

Two (Postmodern) Czech Shakespearean Adaptations: *Claudius and Gertrude and Emodrink of Elsinore*

Ivona Mišterová

“Gertrude: The second half of life is much more beautiful than the first because it has learned from the first. We are going to have a beautiful life...”
(Jiří Stránský and Jakub Špalek, 2007)

ABSTRACT

In her book on adaptation theory, Linda Hutcheon¹ argues that “[n]either the product nor the process of adaptation exists in a vacuum: they all have a context - a time and a place, a society, and a culture.” Texts travel from their locus originis to other destinations, times, and contexts, crossing geographical, language, and genre borders, and creating their own palimpsestic identity. As Hutcheon² states, “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary.” The objective of the article is to examine two Czech adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet: Claudius and Gertrude* (2007) by Jiří Stránský and Jakub Špalek, which was inspired by Saxo Grammaticus and John Updike’s novel *Gertrude and Claudius* (2000), and *Emodrink of Elsinore* (2009) by Josef Prokeš. The two plays differ significantly. Stránský and Špalek retell the story that precedes the well-known events at Elsinore and remade the remake. Prokeš, on the other hand, transfers the action to an obscure nightclub, turning Hamlet into a bartender accompanied by a faithful dog (albeit embodied by a human) and incorporating some Czech allusions. The paper focuses on the intertextual aspects of the Czech plays and their vertical rather than horizontal existence.

KEYWORDS

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, adaptation, appropriation, elasTEXTity

Introduction

Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* remains a popular play in the 21st century, captivating audiences on page, stage, and screen alike. The first decade of the millennium sees two distinctive Czech adaptations inspired from Shakespeare’s tragedy and other sources emerged. *Claudius and Gertrude* (2007), written by Jiří Stránský and Jakub Špalek for the Kašpar Theatre Company [Divadelní spolek Kašpar], is a 22-scene play that begins roughly two months before the death of King Hamlet and Gertrude’s subsequent marriage to Claudius. The play’s outline is based on John Updike’s novel *Gertrude and Claudius* (2000) and also incorporates elements from *The History of the Danes* (1514) by Saxo Grammaticus and the fifth volume of *Les Histoires Tragiques* by François de Belleforest (1576)³. The premiere of the play, titled *Emodrink of Elsinore*, took place two years later at the Centre for Experimental Theatre - Goose on a String Theatre (Centrum experimentálního divadla

1 Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York, London: Routledge, 2013), 18.

2 Hutcheon and O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 9.

3 Jiří Stránský and Jakub Špalek, *Claudius and Gertrude* (Praha: Dilia, 2007), 1.

Divadla Husa na provázku). Josef Prokeš's adaptation is a more loosely connected appropriation that builds on a few basic characters and motifs from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Despite being written two years apart, both plays represent distinctive products of specific adaptive processes originating in the Czech environment.

This article aims to trace the specifics of both works with regard to intra- and extra-textual factors shaping the process of adaptation. Specifically, the following questions will be addressed: 1) What kind of relationship exists between Czech adaptations and Shakespeare's tragedy? 2) Are there any distinctive markers of the adaptive process that de-Shakespeareize the works? and 3) Do the adaptations allow for a subtle political commentary?

State of the Art: The process of adaptation

The theoretical underpinnings that form the foundation for analysing the Czech Shakespearean adaptations, *Claudius and Gertrude* and *Emodrink of Elsinore*, will be delineated in this section. This framework draws upon established concepts such as adaptation, appropriation, and intertextuality, while introducing two pivotal notions: transfocalization and translocation.

