No Puppets Dallying: Green’s 1626 Production of *Hamlet*

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In a 2013 essay in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Tiffany Stern explores the possibility that the English actors who were on the Continent in the seventeenth century presented puppet plays. In particular, she asks whether the *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* performed in Dresden in 1626 or *Der Bestrafte Brudermord* (*Fratricide Punished*) published in Germany in 1781 and once extant in an earlier manuscript could have been such “motions.” In the end, she makes no judgment, but the essay judiciously weighs the case for and against the puppet *Hamlet*. This essay examines the continental records in order to determine whether the 1626 performance of *Hamlet* was likely to have been a puppet play. Along the way, it reconstructs the seventeenth-century continental stage history of *Hamlet*.

Documentary evidence on the visit of the *englischen Komödianten* to Dresden in 1626 has been the subject of scholarly interest for at least 150 years. A record in the Saxon court calendar, published by Moritz Fürstenau in 1861, indicates that a company of English actors performed *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* in Dresden on 24 June 1626 and, over a nine-month period, twenty-eight other plays, including *The Prodigal Son; The Proud Woman of Antwerp; The Turkish Mahomet and Hiren the Fair Greek; Romeo and Juliet; Julius Caesar; Nobody and Somebody; Doctor Faustus; Fortunatus; Barabas, Jew of Malta; and Lear, King of England* (Fürstenau 96–97)—plays also in, or related to, the repertory of the English stage. The calendar also records the company’s 1627 visit to Torgau for the April marriage festivities of Princess Sophie of Saxony and the Landgrave Georg of Hesse-Darmstadt. The entry names several members of the troupe, which appears (not uncommonly) to have consisted of both German and English players, including “Robertt. Pickelheringk,” i.e., Robert
Reynolds, who played the clown Pickelhering, and “Der Engelernder. Der Rothkopff” (Fürstenau 100), the “redhead,” a moniker associated with John Green.

Green spent at least two decades playing on the Continent. His name first appears with that of Robert Browne, the well-known actor-manager who, for some years beginning in the mid-1590s, was in the service of the Landgrave Moritz of Kassel. This was in 1603, when he, Browne, Robert Ledbetter, and others performed in Lille. He is also in Frankfurt records in 1606 with Browne and Ledbetter and in 1607 with Browne. When in the Landgrave’s service, the players performed on the road and at court, where, in 1604–5, Moritz had a theater built for them, called the Ottoneum (Schlueter 248–50). Eventually, the Landgrave Moritz’s substantial group of English actors—there were at least twenty-four—formed splinter groups, presenting plays at fairs, in towns, and in courts throughout the Holy Roman Empire and beyond. In his two decades on the Continent, Green played in Warsaw, Vienna, and numerous German cities, as well as in the Spanish Netherlands, at times styling himself a servant of the Elector of Brandenburg. Green first appeared in Gdańsk (then Danzig) in 1607, and he was there in 1616 with a company of eighteen players that included Reynolds, Browne’s son-in-law, who had recently arrived on the Continent. Notably, Green led the first English troupe to perform in the Gdańsk fencing school, which opened in 1612.

In 1617, his company performed in the ceremonies celebrating the crowning of Ferdinand II of Styria as (Catholic) King of Bohemia. If E. K. Chambers’s “impression” is correct, Green and Browne teamed up again in 1618 (Chambers 2:284). In 1619, the pair were apparently together in Prague for the coronation of Frederick V, Elector Palatine, as the new (Protestant) Bohemian king. (Frederick was the husband of Princess Elizabeth, King James’s daughter; his defeat a few months later earned the royal couple the appellation “Winter King and Queen.”)

