

A Transylvanian History of Shakespeare

Orsolya TÓKÉS
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj

Keywords: 19th-century literary and theatre history Transylvania, literary and theatrical reception of Shakespeare, coming of age of nations, republicanism

E-mail: tokesorsolya@gmail.com

*

Katalin Ágnes Bartha's book¹ is not a cult or critical history, as the subject is rather approached from the perspective of literary history and the history of theatre. It discusses in 300 pages the different periods of 19th-century Shakespeare reception, building the discourse around a few representative personalities affiliated with Transylvania. The disquisition is preceded by the study of an exciting research about reading Shakespeare in the period, and it is complemented by an appendix of more than a hundred pages containing the reviewed catalogues of the contemporary denominational schools' libraries from Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca and Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureş, the collection of Shakespeare performances in Kolozsvár/Cluj and in the provincial area, as well as the notes of the Transylvanian Shakespeare-related books from the documentation archives of the Hungarian Theatre of Kolozsvár/Cluj and of the National Széchényi Library.

Shakespeare's reception in Hungary began in the last third of the 18th century. The contemporary theatrical conditions and the indirect classical translational principles, which transposed the German sources into the national language, as well as their practical realizations, offered initially only a partial knowledge of the English drama author. At the time of Shakespeare's adoption in Hungary, there was no independent Hungarian national theatre. The German stages from Buda, Pest and Bratislava were the first to report about the works of the English drama author. Shakespeare's first readers and critics have thought little of translations that were faithful to the original text in means of content and form, not to mention the theatrical applications. The reason for this is partly due to the scarce opportunities of the contemporary primitive and poor Hungarian travelling theatres, and partly to the domestic validity of the classical, especially French and German drama aesthetic principles. For a long time the stage could not be the site of manifestations that violated public morality: anti-state and anti-monarch statements, actions considered to be examples of bad education (such as murder or adultery). The narrative structures of the dramas, the depictions of the grotesque or the plays that mediated ill-fated and diminished world order violated the classical unities, thus their acceptance seemed difficult. Across Europe, but especially in our region, the reception of Shakespeare was closely correlated

¹ Katalin Ágnes Bartha, *Shakespeare Erdélyben. XIX. századi magyar nyelvű recepció* (Shakespeare in Transylvania. 19th Century Hungarian Reception), Irodalomtörténeti Füzetek 167 (Budapest: Argumentum, 2010), ISBN 9789634465645

with the romantic and national cultural interest that represented, as a fundamental condition for becoming a nation, the need and achievement of culture creation. “The inspiring example of the English Shakespeare cult came in handy in an experiment that tried to bring into effect a culture development programme in which the intellectual (especially the artist and the scholar) who achieved the intellectual creation received greater appreciation in accordance with his/her merits, even in the absence of birthright prerogatives. The programme also facilitated the adoption of the cult, given the fact that it could be used as a tool for such a comprehensive and essential purpose. Cult and culture are already inseparable” – Péter Dávidházi summarizes the importance of the research concerning the reception of Shakespeare in his work entitled “Isten másodszületője”: A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza (“The Second-born of God”: The Hungarian cult of Shakespeare)



Șerban Savu, *Early Days of Summer*, 2008, 20 x 30 cm, oil on canvas

The Shakespeare monographs that were published in the Hungarian language area usually adopt defined criteria for the presentation of their subject matter: in general, after a detailed introduction comprising the history of drama and biography, the Shakespeare reception is investigated for the importance of its impact in the new cultural environment. The first major undertaking to present Shakespeare's life and work is by Ágost Greguss. According to the confessions of our first professional aesthete, which appeared in the foreword of *Shakespeare pályája* (*The Career of Shakespeare*, 1880), his work is a summary of the existing foreign language literature on Shakespeare and it does not want to formulate original thoughts on the subject matter. Like his European contemporaries, he approaches the subject with a short history of drama and a Shakespeare biography. His book continues with general information about the works of Shakespeare and with the analysis of his specific topoi and motifs. In the final chapter

the author examines the spread of Shakespeare's works and discusses about the playwright's Hungarian reception. Included in the appendix is the list of Shakespeare performances organized by the National Theatre of Pest from 1837 to 1878, as well as the list of the Hungarian actors who appeared in the plays of Shakespeare. In the intended second volume he promises an individual analysis of Shakespeare's works, but this could not come to fruition due to Greguss' death in 1882. His work is continued only about three decades later in a major, two-volume monograph by József Bayer.

After a brief introduction entitled *A magyar Shakespeare-honosítás első száz éve. 1777-1878* (The First Hundred Years of the Hungarian Adoption of Shakespeare. 1777–1878), Bayer's accurately written manual in the history of theatre, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban I-II.* (Shakespeare's Plays in Our Country I-II, 1909), offers a detailed examination of the Shakespeare performances held in Hungary, taking into consideration the antecedents, circumstances and follow-ups of the performances, as well as their critical reception. The statistics given in the appendix of the book are extremely important due to the fact that these are corrected versions of the research data of Greguss and complement the information about the history of the Hungarian reception of Shakespeare from multiple viewpoints with special attention given to the repertoire of Kolozsvár/Cluj.