Adaptation, especially within the context of Shakespearean works, has been the subject of extensive exploration, yielding a plethora of terminologies and interpretations. Despite the rich body of literature on the theory and practice of adaptation, certain quandaries persist regarding the precise definition of adaptation and the nuanced dynamics of its emergence. In her work, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders provides an array of terms encompassing both the formative process and the final product. These terms include version, variation, interpretation, continuation, transformation, imitation, pastiche, parody, forgery, travesty, transposition, revaluation, and revision.⁴ Sanders underscores the centrality of the source text in facilitating comparative readings and the role of the recipient, whose "pleasure" (to borrow from Sanders) resides in discerning both commonalities and distinctions between the source and the ensuing adaptation/appropriation. Sanders further distinguishes between adaptation, characterized by a relatively straightforward relationship with the source, and appropriation, with an entirely novel cultural creation emerging, situated within a distinct domain.⁵

The significance of the source text is also acknowledged by Christopher L. Morrow (2013)⁶ and Linda Hutcheon, who provides an oft-quoted definition of adaptation in her seminal work in the field, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2013). According to Hutcheon, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing."⁷ Each adaptation is endowed with an adaptive faculty, enabling it to "repeat without copying, to embed difference in similarity, to be at once both self and Other."⁸

4 Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York, London: Routledge, 2016), 6-7.

5 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 26.

6 Christopher L. Morrow, "Acknowledgement, Adaptation and Shakespeare in Ron Rashes's *Serena*," *South Central Review: The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* 30. no. 2 (2013): 136-161.

7 Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 9.

8 Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 174.

If we consider Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as a palimpsest, the adaptation seems to be engaged in a symbiotic conversation with the source in a virtual shared space. This symbiosis between the adaptation and source takes on diverse forms and is influenced by several factors, such as the number of sources, temporal distance, genre transformation, socio-cultural context, and the familiarity of the recipient with the original source. The adaptation communicates with the source, metaphorically speaking, and provides insight into how they coexist and the extent to which the source is projected into the adaptation. Ultimately, the receiving mind of the reader/spectator/player is where the final form of the work materializes, regardless of whether the genre is identical to the source or significantly different.⁹ Therefore, the recipient's familiarity with the source can affect their enjoyment/experience of the adaptation, as a greater familiarity can lead to a deeper appreciation of it.

This conceptual model inspired, in a sense, by natural association resonates with Christine Geraghty's concept of layering. In her book on film adaptations of literature and drama (2008), Geraghty presents adaptation as a layering process, which cannot be seen only literally, but also as an event in which modern attitudes and understandings are shaped through references to previous understandings and attitudes. "The layering process involves an accretion of deposits over time, a recognition of ghostly presences, and a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind."¹⁰ Similarly, Thomas Leitch observes that the layering process of adaptations also affects how changing social attitudes are preserved and understood, thus enabling seeing modern attitudes through references to previous understandings. Leitch identifies five ways of approaching adaptation: quotation, allusion, embedding, appropriation, or palimpsest. "In choosing as their core aim not fidelity to the source but fertility, adaptors can pose themselves two distinct options: an active engagement with the source, to be appreciated by those of their audience who happen to know it, or relative detachment from the source."¹¹ Geraghty's and, to some extent, Leitch's concepts of layering resonate with the reception theory expounded by the Constance School of reception aesthetics. While this reader-centric reception theory primarily analyses the act of reading and the reader's role therein, it is firmly grounded in the premise of recognizing the significance of an awareness of various strategies and thematic repertoires contained within texts, including adaptations. It hinges upon the recipient's ability to unveil the codes that govern these texts. As seen through the lenses of reception theory, it is possible to postulate that understanding adaptation is informed by previous knowledge and the knowledge of the source, whose continuity it ensures.

In the context of adaptation and appropriation, we also introduce the concept of transfocalization. Transfocalization, introduced by Gérard Genette (1982), pertains to the dynamic shift in narrative perspective or focalization within a text. This encompassing concept allows for alterations in the point of view from which the story is recounted, facilitating the emergence of

9 Ivona Mišterová, "Who Is Afraid of William Shakespeare? Shakespeare for Young Adults," *Brno Studies in English* 47, no. 1 (2021): 208–209.

10 Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 195.

11 Thomas Leitch, *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 597.

diverse perspectives and voices.¹² Transfocalization becomes an important lens through which we scrutinize how the Czech adaptations navigate the complex interplay between Shakespearean source material and their contemporary Czech milieu. These adaptations frequently defy conventional narrative focalization to offer innovative viewpoints on familiar characters and events.