Green turns up in a well-documented tale concerning the players’ 1608 visit to Graz, Austria, where, at the celebration of the betrothal of Archduchess Maria Magdalena to the Duke of Florence, Cosimo Medici, they performed ten plays. The occasion, which took place during Fasching (the carnival season preceding Ash Wednesday), is described in a letter dated Wednesday, 20 February 1608, that the Archduchess sent to her brother Ferdinand, the same Ferdinand who was to be crowned King of Bohemia in 1617. The Archduchess offers an account of the plays the company performed during their two-week visit to Graz:
On the following day, Friday, they gave the play about the prodigal son, as at Passau, but on Saturday about a pious lady of Antwerp, certainly an excellent and chaste play. On Sunday they had Doctor Faustus, on Monday about a Duke of Florence who fell in love with a nobleman’s daughter. On Tuesday they had a play about nobody and somebody, which was mighty clever. On Wednesday they played Fortunatus’s purse and wishing-hat, also very nice. On Thursday they gave the play about the Jew which they had also played at Passau. [...] On Fasching Sunday [...] in the evening after the meal the Englishmen gave another play about the 2 brothers, King Ludwig and King Friedrich [sic] of Hungary, a terrifying play because King Friedrich stabbed and murdered everybody. On mad Monday they again gave a play, about a King of Cyprus and a Duke of Venice, also very good. [...] Yesterday [Tuesday] the English again gave a play, about the rich man and Lazarus. I can’t begin to tell EL [Your Grace] how beautiful this was for there wasn’t a bit of lovemaking [elsewhere translated “obscenity”] in it, they moved us deeply so well did they act. Surely they must be regarded as good actors. (Murad 6–7)

Two days later, before posting her letter, the Archduchess added a “breaking” story about the English actor—“the fellow with the long red hair who always plays the small violin” (Murad 9)—presumably Green, who, through no fault of his own, found himself in an altercation with a Frenchman, which left the Frenchman dead and the Englishman wounded. As F. J. Kramer points out, the Archduchess apparently took Green in as he was convalescing and, during that time, the actor who played Nobody in the anonymous *Somebody and Nobody* (or *Nobody and Somebody*) dictated the play to a local scribe so he might extend his thanks to the royal family (Kramer 89, 91). The manuscript, preserved in the Cistercian Monastery at Rein in Steiermark, Austria, contains a drawing of Nobody, a figure appearing to have no body, his pantaloons ascending to his neck and rosary beads in his hand. It is dedicated to the Archduke Maximillian (Ferdinand and Magdalena’s brother) and signed by John Green. Presumably, this is the play Magdalena saw, and the drawing of Nobody, which differs from that appearing in the English edition of the play, would appear to be of Green himself in that role. Hence we can be safe in concluding that, with no mention of puppets in Magdalena’s otherwise detailed letter and with so personalized a drawing of Nobody, the *Somebody and Nobody* performed in Graz in 1608 was not a puppet play.

But the performance of *Hamlet* in Dresden occurred eighteen years later. In 1626, the company’s repertory, over nine months, was necessarily more extensive than in Graz, though it included eight of the same titles. Other documents, including the one referring to the redhead in Torgau,
make it all but certain that the company that performed in Dresden in 1626 was Green’s. But here, too, there is no mention of puppets. Nor are puppets associated with any earlier productions by English actors in Dresden, which began, with some regularity, in 1600.

This is not to say that continental audiences never saw a puppet show. As Frances K. Barasch points out, traveling Italian companies were touring both commedia dell’arte productions and puppet shows: “In the latter half of the seventeenth century, puppet theater had become the site of an endless circulation of culture, from Italy to England, northern Europe, and to Italy again” (Barasch 175). There is no doubt that puppet shows by Italian and native players were standard fare on the Continent. Puppets held a place not only in popular culture but also on the legitimate stage and, in 1657 and 1667, permanent puppet theaters were established, respectively, in Frankfurt and Vienna. References in English plays by Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher, and others make it clear that Englishers were also familiar with the form; in fact, records of puppet plays in England date back to 1431 (Lancashire 6–8). Before and during the Thirty Years War (1618–48), however, there is no known continental document associating the English players on the Continent with puppet plays.

