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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE ON THE STAGE OF THE UZBEK NATIONAL  
ACADEMIC DRAMA THEATRE

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**Purpose of the study:** This article examines the history of staging the works of the English playwright William Shakespeare at the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre and analyzes the influence of classical dramaturgy on the creative development of the theatre troupe. In addition, the directors' and actors' interpretations of the staged works are highlighted separately.

**Methods:** Source analysis, scientific-practical analysis, historical analysis.

**Results:** The history of staging William Shakespeare's works at the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre was studied, and their current state was analyzed.

**Scientific novelty:** The dramaturgy of the English playwright William Shakespeare has significant practical importance in the formation of the Uzbek theatre, which was established in the European style. Therefore, studying the staging of the playwright's works in the Uzbek theatre is considered one of the important aspects of theatre studies. Shakespeare's works serve as a major creative school for the professional development of theatrical art in our country. The research aims to study and analyze not only the historical creative processes of Uzbek theatre art, but also the present-day status of theatre and classical works within modern Uzbek cultural life. The absence of comprehensive scientific sources on the staging of Shakespeare's dramaturgy in the Uzbek theatre to date necessitates a systematic analytical study of these creative processes.

**Practical application:** This research can be used as a scientific source for teaching foreign dramaturgy in Uzbek theatre education. In addition, it serves to promote Uzbek theatrical art at the international level.

**Keywords:** William Shakespeare, Uzbek theatre, classical dramaturgy, repertoire, director, actor, interpretation.

The ancient theatre of the Uzbek people has survived through the ages while preserving its traditions. In the early 20th century, the historical circumstances that emerged in the region created the foundation for the Uzbek theatre to begin operating in a new form, assimilating the cultural practices of European theatre. Unlike foreign theatres, the European-type Uzbek theatre had to develop within a very short period. From its earliest years, the newly formed theatre turned to foreign dramaturgy and sought to stage it with mastery. One of the local theatres that repeatedly turned to world classical works throughout its activity is the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre. In its early years, the theatre troupe staged such classical works as the German playwright Friedrich Schiller's *The Robbers* and *Intrigue and Love* (1921), the French playwright Molière's *The Miser* (1925), the Italian playwright Carlo Gozzi's *Turandot* (1927), and the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna* (1931). By 1933, having received the status of an "Academic Theatre," the troupe began staging the works of William Shakespeare. For more than a century of activity, the theatre has staged nearly ten of Shakespeare's works. During the Soviet era, the playwright's tragic and comic works such as *Hamlet* (1935), *Othello* (1941), *Romeo and Juliet* (1951), *Julius Caesar* (1958), *King Lear* (1966), and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1966) repeatedly appeared in the theatre's repertoire. Renowned directors such as M. Uyg'ur, A. I. Chirkin, A. V. Ladigin, A. Ginzburg, Sh. Qayumov, and N. Otaboyev



skillfully staged Shakespeare's plays. During the years of independence, the theatre troupe once again brought the works of the English playwright to the stage in new interpretations. *King Lear* (1998, staged by Sergey Kapriylov), *Hamlet* (2003, staged by Turg'un Azizov), and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2004, staged by Avliyoquli Khojaqulliyev) were presented to audiences with renewed vision.

The first Shakespearean work to appear in the Uzbek theatre repertoire was the tragedy *Hamlet*. This play narrates the tragic fate of the Prince of Denmark. The author reflects on themes of life and death, betrayal and duty, vengeance and forgiveness. The plot begins with news that the ghost of the recently deceased king has appeared in the castle. Prince Hamlet decides to speak with the apparition. The ghost of the late king informs his son Hamlet that his uncle is responsible for his death. Claudius, who murdered his own brother and seized the throne, marries Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude. Aware of the secret, Hamlet swears to avenge his father's spirit. The development of events begins from this complex turning point. How Hamlet responds to the heavy blow fate has dealt him/his actions, decisions, and judgment, sets the plot into motion.