Furthermore, the concept of translocation will be employed. Translocation, taken from Michael J. Walton (2006), extends beyond the confines of the literary text itself.¹³ It pertains to the geographical and cultural reconfiguration of a narrative where the adaptation relocates the narrative to an alternative temporal, spatial, or sociocultural context. In the case of *Claudius and Gertrude* and *Emodrink of Elsinore*, translocation manifests as they transplant Shakespearean characters and themes into the Czech context, engendering a transnational dialogue between Shakespeare's oeuvre and Czech postmodernism. This conceptual framework allows us to probe how the adaptations navigate the intricate interplay between global and local cultural dynamics.

Finally, Julie Grossman's concept of elasTEXTity, introduced in her work *Literature, Film, and Their Hideous Progeny: Adaptation and ElasTEXTity* (2015), finds application in the analysis. ElasTEXTity delineates the expansion of texts beyond their inherent boundaries, as they merge their identities with other artistic works that precede or succeed them. This concept engenders the adaptation's transformation beyond its initial form, encompassing other objects, texts, and identities. According to Grossman, elasTEXTity affords adaptors the freedom and latitude to incorporate various elements from source texts and apply them diversely.¹⁴ Although this approach may at times yield unconventional or divergent outcomes, the expansive nature of the term empowers adaptors to draw upon the multifaceted elements constituting any given source. Adaptations can, thus, craft their vision employing the raw materials of their chosen medium, regardless of whether it diverges from the medium of the source. This latitude allows adaptations to preserve, replicate, critique, repurpose, and imagine information from the past.

The Source Material: John Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius*

To better understand the specific Czech adaptations, *Claudius and Gertrude* and *Emodrink of Elsinore*, it is essential to explore their source material. In this case, John Updike's novel, *Gertrude and Claudius*, serves as the foundation for Stránský and Špalek's theatrical interpretation. This novel unfolds three distinct parts, each drawing inspiration from different historical and literary sources, as indicated by the nuanced spelling of character names. In Updike's novel, a third-person omniscient narrator guides the reader through the narrative, providing insights into characters' emotions, thoughts, and the unfolding events. The narrative structure of the novel is noteworthy for its three distinct sections, each drawing from various sources and marked by alterations in

12 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky. (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 285.

13 J. Michael Walton, *Found in Translation: Greek Drama in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 182-183.

14 Julie Grossman, *Literature, Film, and Their Hideous Progeny: Adaptation and ElasTEXTity*. Palgrave Studies in Adaptation and Visual Culture (Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2-3.

character names. This intertextual approach exemplifies the concept of adaptation, where existing narratives are reimagined and transformed into new forms.

The first part draws from a legend documented by Saxo Grammaticus in *Historia Dania* (1514), resulting in characters such as Gerutha, Horwendil (King Hamlet), Feng (Claudius), Amleth (Hamlet), and Corambus (Polonius). In this instance, we observe Updike's narrative engaging a medieval legend, reshaping the source material to provide novel insights into familiar characters and events. This interplay between the source and adaptation exemplifies the concept of adaptation, as it involves the reconfiguration of pre-existing narratives to create a novel. Within this section, the narrative voice adopts a sympathetic stance towards Gerutha, the central character, who is compelled to marry Horwendil, a beefy warrior and a "thoroughly modern man"¹⁵. The marriage is driven by political ambitions, and Gerutha becomes a pawn in her father's power-driven strategies. "And I am to be the plunder in exchange."¹⁶ Despite initial reservations about her husband, she reluctantly accepts her fate. The narrative subtly portrays her disappointment on their wedding night when Horwendil, exhausted from revelry and a cold bath, falls asleep, leaving her yearning for reciprocated love. This poignant moment sheds light on the complex emotions of a woman trapped in a loveless marriage.

