance of images or an intentional absence of signs. This is to provoke the viewers to use their own imagination to fill in the gaps of the production and inform the narrative instead of relying solely on dense signposting navigating the plot.

By choosing to use the English version of "to be or not to be" the production signals alterity, achieving an alienation effect ameliorated to a certain extent by the audience's knowledge of the English phrase. Bülent Emin Yarar's performance as Hamlet capitalises on such defamiliarization as a technique achieved mainly through voice changes, diverse intonation patterns and diversified pitch. When he holds the crown in his hand and delivers the speech of Hamlet contemplating suicide, while staring directly at the audience, it is difficult to miss out on the theme of corruption, which is intentionally emphasized yet again: "O God, God,/How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable/ Seem to me all the uses of this world!/ [...] tis an unweeded garden/That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature/Possess it merely" (1:2:132-137).



Bülent Emin Yarar in *Hamlet* (2017-2018)  
 (© The Turkish State Theatres Refik Ahmet Sevengil Digital Theatre Archive  
 and Library)

Without doubt, in the scenes when the actor in the role of Hamlet philosophises on corruption and the weakness of the human condition, directly engaging the audience, he creates potentially transformative moments, in which the audience contextualises the monologue and through the embeddedness in the “here and now” of Hamlet/actor establishes parallelisms with their own “here and now”. There are more moments that establish this sense of connectedness and presentist continuity until the ending comes: the lights are off and sound effects indicative of sword and fighting are heard until the stage lights up and the actor speaks one of the most stunning lines from *Macbeth*: “What’s done cannot be undone.” He then continues to call upon the audience to bear witness to the story of the Prince of Denmark, fashioning the viewers into a collective Horatio: “in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, /To tell my story” (5:2:355-356). Then he cries vehemently. The lights go out and the jewellery box is closed.

The production renders mimetic illusion almost impossible due to its de-hierarchization of theatrical signs: there is no proper plot to follow for the audience and the events are not acted out but narrated. The use of stage props like glove dummies, satin cloths symbolising blood (red) and drowning (river; blue) also add to the anti-representational quality. As Lehmann indicates, “The principle of narration is an essential trait of postdramatic theatre; the theatre becomes the site of a narrative act. [...] One often feels as though one is witnessing not a scenic representation but a narration of the play presented” (109). This quality of becoming a witness to the struggle narrated by the actor in

the role of Hamlet seems to be of key significance in the way “the present time” is contextualised for the audience. Kasapoğlu’s production confronts the audience members with an uneasy reaction to the way the “here and now” is present and governed, and provokes the audience members by tasking them with bearing witness to the story they have just heard. It is crucial to highlight that the consequence in such theatre “is a changed attitude on the part of the spectator” (Lehmann 87). This “changed attitude” is built on a sense of empathetic listening, on being captivated by the narration, of being changed by it, provided that the sense of communal experience of the “here and now” has been established during the performance. Although content-wise, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* can be described as anything but utopian, in expressing the suppressed longing for a better future and despair for the disenchanting present, Işıl Kasapoğlu’s *Hamlet* can be thought of as what Dragan Klaić sees as: “dystopian drama [which] is in fact utopian; it involves utopian ambitions while describing total collapse” (3-4). In this particular case, transforming a well-known dramatic text into a monologue by means of postdramatic aesthetic qualities makes utopian performative possible since it enables a sense of shared predicament between the actor/Hamlet and the viewers/collective witnesses. As Dolan explains, “utopian performatives exceed the content of a play or performance; spectators might draw a utopian performative from even the most dystopian theatrical universe” (8). The production renders a utopian performative possible by presenting a transformative potential to the audience members, engaging them in our present moment by way of de-hierarchization of theatrical signs which translate into a resistance against the mimetic, but also political order. The production depicts not a finished product or a finite world but fashions the play into a monologue, a process which is in parallel with what Dolan thinks of utopia:

Thinking of utopia as processual, as an index to the possible, to the “what if,” rather than a more restrictive, finite image of the “what should be,” allows performance a hopeful cast, one that can experiment with the possibilities of the future in ways that shine back usefully on a present that’s always, itself, in process. Such a view of utopia prevents it from settling into proscription, into the kind of fascism that inevitably attends a fully drawn idea of a better world. (13)