The story told by Dresden records in the 1640s, therefore, is of special interest. On 8 May 1644, the entertainment offered by a company visiting the Saxon court consisted of gymnastics, fencing, dancing bears, and an unnamed puppet show (“mit den Puppen agiren”). Two years later, in performances that ran from 11 September to 19 October 1646, both puppet plays and plays with live actors were performed, and the record distinguishes between them. The entertainment on 11 September consisted of dancing bears and a comedy, The Prodigal Son, acted with people (“eine Comödie mit Personen”), the theme represented by a dumb show (“mit stummen Personen”) before each act, followed by a dance for four persons. On 13 September, there was rope dancing, vaulting, a tragedy about Lorenz acted with people (“mit Personen”), and a dance for eight people. And on 9 October 1646, the company performed a comedy about the creation of the world, played with puppets (“eine Comöedia von Erschaffung der Welt, mit den Puppen gespielet”), followed by three dances (Fürstenau 106–8). But Green, who disappears from the continental records following the Torgau wedding (when Reynolds assumed the lead) and a performance a few months later at the autumn Frankfurt fair, is not mentioned. Rather, the records name the “Freyberger Springer,” the acrobat/dancer from Freiberg (in Saxony), identified by Fürstenau as Hans Schilling (Fürstenau 78–79).
The Freyberger Springer was at the Dresden court in 1644 and 1646. By this time, Reynolds had died, and his widow, Jane, had been given a pension by the King of Poland. (Jerzy Limon observes that between 1635 and 1645, Reynolds’s company and Robert Archer’s were in residence at the Königsberg and Warsaw courts, which offered safe harbor from the War, 30–31). But though Reynolds and the English players had left Dresden more than a decade earlier, their influence there in the 1640s was unmistakable. Fürstenau’s transcript of the Springer entry for 13 September 1646 notes that the dance for eight people was done in the style that the Englanders danced in the rich Jew of Malta (“auf die Art wie bei den reichen Juden von Malta, von den Engelländern getanzt worden,” Fürstenau 107). The Jew of Malta, it will be recalled—as well as The Prodigal Son and Romeo and Juliet, both now being performed by the Freyberger Springer—had been in Green’s repertory in 1626. Springer’s son-in-law played Pickelhering, the role made famous by Reynolds, Browne’s son-in-law, Green’s colleague in Dresden, and two plays about Pickelhering and two angry wives were in the Springer’s repertory. Finally, one of the 1646 puppet plays Schilling’s company performed was The Creation of the World, which had been presented in the English provinces a few years earlier.

That puppet play, in fact, provides an intriguing if elusive theatrical link between England and the Continent, for its history is part of both the English provinces and the Dresden court. Browne’s name disappears from continental records in 1620, following a well-documented visit to Frankfurt. Peter Brand, whose 1978 University of Heidelberg thesis offers a thoroughly researched account of Browne’s years on the Continent and in England, states with certainty that Browne returned to England at that time (Brand 89–90). During an earlier respite in England, Browne welcomed the visiting son of the Landgrave Moritz, a hopeful for the hand of Princess Elizabeth, and he may have attached himself to the Children of the Queen’s Revels, his billet to identify and train children for the company. For our purposes, the story gets especially interesting after Browne’s 1620 return. For although the assumption has been that he died shortly after—an assumption supported by Cicely Browne’s remarriage to William Robins in 1622 and the absence of any records concerning him for eighteen years—a Robert Browne appears in Coventry in 1638 and in Norwich in 1639 and 1641—as a puppeteer.7 The Browne mentioned could not have been Browne’s son Robert, who died in 1625. It was surely not the Browne of the Boar’s Head, who died in 1603. Nor is there any evidence that the Boar’s Head Browne’s son Robert was a
player. The case for the puppeteer’s being the continental actor-manager is strengthened by the names of his companions: Richard Jones and George Hall (Hull, Hill), both players who had been with Browne and Green on the Continent. In an entry recording payments to the performers in Coventry dated 12 January 1638, the three, under warrant from the Mayor, “had a motion to shew expressing the worlds abuses.” In another entry, also dated 12 January, they are said to have “had warrant to shew an Italian motion.” The 1639 Mayors’s Court Book in Norwich records the denial of Browne’s desire “to shewe puppinge playes,” and the 1641 Book records the denial on 9 October of Browne and Hall’s petition “to shewe an Italian motion” despite their having a license from Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels. The entry explains: “because he sayth his motion is noe Italian motion but made in London this Court thinks fit not to suffer them to shew” (Records of Early English Drama: Coventry 441–42; Records of Early English Drama: Norwich 232, 236).