He was asleep. Her husband, in a coarse-knit boxy nightcap, had collapsed from excessive festivity, and from three-hour's bath in winter air followed by his sauna of bedchamber ... Gerutha discovered in this moment a woman's secret: there is a pleasure in feeling love that answers, as with the heat of two opposing fireplaces, to that of being loved. The flow of a woman's love once started can be stanchd but with great pain.¹⁷

The narrative voice in this first part offers a compassionate perspective on Gerutha, analysing her motivations and providing a rationale for her subsequent actions. As Julia Sanders suggests, Updike implants a motive to Gertrude's (Gerutha's) later adultery that diverges from Shakespeare's portrayal.¹⁸ Gerutha's recollection of her bridal night's disappointment, combined with the pain of her deflowering and the absence of her own mother, potentially shape her subsequent behaviour, including her hesitant affection for her own child, Amleth.

The first part concludes with Feng's (Claudius's) burgeoning affection for Gerutha, marked by his gift of a tamed falcon to her. In stark contrast to Shakespeare's depiction of Claudius, Updike presents Feng in a significantly more detailed and favourable light. Feng, younger than his brother with just eighteen months, boasts a darker complexion and a leaner build. He spends most of his time in German territories, engaged in military and intelligence activities for the Emperor. His proficiency in languages and diplomatic skills adds depth to his character. Despite nearing the age of thirty, Feng remains unmarried, his yearning for love evident in his "dark-eyed diligent demeanour", reminiscent of Horwendil's.¹⁹

15 John Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2000), 4.

16 Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius*, 5.

17 Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius*, 25.

18 Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 72.

19 Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius*, 14.

The second part of the novel shows Geruthe and Fengon embarking on an illicit affair, navigating the perils and obstacles they faced, and their secret rendezvous at Corambis's cottage, facilitated at Geruthe's request. This translocation of their encounters from the royal court to a secluded cottage signifies a departure from traditional settings, creating a transnational dialogue between Shakespeare's works and (post)modernism.

Guilt and societal disapproval weigh heavily on them, especially with Geruthe's husband's awareness of their relationship. Simultaneously, Fengon strives to maintain his role as the king's brother and advisor while harbouring ambitions for power. As Gertrude questions the morality of their actions and the toll of their forbidden love, tensions escalate when King Horvendile accuses his brother of adultery. "[S]peak not to me again. I curse you, brother, and the monstrous yoke of nature that bade us issue from the same womb".²⁰ The climactic moment arrives when Fengon, motivated by Corambis, contemplates regicide to secure his ambitions. However, he meticulously shields Geruthe from any involvement, preserving her innocence for both her sake and their own since "she must stay innocent for her sake and ours".²¹

In the third section of the novel, the repercussions of King Hamlet's murder begin to unfold. Gertrude and Claudius must grapple with the aftermath of their actions. Claudius ascends to the throne after the murder, and Gertrude is left to confront the guilt and consequences of her choices. This exploration of the aftermath of a regicide and its impact on characters aligns with the concept of transfocalization, where shifts in narrative perspective offer a multiplicity of viewpoints and voices.

In John Updike's prequel to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Gertrude and Claudius take centre stage, and their complex relationship is explored in depth, encompassing their affair and the events that set the stage for Shakespeare's renowned tragedy.

Doing justice to Claudius, or who is the wicked brother?

In their Czech adaptation of *Claudius and Gertrude*, Jakub Špalek and Jiří Stránský were inspired by John Updike's novel *Gertrude and Claudius*, which itself reimagines Shakespeare's iconic *Hamlet*. However, the Czech adaptation reverses the order of the protagonists' names, a shift that not only reflects the play's focus on Claudius but also serves as a deliberate act of intertextuality and adaptation.

Set in a contemporary political landscape, *Claudius and Gertrude* offers a fresh take on Shakespeare's timeless characters. The play opens with a pivotal letter from King Hamlet to his son, setting the stage for the unfolding drama. In this adaptation, Claudius emerges as a complex character, far removed from the straightforward antagonist of Shakespearean lore.

Claudius, the driving force behind the play's narrative, becomes the central figure. As King Hamlet's urgent letter implicates Gertrude in an alleged affair with Claudius, the plot is set into motion. This accusation casts Claudius as the catalyst of the story's conflicts. Gertrude is unhappy in her marriage and finds solace in Claudius, but King Hamlet suspects her of infidelity with his

²⁰ Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius*, 150.