## Conclusion

*Hamlet* of Istanbul State Theatre directed by Işıl Kasapoğlu in 2014 stands out from other productions due to its anti-illusionist methods and solo performance, utilizing postdramatic theatre techniques. The production’s overall effect and the

striving to create a utopian impulse may be seen as a subjective reflection, as this study is not based on scientific data analysis made among audience members. The production's staging time coincided with politically chaotic times in Turkey, however, and this is a context that weighed heavily on its performances in 2014, when many citizens in Turkey were feeling overwhelmed with the corruption of the authoritative system. Although *Hamlet* does not explicitly dwell on these issues, Hamlet's soliloquies on his disappointment with humanity, his comparison of an ideal king with an evil tyrant, and his ruminations on the meaning (lessness) of life might all be taken to reflect the general dissatisfaction among the republicans in Turkey. Jill Dolan argues that utopian performatives form "meaningful, moving, even transformational moments at the theatre" (33), supporting her argument with David Román's notion of "'critical generosity,' through which he argues that performance should be taken on its own terms, and read through the exigencies of a social moment, offering cultural criteria equally as important as more straightforward aesthetic ones" (33). In this respect, Kasapoğlu's *Hamlet* came across just like "us": "Hamlet's soliloquies have come to represent the ultimate articulation of a fraught, reflective consciousness: modern man captured in the process of emotional and intellectual formation" (Smith 163).

In this production, postdramatic techniques contributed to a potential emergence of the utopian performative, as argued by Jill Dolan, achieved through defamiliarization of the audience by the actor and through stressing the overarching metaphor of corruption to provide an empathetic platform for presentist contextualisation. The study argues that staging and adapting a play by Shakespeare in contemporary times has more to do with the present agenda than the play itself, especially if the production breaks away with conventional theatre. The reimagining and reinscribing of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Kasapoğlu in a presentist and postdramatic mode can stimulate the audience to think about the present time due to its interaction with the political context. As indicated by Dolan, the fleeting nature of utopian performances can leave us feeling both melancholic and hopeful as such moments could be short-lived. These performances offer a glimpse of the potential to understand what redemption and humanism mean and a world where our similarities unite us instead of our differences (Dolan 8). At such emotionally resonant moments, imagining a better world and future or an alternative one can be labelled as utopian performative and articulates a transformative potential in the audience even though it might be fleeting and elusive.

## WORKS CITED

- Adiseshiah, Siân. "Utopian Space in Caryl Churchill's History Plays: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *Vinegar Tom*." *Utopian Studies* 16.1 (2005): 3-26.
- Avcı, Zeynep. *Cumhuriyet*. 25 Nisan 2014. <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/shakespeare-olmasa-ne-yapardik-64951/>. Accessed on 18 August 2022.
- Avcı, Zeynep. <https://www.gazipasahaberler.com/HaberDetay/21117/Zeynep-Avci-Ile-Shakespeare-Ve-Hamlet-Uzerine---.html/>. Accessed 20 July 2022.
- Bilgiç, Ali. "Reclaiming the National Will: Resilience of Turkish Authoritarian Neoliberalism after Gezi." *South European Society and Politics* 23.2 (2018): 259-280.
- Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. Touchstone: New York, 1996.
- Craik, Katharine A., ed. *Shakespeare and Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2020.
- Dolan, Jill. *Utopia in Performance. Finding Hope at the Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Fuchs, Elinor. "Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre. By Jill Dolan." *Theatre Research International*, 32.2 (2007): 198-199.
- Gajowski, Evelyn. "Beyond Historicism: Presentism, Subjectivity, Politics". *Literature Compass* 7.8 (2010): 674-691.
- Grady, Hugh. "Shakespeare Studies, 2005: A Situated Overview." *Shakespeare: A Journal* 1.1 (2005): 102-120.
- Grady, Hugh and Terence Hawkes, eds. *Presentist Shakespeares*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- Izmir, Sibel. "The Oscillation Between Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre: Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*." *AAA: Arbeiten Aus Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 42.1 (2017): 71-99.
- Kasapoğlu, Işıl. *Arka Kapak Dergisi*. 32 (2018). <https://arkakapak.babil.com/arka-kapak-mayis-2018-sayisinda-dosya-konusu-hamlet/>. Accessed 25 July 2022.
- Klaić, Dragan. *The Plot of the Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.
- Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, Abington: Routledge, 2006.
- Letsch, Constanze. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/31/istanbul-protesters-violent-clashes-police/>. Accessed 24 January 2023.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*. Eds. Richard Proudfoot et al. Revised Edition. London, Bloomsbury, 2012.
- Smith, Emma. *This is Shakespeare. How to Read the World's Greatest Playwright*. Pelican, 2019.
- Wessendorf, Marcus. "The Postdramatic Theatre of Richard Maxwell," unpublished manuscript (2003) available online at <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~wessendo/Maxwell.htm/>. Accessed 1 March 2023.