



SHAKESPEARE AND EUROPEAN  
GEOGRAPHIES: CENTRALITIES  
AND ELSEWHERE

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Seminar - Remapping Gender in Shakespeare's Europe

**Influence of Belarusian sovereignty on international cultural exchange in Shakespeare's heritage**

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Since the XIX century, the formation of the theatre in Belarus was connected with the Shakespeare's heritage. Built in 1890 under the patronage of Count Jan Karol Chapski (1860–1904), the Minsk City Theatre was given to the entrepreneur Alexei Kartavov (1841–1894), and for the first two years, Hamlet and King Lear were among its first performances. After declaring the Belarusian People's Republic (BNR) in 1918, as well as the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as part of the Soviet Union in 1920, the theatre became known as the Belarusian State Theatre-1 from 1926, and from the middle of the XX century – the Yanka Kupala National Academic Theatre. Then the Vitebsk Theatre named after Yakub Kolas (Belarusian State Theatre-2), originated in the studio at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1921, put on the second performance – “A Midsummer Night's Dream”. The actors were trained by experts from the Moscow Art Theatre, who collaborated with Anton Chekhov. Biomechanics was taught by Irina Meyerhold, the daughter director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940).

Until the end of the XX century, the Belarusian theatres staged plays by Shakespeare and toured with them outside Belarus, but that was not often and within the USSR. The situation changed after 1991, when the Republic of Belarus gained sovereignty, and the state monopoly on art disappeared. The theatrical troupes were created on the basis of the principles of non-repertory theatre, with the most famous troupe being the Free Theatre of Yuri Khalezin and Natalia Kolyada, which began to periodically participate in international forums. In 2012, when the actors of the Janka Kupala National Theatre and the Free Theatre were invited from Minsk to the World Shakespeare Festival in London, this event became a subject of discussions in the press, although the representatives of the groups were consistent and spoke in an interview about art, not about competition in the Shakespearean heritage. Acculturation and cultural exchange in this field simply cannot happen today, because independent theatres in Belarus are supported by the world-famous playwrights Vaclav Havel and Tom Stoppard, and their performances are preceded by such celebrities, as Ian McKellen, a recognized master of Shakespeare's repertoire, who also played in a number of British and Hollywood blockbusters.