²¹ Updike, *Gertrude and Claudius*, 151.

younger brother and confronts Claudius. In a fiery speech, Claudius objects to the accusation and strips his brother of his mask as a beloved king and warrior.

“Finally! Finally, your obedient mask has fallen! [...] I saw how much effort it took her [Gertrude] not to tremble with disgust when the king joined your hands. And I know how you got drunk like an animal after the wedding, out of fear that you wouldn’t be able to stand up to your wife anymore, because you knew that only violence could still arouse you [...] I know that you vomited on the wedding bed and she had to fight with you to wash and change you [...] Two months later, you - again properly fortified with liquor - were already shouting in the hallway to open her womb because you were coming to make her happy with a son.”²²

Similarly, in Updike’s novel, the play introduces a motive indicating Gertrude’s attraction to Claudius and his unwavering desire to protect her: “I won’t let him kill you [Gertrude]. I won’t.”²³ While Hamlet harbours a wish for Claudius’s demise, he presents his brother with an opportunity to face his own guilt and seek redemption by taking his own life using poison. However, Claudius, who fails to recognise his actions as guilt, deviates from King Hamlet’s plan and instead opts to poison Hamlet. His intention behind this act is to eliminate Hamlet to protect Gertrude and preserve his relationship with her.

After King Hamlet’s death, Hamlet assumes a more active role, becoming the driving force of the events and, in his own way, the orchestrator of Claudius’s life and fate. His decisions and subsequent actions are not motivated by a desire for revenge (as in Shakespeare’s tragedy) but rather by the quest to find the rightful ruler for Denmark, a position he does not consider himself fit for. He is indeed torn by “Shakespearean” ambivalence, stemming not from the dilemma of existence versus non-existence but from the conflict between the duty that demands succession and accepting the crown and his awareness of his own imperfection: “But I cannot make a royal vow when I know that I lack the ability and the skill to fulfill it.”²⁴ However, he finds a solution that would secure, for Denmark, an educated, knowledgeable, and courageous man, his uncle Claudius, who is unanimously approved by the Danish council. It should be noted, however, that Claudius’s intention is not to seize the Danish crown but rather to regain his dignity and self-respect, which seem to be lost after his act. “I do not want to be a king! Not of Denmark, nor any other - much prettier - country in Europe! I want to be what I was just a few days ago - I want my freedom and pride back!”²⁵

Claudius, however, is concerned about his physical condition —his inability to walk — (Saracens severed his spine while defending the holy grave), which, in his opinion, could be perceived negatively by the public. It is noteworthy that Claudius perceives his paraplegia as a major weakness in relation to his status as a ruler but not in relation to Gertrude. In this regard, it is necessary to mention the casting of the production, with the role of Claudius portrayed by Jan Potměšil (born in 1966), who has been confined to a wheelchair since a car accident in 1989. The paraplegia expressed through the text and subsequently through the stage reality enhances

22 Jiří Stránský and Jakub Špalek, *Claudius and Gertrude*, 9. (All quotes from the text of the play were translated by the author).

23 Stránský and Špalek, *Claudius and Gertrude*, 11.

24 Stránský and Špalek, *Claudius and Gertrude*, 13.

25 Stránský and Špalek, *Claudius and Gertrude*, 26.

the intensity of the relationship between Claudius and Gertrude, which is not shaped by desire but, as it seems, by deep emotion. After some hesitation, Claudius agrees to assume the Danish crown. Surprisingly, on the coronation day, Hamlet politely excuses himself in a letter to be absent, and instead, Fortinbras takes part in it. In the text of the play, the Norwegian prince is introduced ex-post through a conversation between Gertrude and Ophelia, in which Gertrude's positive and Ophelia's concerned view of Fortinbras are juxtaposed, culminating in a praising characterisation of King Claudius. The play ends in a joyful tone of Gertrude and Claudius's happiness, with slight disturb of Hamlet's (sudden) seclusion. "We're going to have a wonderful life, Claudius – darling - ... I'm so happy, so happy... God, thank you."²⁶

To explore Claudius's inner world, the play employs the literary technique of transfocalization, allowing the audience to access his thoughts and emotions. This narrative style humanizes Claudius, unveiling the complexities of his character. His internal struggles, motivations, and evolving relationship with Gertrude are laid bare for the audience to empathize with. Through transfocalization, the adaptation navigates the intricate landscape of Claudius's psyche.