Staging a large-scale, complex, and deeply tragic work like *Hamlet*, with its multifaceted characters, required great mastery from the troupe of the former Hamza Theatre. The director of the production, Mannon Uyg'ur, travelled to Moscow to watch the *Hamlet* performances being staged at "MXAT-2" and the Vakhtangov Theatre, gaining experience before returning. Driven by the desire to bring to the stage the Uzbek translation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by the writer Cho'lpon, he worked tirelessly with the theatre troupe for two years.

Art scholar Muhabbat To'laxodjayeva also notes in her research: "In the *Hamlet* production, directors M. Uyg'ur and Y. Bobojonov, along with stage designer I. Shlepyanov, worked with extensive historical material and made great efforts to reveal the ideological and artistic essence of the tragedy."<sup>1</sup>

In the first staged version of *Hamlet*, the role of the protagonist was performed by the talented Uzbek actor Abror Hidoyatov. In his interpretation, Hamlet appeared as an active, passionate, and easily provoked warrior-like figure. The actor's moral and spiritual nobility, as well as his uncompromising attitude toward evil and betrayal, left a strong impression on the audience. The premiere of the performance took place in February 1935. Crowds of spectators, coming from distant villages and districts to the capital, continued to fill the theatre without end. Statistical data confirming that *Hamlet* was performed 640 times between February 1935 and September 1938 demonstrates the immense interest of the Uzbek people in this work. During the theatre's tour to Moscow in 1936, the troupe successfully presented its version of *Hamlet* as well. The famous Czech journalist and public figure Julius Fučík, impressed by Abror Hidoyatov's portrayal of Hamlet, wrote with great enthusiasm:

*"Even if you do not know the language, you feel as though you hear every word of Shakespeare. This Hamlet can compete with the performances of the best European theatres."*

The role of Hamlet became a new, higher stage in the actor's creative biography.

The character of Ophelia, portrayed by actress Sora Eshonto'rayeva, won the hearts of the Uzbek audience. Her Ophelia was depicted as delicate, beautiful, pure, and charming. At the same time, she embodied traits of simplicity, obedience, and fragility. The prince's exile to another country plunged her into deep sorrow and despair. Unable to withstand the severe trials she faced,

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<sup>1</sup> Туляходжаева М.Т. Режиссура узбекского драматического театра (тенденции развития и современные проблемы) Дис. ...д-ра искусствоведения. Т.: 1996-г. 36-37 с.



Ophelia ultimately perished. The role of Ophelia became one of the actress Sora Eshonto'rayeva's finest and most memorable performances.

By mid-1937, the worsening political situation in the region led to many talented Uzbek writers being falsely accused of nationalism and becoming victims of repression. Among them was Cho'lpon, who had translated several of Shakespeare's works into Uzbek. For this reason, Cho'lpon's translation of *Hamlet* was removed from the theatre's repertoire.

As a result, by 1939 director Mannon Uyg'ur, in collaboration with Chirkin Aleksandrovich, was compelled to stage *Hamlet* using G'afur G'ulom's translation. In this second, newly staged version of the production, the role of the protagonist was performed not by Abror Hidoyatov, but by the young actor Olim Xo'jayev. Naturally tall, well-built, and elegant, Olim Xo'jayev suited the role of Prince Hamlet remarkably well. The young actor somewhat imitated Abror Hidoyatov, yet he could not embody the spirit of the role with the same depth as Hidoyatov. Nevertheless, his demeanor and bearing, reflecting dignity, nobility, and an inclination for deep contemplation, made his portrayal of Prince Hamlet appealing to the audience.

If Hidoyatov portrayed Hamlet as an active and fearless figure, Olim Xo'jayev's performance revealed an attempt to interpret Hamlet as a reflective, philosopher-like character. This version of *Hamlet* remained on the theatre stage for many years. To this day, Olim Xo'jayev's interpretation is frequently acknowledged by theatre scholars as the most masterfully crafted Hamlet role ever produced on the Uzbek stage.