Curiously, the REED volume on Lancashire lists two christenings in 1637 that appear in the register of St. Mary the Virgin Parish, Blackburn: on 12 September, Richard, son of Robert Brown, player, stranger; and on 17 September, Elizabeth, daughter of George Hall, player, stranger” (242). Was Browne, who would have been in his seventies, still active not only as a puppeteer but as head of a new family as well? Earlier, Browne’s family life had been defined by his absence. His first wife and children died in the plague in Shoreditch in 1593 while he was abroad. His son Robert was born of his second wife, Cicely Sands, in 1595, around the time that Browne was establishing himself at the court of the Landgrave Moritz. Not surprisingly, Robert’s will, proved in 1625 when he was thirty, appoints his mother Cicely as executrix and refers to Robins as his father.

Other provincial documents concern William Sands, who, in 1623, obtained a license for his puppet show The Chaos of the World. His two sons, John and William, were also puppeteers: with their father, they were the subject of a 1630 complaint about “certain blasphemous shewes and sights which they exercise by way of poppett playinge” (Records of Early English Drama: Dorset, Cornwall 121–22). In his will of 11 September 1638, William Sandes bequeaths “my Shewe called the Chaos, the Wagon, the Stage, & all the Joyners tooles & other ymplementes & appurtenances to the said Shewe belonging to my sonne John Sandes” (George 87). Sands was Browne’s wife’s—or former wife’s—birth name, and the “Shewe called the Chaos” may be the same show done by the Freyberger Springer in Dresden in 1646.
But to return to the continental Hamlet: the play that prompted Stern to pursue the question of a puppet Hamlet was Der Bestrafte Brudermord. After pursuing a second-hand reference by Nino Amico to a manuscript of a Hamlet puppet play (the original 1964 study by Ingrid Hiller is not to be found), Stern realized that the manuscript was not a newly discovered, then lost manuscript but the already-known Der Bestrafte Brudermord, published in summary form in 1779 and in full-text in 1781. According to Amico, Hiller described the document as small format and thirteen pages ("un manoscritto di piccolo format, tredici pagine contenenti," Amico 98). Although the manuscript has been lost and Hiller’s work cannot be found, this description tallies with the 1779 publication of the abstract, which occupies thirteen pages—47–60—of the Gotha Theaterkalender, auf das Jahr 1779. Editor Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard prepared the scene-by-scene summary and published it as the “Erster deutscher Hamlet; im Auszug” (the First German Hamlet, in an Abstract); two years later, responding to friends and colleagues, he published the full text, Tragœdia: Der Bestrafte Brudermord oder: Prinz Hamlet aus Dännemark. In a prefatory note to the abstract, Reichard states that this rare manuscript lay among many other theatrical manuscripts from the distant past that had been in the possession of Konrad Ekhof (1720–78), the Gotha actor-manager whose last stage role was the Ghost in Hamlet. The manuscript from which Reichard prepared his abstract is dated “Pretz den 27 Oktober 1710,” but he notes that the original could date from a dozen or more years before that.8