Claudius and Gertrude is a product of intricate intertextuality, drawing from both Updike's novel and the Shakespearean source material. Claudius's character, once a one-dimensional villain, gains depth through the layering of these texts. The interplay between different sources enriches the narrative, creating a dynamic web of intertextual connections. This fusion transcends the boundaries of a single source, enriching the audience's understanding of Claudius and Gertrude's complex relationship.

Beyond character development, the play engages a form of translocation, shifting Claudius from Shakespearean Denmark to an unspecified sociocultural milieu. Claudius's actions and decisions take on a different significance within this new context; his motivations shaped by the dynamics of politics, power, and personal ambition. Claudius's quest for redemption and self-respect takes centre stage. His character is imbued with a sense of humanity as he grapples with the consequences of his actions. His relationship with Gertrude, far from a mere affair, becomes a deeply emotional connection marked by ethical dilemmas and personal sacrifices.

In this nuanced exploration of Claudius's character, *Claudius and Gertrude* exemplifies the dynamic nature of Shakespearean adaptations. Through transfocalization, translocation, and intertextuality, the play offers a fresh perspective on familiar characters and themes, enriching the theatrical experience with layers of meaning and complexity. It invites audiences to question the boundaries of morality, love, and ambition. In the realm of adaptation and intertextuality, *Claudius and Gertrude* is a testament to the enduring power of Shakespearean narratives transcending time and place. It prompts the readers and audience to revisit these characters with fresh eyes, reminding us that the stories of Claudius and Gertrude are not confined to the pages of history but are living narratives that continue to evolve and captivate audiences in new and unexpected ways. As mentioned earlier, *Claudius and Gertrude* by Stránský and Špalek is an adaptation of Updike's novel, which inspired their work. This gives the play a specific status –an adaptation of an adaptation. However, the title is revealing as it suggests the focus of attention and whose actions come under scrutiny.

²⁶ Stránský and Špalek, *Claudius and Gertrude*, 23.

Who is the emodrink of Elsinore intended for?

In Josef Prokeš's play, aptly titled *Emodrink of Elsinore*, a departure from the traditional Shakespearean narrative is observed. This adaptation, already signposted by its title, thrusts the character of Hamlet into a modern-day setting, specifically within the dimly lit nightclub known as Elsinor. The lone employee of this establishment, a young bartender visually and verbally aligned with the punk subculture, signifies a generational clash, reflecting the transition of punk from a substantive movement to a shallow trend in the 1990s. Despite the narrative's temporal placement, the bartender embodies the rebellious spirit of the younger generation, contrasting with the narrow-mindedness of their parents' era.

The play's set and the use of music and song excerpts adds to the minimalistic and immersive nature of the production. The use of an amateurishly drawn sign above the door and a battered guitar in the corner further emphasises the dingy and run-down atmosphere of the nightclub. The incorporation of song lyrics adds to the overall theme of the play, as the lyrics explore themes of alcohol, death, revolt, and the desire for originality.

Drawing from the punk ethos, the bartender curates his identity, casting himself as a contemporary Hamlet. Clad in an "inky cloak" and "suits of solemn black" (I. 2. 77–78),²⁷ he dons a Hamletian pendant, grappling with unanswered questions about his estranged father and himself. While projecting an outward veneer of confidence and irony, he veils his inner insecurities and mental distress, gradually succumbing to a looming madness he adeptly conceals. In a bid to substantiate his Hamlet-like persona, he passionately recites excerpts from Shakespeare's tragedy, occasionally sharing the stage with Ophelia, also known as the Techno-Whore, a reflection of their shared history of expulsion from acting studies at the conservatory.