Even during the years of the Second World War, the theatre troupe did not cease its creative activity. The success achieved by *Hamlet* increased the ensemble's interest in Shakespeare's dramaturgy. In the first half of 1941, another Shakespearean work entered the theatre's repertoire under the joint direction of N. Ladigin and M. Uyg'ur. The production of *Othello*, recognized as a major achievement of Uzbek national culture, was also acknowledged as a significant event in world theatre. The role of Othello was performed by Abror Hidoyatov, who had already gained international recognition for his portrayal of Hamlet.

*Othello* is a work built on realistic depiction; unlike in other Shakespearean tragedies, there are no supernatural characters such as ghosts or spirits. The play demonstrates how genuine love and trust can be destroyed through manipulation. Othello is a Moor and a highly respected general in the Venetian army, a brave and powerful military commander. Noble, pure-hearted, and loyal, Othello loves Desdemona deeply. Yet deep inside, he feels unworthy of the love of someone as beautiful as Desdemona. Because of this, Iago's cunning schemes eventually overpower him. He does not kill Desdemona solely out of jealousy. For Othello, Desdemona embodies the highest human virtues, idealism and moral purity. Misled by Iago's slander about betrayal, Othello believes he restores moral order by killing her. But Desdemona is innocent, and Othello's act, committed in the name of justice, proves to be an injustice. Once he realizes this truth, Othello takes his own life by plunging a dagger into himself.

Much has been written about Abror Hidoyatov's portrayal of Othello. The character he created is enriched with traits characteristic of Eastern men. His passion, bravery, sincerity, courage, and warmth made the role incredibly close to the hearts of Uzbek audiences, contributing to its immense success. Hidoyatov portrayed Othello as a delicate, nature-loving, deeply emotional person. In Othello's movements, clothing, speech, demeanor, emotions, intellect, refined taste, elegance, and dignity were ever-present. For this reason, his striving for beauty, and his belief in the possibility of moral beauty and harmony in human life, felt natural. Hidoyatov's Othello was a powerful and majestic figure<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Qodirov M. Qodirova S. IV Bob. Sho'rolar davri mafkurasining o'zbek teatri rivojida aks etishi // O'zbek teatri tarixi (darslik) T.: 2019 "Niso poligraf" MCHJ bosmaxonasi. 182-185 b.



Hidoyatov's portrayal of Othello captivated audiences so deeply that they left the theatre overwhelmed with unforgettable impressions and emotion. The greatness of the actor's mastery lay precisely in this. Even today, when we speak of *Othello*, Abror Hidoyatov's image immediately appears before our eyes. Shakespeare's Othello, intertwined with Hidoyatov's physical presence and artistic expression, became permanently engraved in the memory of the Uzbek people.

It is impossible to imagine *Othello* without the character of Iago, whose schemes destroy the great love between Desdemona and Othello. The role of Iago was portrayed on the Uzbek stage by actors Olim Xo'jayev and Nabi Rahimov. Olim Xo'jayev depicted Iago as intelligent, sharp-minded, and courageous. Yet these qualities serve only to harm others and destroy lives. He is a jealous, vile, dark-hearted man who cannot tolerate Othello's happiness.

Nabi Rahimov's Iago was also portrayed as extremely cunning and malicious. He presents himself as a loyal friend to Othello, yet does not hesitate to become the murderer of good and innocent people in pursuit of his own goals. Iago believes that only he is worthy of all good things. Through their masterful performances, Nabi Rahimov and Olim Xo'jayev created unique and unforgettable interpretations of the character.

In conclusion, it must be said that staging classical works such as *Hamlet* and *Othello* requires immense responsibility from both the director and the actor. Although these works belong to a people with different religion, customs, and culture, the themes they address concern all of humanity. Therefore, staging such profound works and performing these roles, striving to be the best among the best and creating monumental stage productions, is no easy task. The Uzbek National Academic Drama Theatre has succeeded in engraving such exceptional theatrical masterpieces into the history of Uzbekistan's art.

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