But would it have been performed as a puppet play? Stern points to internal features of Der Berstrafte Brudermord that could indicate it was performed with puppets: a prologue of supernatural characters that enter from above on a flying device; action often originating “behind”; and added moments of pronounced violence and shaking, as well as lightning, thunder, and fire crackers (Stern 346–49). Indeed, such features appear in many of the two dozen puppet plays compiled into twelve volumes by Karl Engel, including the oft-performed Doctor Faustus.9 But so also do they appear in productions with live actors. As Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Pattison More point out in The Sources of the Faust Tradition, contemporary commentary speaks to the technical capabilities of seventeenth-century postwar theater. The diary of Georg Schröder, for example, which describes a 1668 production of a “Commedia vom D. Fausto” in Bremen, notes that when Pluto’s devils fetch Faust, “they throw him into the air and tear him to pieces” (Palmer and More 246).10 An announcement of a production of a Faustus play in Bremen c.1688,
presented by the “Sächsischen Hoch-Teutschen Comoedianten” (Saxon High-German Comedians), records these stage effects: “Pluto rides in the air on a dragon”; “Pickelhāring . . . is tormented by all sorts of magic birds in the air”; “Dr. Faust gives a banquet at which the centerpiece (épergne) is transformed into all kinds of wonderful figures, so that human beings, dogs, cats, and other animals come out of a pastry and fly through the air”; “a fire breathing raven, in flight, announces to Faust his approaching death and Faust is carried away by the sprits”; “Hell is pictured, adorned with beautiful fireworks” (Palmer and More 246; Engel 1:4). The play also, like Der Bestrafte Brudermord, has a prologue with supernatural characters. Interestingly, a note on the playbill following a list of the attractive features of the Bremen production indicates that after the play is over, the entire action will be presented again with [Italian] shadow pictures (“durch einen Italiänischen Schatten präsentiret werden”) (Palmer and More 246; Engel 1:4); hence the audience will get double its money’s worth (“. . . das Geld doppelt werth ist”) (Engel 1:4).

The Schröder diary and the Faustus playbill, as well as other continental documents from the second half of the seventeenth century, make it clear that the postwar theater, informed as it was by the French and Italian styles now in vogue, liberally used devices and special effects not found—or not remarked on—in productions by the English actors. The stage requirements of Der Bestrafte Brudermord, then, while not dispositive in determining whether the manuscript was or was not a puppet play (since such effects occur in both types of plays), certainly provide a good indication that the play in the form it comes down to us was not the Hamlet performed in 1626.

Indeed, it is clear that the manuscript of Der Bestrafte Brudermord on which Reichard’s transcription is based dates from half a century later. The troupe that performed the Bremen Doctor Faustus, the Saxon High-German Comedians, was almost certainly Johannes Velten’s. Initially a member of Carl Andreas Paulsen’s company, Velten, who held a master’s degree from the University of Wittenberg, married Paulsen’s daughter Catharine, one of three female members of the troupe. In 1678, the couple left Paulsen’s company, establishing their own at the Dresden court under the patronage of Johann Georg III. The extant playbill for the Bremen production of Faust is dated Friday, 18 May: during the years that Velten identified himself with the Saxon court, 18 May (by the Julian calendar) fell on a Friday in 1683, 1688, and 1694. A knowing exchange in Der Bestrafte Brudermord between Hamlet and Charles, one of the players who visits Elsinore, suggests that Der Bestrafte Brudermord also dates from the final quarter of the seventeenth century:
HAMLET. Were you not some years ago at the University of Wittenberg?
It seems to me I have seen you act there.
CHARLES. Yes, Your Highness, we are the self same company.
HAMLET. Have you the whole of the same company still?
CHARLES. We are not quite so numerous because some students took
engagements in Hamburg. [. . .]
[. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .]
HAMLET. Have you still got the three actresses with you? They used
to play well.
CHARLES. No, only two, the one stayed behind with her husband at
the court of Saxony. (2.7)12

Charles, or Carl, is clearly referring to his daughter and son-in-law, now
at the Saxon court. Since the couple left Paulsen’s company in 1678,
and since Paulsen died in 1685, after which such a topical reference
would seem unlikely, the play—or at least the passage—likely dates from
within those seven years. And the performance—assuming the play
was performed—must have been by Velten’s newly established or Paulsen’s
newly diminished company.