Notably, the characters are bestowed with contemporary designations that align with their present-day roles: Emo-boy (Laertes), Customer (King Hamlet), Dance Master, and others. These designations serve as thematic cues, probing the isolation and insanity accompanying life in an ever-changing and uncertain world. Set in the Czech Republic of the mid-1990s, a period of significant political and social upheaval, the play explores how its characters navigate this evolving world, exposing the repercussions on their mental well-being.

Intertextuality and adaptation are pivotal in *Emodrink of Elsinore*. The bartender's fervent recitation of Shakespearean speeches fully depicts his Shakespearean counterpart not only in appearance but, more importantly, through shared personal experiences across different periods. This connection fosters a newly emerging father-son relationship, mediated, in part, through Shakespeare's tragedy. The bartender's interactions with his mother, Emo-boy, and Techno-Whore possess an underlying sensuality. Emo-boy, embodying both the bartender's doppelgänger and foil, explores themes of identity and originality, a quest for individuality amidst a society increasingly focused on conformity. It is a universal longing for uniqueness refracted through the prism of modernity.

Amidst this exploration of identity and alienation, the adaptation takes a distinct turn from Shakespeare's original work. Claudius and Polonius are notably absent, with the latter only

27 William Shakespeare, "Hamlet", in *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2004.

mentioned in connection to his murder a week earlier, “[t]he day before yesterday, they accidentally stabbed Polonius through the curtain”.²⁸ The cause of King Hamlet’s death has shifted from fratricide to suicide, wrapped in an enigmatic shroud of motives. Why did he choose to end his life in the lavatory of the shabby night bar, Elsinore, just after meeting his long-lost son? Perhaps it was disillusionment upon his return to his homeland or the startling reality of a son he had never imagined.

The decision to omit Claudius entirely in the play may also be viewed as a means of simplifying the narrative and focusing exclusively on Hamlet’s inner turmoil and his relationship with his father. By emphasising King Hamlet’s suicide as the central event, the play effectively underscores the themes of grief, guilt, and the complex father-son relationship. However, it may also be seen as a subversion of the original story, challenging the traditional power dynamics present in Shakespeare’s play, where Claudius usurps the throne from King Hamlet to become the new king and Gertrude’s husband. In contrast, in the Czech adaptation, the customer’s/King Hamlet’s suicide could be seen as a rejection of the corrupt political system that originally allowed Claudius to seize power. It might also be viewed as a commentary on the dangers of unchecked ambition and the corrupting influence of power. The bartender subsequently appropriates his father’s gestures and transforms from a conflicted youth into a self-assured property owner and dog owner, a living legacy from his deceased father.

Emodrink of Elsinore not only transports Shakespearean characters to a new temporal and cultural milieu but also masterfully weaves intertextuality, adaptation, translocalization, and translocation into a thought-provoking narrative, resonating with modern audiences while preserving the timeless essence of *Hamlet*.

In this regard, the situation in Czechoslovakia after 1989 could be a parallel. The mid-1990s in Czechoslovakia was characterised by significant social, political, economic, and cultural changes and challenges. Following the Velvet Revolution in 1989, which led to the downfall of the communist regime, Czechoslovakia transitioned into a democratic system. During the mid-1990s, the country underwent political and economic transformations, splitting it into two separate nations, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in 1993. This event, known as the Velvet Divorce, marked the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia. The two new countries embarked on their individual paths, establishing their own political institutions and policies.

Economically, the mid-1990s witnessed the implementation of market-oriented reforms and privatisation of state-owned enterprises. These changes aimed to transition the country from a centrally planned economy to a market-driven one. However, the economic transformation process faced challenges and resulted in disparities, with certain segments of society experiencing difficulties adapting to the new system. Overall, the political situation in Czechoslovakia during the early 1990s was unstable, with frequent changes in government and ongoing debates about the country’s future direction. This uncertainty strengthened the chaos and unpredictability that

28 Josef Prokeš, *Emodrink z Elsinoru* (Brno: Větrné mlýny, 2008), 55.

characterised the era, which often is referred to as “the wild 1990s,”²⁹ or even “wild, wild west”³⁰ due to the rapid and often unregulated changes that took place during that time. These changes had significant consequences for the country’s economy and society, causing instability and uncertainty that continued to shape Czech and Slovak politics and culture in the years that followed.