But who were Carl Andreas Paulsen and Johannes Velten? Once the
War was over, having ended in 1648 with the signing of the peace at
Westphalia, theatrical troupes, already fluid during the war years, were re-
grouping, often trading on the reputation of the English players. For two
or three decades following the 1660s, the companies of Paulsen (c.1620–
85), Velten (c.1640–97), and Daniel Michael Treu (Drey) (c.1634–1708)
dominated the records on wandering players, and the titles of many of
the plays they presented mirrored plays that had been in the reperto-
ries of English companies. Interestingly, at least two of these German
actor-managers were both players and puppeteers. Late in the centu-
ry—1688—Hamburg audiences watched Velten’s company present Adam
and Eve with puppets, “followed by a buffoonery called Jack-pudding in
Punch’s Shop” and, some years later, The Lapidation of Naboth; Asphalides,
King of Arabia; The Fall of Jerusalem; and The Death of Wallenstein” (“The
Puppets”).13 But as early as 1666, Treu brought his “Figurentheater” to
Lüneburg. Some of the twenty-five plays in his company’s repertory have
familiar titles: Doctor Faustus, The Destruction of Jerusalem, King Lear, Titus
Andronicus, Edward III,14 but the record does not say which plays were
done with live actors and which with puppets, and Der Bestrafte Bruder-
mord is not on Treu’s list.15 (In 1719, in Copenhagen, a German company
performed Titus Andronicus as a puppet play, Herz 86.)16

By the second half of the seventeenth century, most English players
had returned to England. George Jolly, generally considered the last of
the English actor-managers on the Continent, performed in Nuremberg in 1660, then crossed the narrow sea to England. The eighteen-year moratorium on theater had ended, and he was able to reestablish himself on the English stage. Jolly’s departure effectively brought to a close an exceptionally rich era of theater on the Continent. In the postwar years, Jolly and his company traveled extensively, at times to cities that had not seen English actors for years. (Limon points out that there are no records of English actors in Nuremberg from 1628 to 1649, in Cologne from 1631 to 1645, in Strasbourg from 1628 to 1651, in Ulm from 1618 to 1650, in Frankfurt from 1631 to 1649, and in Dresden from 1632 to 1651, Limon 30; their absence effectively maps the city-by-city history of the War.) Even after the departure of most of the English actors, however, their legacy was intact. The English had brought decades of accomplished performing and exciting plays to the Continent. But while some of the plays in their repertory undoubtedly enjoyed an afterlife as puppet shows and made their way into Engel’s collection, there is no known evidence that the Englishmen on the Continent themselves presented puppet plays.

Nor are there any sure records of seventeenth-century performances of Hamlet on the Continent other than Green’s in Dresden—though there are two scholarly claims. In 1892, Berthold Litzmann noticed commentary in a book by Johann Rist (1607–67) in which the preacher/playwright tells of his youthful experience with an English playing company. Litzmann points to similarities in Rist’s description of the play “von einem Könige, der seinen Sohn, den Printzen mit des Königs von Schottland Tochter wolte verheirahten” and several passages from Hamlet. Surmising that Rist misremembered the play’s title, Litzmann, on the strength of his comparison of the two plays, concludes that Rist is recalling a production of Hamlet by English actors in Hamburg in 1625 (Litzmann 430). Most scholars, however, are not persuaded, identifying the play as the Comoedia von eines Königes Sohne auss Engellandt und des Königes Tochter auss Schottlandt (Comedy of the Son of a King of England and the Daughter of the King of Scotland), which was performed several times on the Continent and appears in Engelische Comedien und Tragedien, the volume of German prose versions of English actors’ plays published in Leipzig in 1620. Although Litzmann does not identify the company that he believes performed Hamlet in Hamburg in 1625, presumably this would have been Green’s, just prior to its performance in Dresden. But there is no known record of Hamlet’s having been performed in Hamburg in or around 1625, of Green’s troupe ever having performed in Hamburg, or of any English comedians having visited that Hanse-
atic city before 1648, when Reynolds’s company (under new leadership) was there. Similarly, in 1882, E. Mentzel spoke of a 1686 performance of Der Bestrafte Brudermord in Frankfurt by Velten’s troupe, regretting that a surviving playbill for that production had been lost (Mentzel 65). Unfortunately, this claim follows a pattern in Mentzel’s work, much of which, even before the devastation of the two World Wars, is unverifiable. If the Hamburg and Frankfurt productions cannot be confirmed and the production implied by the manuscript of Der Bestrafte Brudermord cannot be documented, then scholars are left with only one record of a seventeenth-century continental production by English or German actors: Green’s 1625 Hamlet in Dresden.

Hiller, who was at the University of Catania when she identified Der Bestrafte Brudermord as a puppet play, certainly knew Italy’s—and Sicily’s—puppet traditions, and she would have been aware of the burgeoning activity in puppet shows that began in force in Germany following the Thirty Years War. Indeed, as Stern points out, a puppet in a Vienna museum, “said to date from 1667, and to have been carved by Pietro Resoniero (1640–1735)” (345), may be of Hamlet, again implying a performance—postwar and likely not by English players. Those who saw the production of Der Bestrafte Brudermord that Christine Schmidle mounted at the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Virginia, on 18 and 19 January 2010, in German, with live actors, must surely have taken the director’s point: that, in adapting plays for performances in German, the English comedians followed a familiar pattern, adding physicality, simplifying the text, and enhancing the role of the comic characters (Schmidle 191–212). But so too would they have recognized these as features characteristic of puppet plays. When, three years later at the Blackfriars Conference, they saw the Hidden Room Theatre’s presentation of Der Bestrafte Brudermord done with rod puppets, they would surely have agreed that this was a viable mode for this play. And they would have understood why, in the latter half of the seventeenth century and into the next, the Continent hosted many Shakespeare plays with puppets dallying.

Despite the pleasure that Staunton audiences took in these rare and thoroughly enjoyable productions, however, we should be cautious about associating Der Bestrafte Brudermord with the Hamlet performed in Dresden in 1626. Amico, relying on Hiller’s (unlocatable) 1964 study, wrote that Der Bestrafte Brudermord was performed in Dresden in 1626 and, subsequently, in Hamburg, Danzig, and Frankfurt, a statement Barasch references later that year and Susan Young, in Shakespeare Manipulated (1996), adopts, adding that the play was done with marionettes: “As early
as 1626,” she states, “a version of Hamlet for marionette was performed in Europe; first in Dresden, then in Hamburg, Gdańsk, and Frankfurt” (9). Green’s company, which became Reynolds’s company, did play in these cities and others after 1626, but there is no indication that their later repertory included Hamlet or Der Bestrafte Brudermord. Nor do we know whether so early a seventeenth-century presentation of a puppet play—or, for that matter, the puppet shows of the Freyberger Springer two decades later—would have been done with marionettes, rod puppets, glove puppets, or shadows.19

We also do not know whether the text of Der Bestrafte Brudermord published by Reichard was the only version of that play or whether the manuscript represented an evolved text reflecting years of adaptations by English and/or German players. A number of scholars have compared the texts of Der Bestrafte Brudermord and the three English Hamlets, but no one has established an agreed-upon genealogy. The Folio edition of Shakespeare’s Hamlet was published three years before Green’s production in Dresden and sold at the Frankfurt fair,20 but it is unlikely to have been the source for Der Bestrafte Brudermord. For although Green’s Hamlet, like all of the English actors’ translated texts, would have been in German prose, as Der Bestrafte Brudermord is, the play published in 1781 uses the name Corambus for Polonius, aligning it with the first quarto (Corambis), published in 1603,21 moreover, there are similarities between Der Bestrafte Brudermord and the second quarto, published in 1604. And, of course, there is always the lurking thought that an earlier version of Der Bestrafte Brudermord could be the elusive Ur-Hamlet. Whatever the origin and precedence of these texts, whatever the unrecorded stage history of the German Hamlet, and whatever the mode of Der Bestrafte Brudermord, continental records do not support a puppet Hamlet in Dresden in 1626. Nor do they associate such a mode of performance with English actors on the Continent in the seventeenth century. Indeed, in the lacuna of evidence for any seventeenth-century continental production of Hamlet by English or German players, the reputedly 350-year-old surviving puppet stands alone.

Notes

1The records Fürstenau cites were lost in the 1945 bombing of Dresden. For a list of the Dresden plays, see Herz, 66–67.