Conclusion: Navigating Adaptation, Intertextuality, and Translocation in Czech Shakespearean Adaptations

This paper discussed the intricacies of three distinct works: *Gertrude and Claudius*, *Claudius and Gertrude* and *Emodrink of Elsinore*. Complex processes of adaptation and intertextuality are engaged by the Czech adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which offered fresh perspectives through transfocalization and translocation, making each of these works distinctive and much appreciated.

Emphasising the modification of John Updike’s novel as the primary source text, Jiří Stránský and Jakub Špalek were able to effectively reshape it in *Gertrude and Claudius* into a theatrical production. This adaptation of an adaptation of Shakespeare’s tragedy takes audiences on a compelling journey through multiple genres, employing transfocalization to cast a new, illuminating light on familiar characters and scenarios. While the broadest scope for transfocalization is evident within Updike’s novel, tantalizing glimpses of this technique also surface in *Claudius and Gertrude*. Meanwhile, Josef Prokeš’s *Emodrink of Elsinore* boldly combines transfocalization and translocation, transporting the narrative to Czechoslovakia in the mid-1990s. This transformation, laden with socio-political undertones, can be regarded as a form of appropriation, crafting a distinct cultural product.

Considering the term *elasTextity*, as introduced in the earlier section, provides an apt framework for exploring the essence of these Czech Shakespearean adaptations. *elasTextity* encapsulates the idea that texts extend beyond themselves, merging their identities with other works of art that precede or succeed them. Much like these Czech adaptations, *elasTextity* grants adapters the creative freedom to draw from source texts and apply them in multifarious ways. In doing so, it offers narratives that can simultaneously preserve the essence of the past while forging new artistic frontiers. The *elasTextity* concept takes on a profound resonance in the context of Czech adaptations. These works breathe new life into Shakespeare’s play, resonating with the echoes of the original while also forging distinctive identities. Through this lens, the adaptations transcend a mere replication, elevating themselves to a level where they serve as tributaries to the grand river of Shakespearean literature.

Reflection on these Czech Shakespearean adaptations prompts a consideration of the intricate tapestry woven by the adaptive process. These works challenge conventional boundaries, offering reinterpretations that simultaneously pay homage to the original while carving out their distinct narratives. In doing so, they raise thought-provoking questions about identity, power, and rebellion in ever-evolving socio-cultural landscapes. In the realm of adaptation theory, the concept

29 Miroslav Vaněk, “Where did Grey Normalisation Come from?” *Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the Era of Normalisation*, eds. Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022), 148.

30 Allison Clark Ellis, *Impact of Political Socialization on the Support for Democratic Principles: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2021), 23.

of *elastextity* becomes a powerful tool for understanding the fluidity of texts and their capacity to evolve across temporal, cultural, and linguistic borders. It underscores how adaptations can extend the legacy of a source text, invigorating it with contemporary perspectives and resonances.

In conclusion, the Czech adaptations of *Hamlet* explored in this study exemplify the dynamic nature of adaptation, showcasing how it can transform and reinvigorate familiar narratives. Through the lenses of adaptation, intertextuality, transfocalization, and translocation, these works testify to the enduring relevance and malleability of Shakespeare's tragedy in the ever-shifting landscape of literature and theatre. In embracing *elastextity*, these adaptations enrich our understanding of the intricate relationships between texts and their capacity to transcend temporal and cultural boundaries. Moreover, both plays showcase a deep familiarity with Shakespeare's tragedy, encouraging and inspiring readers and audiences to reengage with its timeless essence.

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Ivona Mišterová is a senior lecturer at the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic. She received her Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Charles University in Prague. Ivona has published monographs on performances of English and American works staged in Czech theatres in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (*The Reception of Anglo-American Drama on Pilsen Stages*, 2013 and *Inter Arma non Silent Musae*, 2017).