2Although the company may have performed plays from its Dresden repertory, the only play Fürstenau mentions as having been presented in Torgau is Julius Caesar (101).
Magdalena’s letter is in the Austrian State Archive in Vienna: Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Wien: Familienkorrespondenz, A. Karton 6, fols. 311–16. The English actors had visited Graz a year earlier as well. In a letter, Magdalena’s mother, Archduchess Maria Anna, identifies one of the plays they performed as “a comedy about a king of England who is in love with a goldsmith’s wife and has abducted her, it was nothing very special” (Murad 31).

For illustrations of the Nobody that appears in the English text of the play and the Graz Nobody, see Kramer (92, 93).

Griffith locates Green in London in 1627 and presents evidence that he was the brother of Thomas Greene, a member of Queen Anne’s Company from 1604 to 1612 and Susan Browne Greene Baskerville’s second husband (186–88).

For information on Schilling, see Rudin.

Brand, who takes note of the provincial puppeteer, cautiously gives Browne’s death date as between 1621 and 1639.

Amico, referencing Hiller, says the manuscript was found in a German monastery. There is a Pretz in Schleswig-Holstein (near Gotha) and a Preetz in Saxony.

Although the publisher remains the same with the issuing of each successive volume, its name varies slightly, and the editor’s first name, “Karl,” is sometimes given as “Carl.” Among the twenty-four plays Engel collects are Doctor Faust, The Prodigal Son, Don Juan, Haman and Esther, Fortunatus, The Enchanted Island, and The Son of the King of England and the Daughter of the King of Scotland. (Hamlet is not included.) Unfortunately, Engel (understandably) does not provide the dates that these texts, many of which had been in the repertory of English actors, were performed as puppet plays. It would appear that the puppet plays in these volumes date from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

Engel, who examined the Schröder diary (1665–76) at the Stadtbibliothek in Danzig, gives a transcript (in German) of the relevant section (1:2–3).

Engel prints a facsimile of the playbill (in German) (1:4–5).

Cohn reprints the German text alongside an English translation by Georgina Archer (242–303).

“The Puppets of All Nations” includes a description of an eighteenth-century Adam and Eve and of a playbill for The Prodigal Son.

For a list of the Lüneburg plays, see Herz (68–69).

Another play from this period with “Brudermord” in its descriptive title is Der Unschuldige Bruder-Mord, performed by Treu’s company while in residence at the court in Munich from 1681 to 1685 (Herz 69–70). A second reference to this play, performed in Copenhagen in 1719 by “Hochdeutschen Comedianten” (High German Comedians), gives the play’s subtitle—Das blutige Rom, unter der Regierung des Römischen Käysers Antonini Bassiani Caracallae, Wie auch Der Kluge Phantast und Warhafte Astrologus (Paludan 334)—which makes it clear that this was not Der Bestrafte Brudermord.

Von Tito Andronico und der hoffärtigen Kayserinn und dem Mohr Aran.

Engel includes four of these eight plays in Deutsche Puppenkomödien.
Stern cites Isaacs on this production, but Isaacs relies on Mentzel. Similarly, Carl Heine, in his 1887 dissertation at the University of Halle-Wittenberg, includes this production in the list of plays performed by Velten’s troupe, but he too cites Mentzel. Interestingly, scholars prior to Mentzel say nothing about such a production. See, for example, Eduard Devrient’s chapter on “Magister Velthen und seine Kunstepoche” (224–67).

For glossaries of puppet terms, see Young (225–26) and McCormick et al. (255–56). Bernstengel and Scholze date the first continental use of the term “marionette” to 1667, when two players—Peter Resonier and Joan Baptista—arrived in Prague asking to present “einen lustigen englischen Figurenspill” (a merry English puppet play). In Dresden, the first recorded “marionette” show was in 1686 (10).

I am grateful to Karen Newman for a photocopy of the advertisement for Shakespeare’s Folio that was available at the 1622 Frankfurt fair.

It may (or may not) be relevant that the first quarto was not (re)discovered in England until 1823.

Works Cited