Katalin Ágnes Bartha's book points out on several occasions the impact of Péter Dávidházi's work, *"Isten másodszülöttje": A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza*; the research data of her volume in many ways consolidate Dávidházi's findings. The author also gives high priority to the collected volumes of Kéry–Országh–Szenczi:¹ *Shakespeare-tanulmányok* (Studies on Shakespeare) and to that of Maller–Ruttkay:² *Shakespeare Mirror* (Shakespeare-tükör). In addition, she often quotes the shorter studies of the *Magyar Shakespeare-Tár* (Hungarian Shakespeare Collection). Other authors concerned with the reception of Shakespeare: Bernát Alexander, Elemér Császár, Hevesi, the conscious and investigative director, Marcell Benedek, Endre Roth – just to mention the most important ones.

Dávidházi's volume from 1989 did not seek to expand the database – it created a new school of thought as a consequence to the creation of a cultic history system. In this approach, the goal of Katalin Ágnes Bartha's book is not ambitious, but rather necessary, even though it smoothly demonstrates the progressive integration of Shakespeare into the Hungarian culture. The spatial and temporal confinement designated by the title is a tool of the scientific methodology, the book itself has a much broader perspective. On one hand it introduces in detail the premises of the 18th century reception of Shakespeare, it contains a separate chapter on the antecedents of the history of reading Shakespeare, while on the other hand it pinpoints that the Transylvanian theatrical world cannot be perceived as a hermetically sealed area of the national cultural life, and therefore the study cannot limit itself exclusively to the cultural products of 19th century Transylvania. The study presumed constant linking and comparison between the works of the Transylvanian and Hungarian translators, institutions, actors and directors, with special attention given to cultural centres of Kolozsvár/Cluj, Marosvásárhely/Târgu

¹ Kéry László, Országh László and Szenczi Miklós, ed., *Shakespeare-tanulmányok* (Studies on Shakespeare) (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1965).

² Maller Sándor, Ruttkai Kálmán, ed., *Magyar Shakespeare-tükör: esszék, tanulmányok, kritikák* (Hungarian mirror of Shakespeare) (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984).

Mureş, Nagyenyed/Aiud, Sepsiszentgyörgy/Sfântu Gheorghe and Pest. For example it points out that the members of the first professional theatre company from Kolozsvár/Cluj studied at the Bethlen Gábor College in Nagyenyed/Aiud (János Sáska, József Koncz, Pál Jancsó, Celesztin Pergő). In addition, the autodidactic group of the College had among its members Károly Szász, Ferenc Salamon and Lajos Jancsó, who all played an important role in the subsequent canonization of Shakespeare. Marosvásárhely/Târgu Mureş was of similar importance to the age. The detailed presentation of the theatrical life in Sepsiszentgyörgy/Sfântu Gheorghe is justified by the author's previous research and personal ties. The author argues that the need for delimitation in the title is due to the shortcomings of the 19th century research on the reception of Shakespeare: the lack of perspective in the history of theatre, under which she understands the absence of unravelling of the social validity of the Shakespearian dramas and performances, notably the lack of reference regarding the history of reading.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the volume is that it extends the range of the reception-related facts with the examination of the library lists of the reading habits of the era. The author looked into the manuscript catalogue of the Teleki-Bolyai Library and the booklists of the three denominational schools of Kolozsvár/Cluj, namely the Reformed College, the Unitarian Academy and the Roman Catholic High School, pointing out the location of the documents (the Kolozsvár/Cluj Branch of the Romanian Academy Library or the Kolozsvár/Cluj State Archives), the transcription of the complete title indicating the type of the document, as well as the archival or library code of the document. The revised document types include log books, register of book donations, private book collections (owned by the school usually via donations), registers of acquisitions, membership lists of reading clubs – just to name a few examples. These show that the 18th-19th century reception audience of Shakespeare should be viewed more broadly than indicated before by the scientific field. Overwriting József Bayer's extraordinary work, Katalin Ágnes Bartha points out that the reading of Shakespeare was popular not only in the young literary circles, but, according to the revised library listings, among a much broader reading audience of Kolozsvár/Cluj: high-ranking aristocrats (Count Toldallaghy, Baron László Bánffy, Baron Samu Jósika), intellectuals (the Piarist aesthete and Erdélyi Múzeum (*Transylvanian Museum*)¹ founder Emil Buczy, the dilettante actor and judge Ferenc Gyergyai, the professor Ferenc Szilágyi, the teacher Pál Balogh, the government officer Lőrinc Lészai), book collectors and last, but not least, women.

The author advances from the book toward the stage. She is a mediator of a theatrical conception that considers the text of the drama primordial in comparison to the manifestation on the stage. However, her conclusions demonstrate the contrary of this phenomenon as well. Although Shakespeare does not constitute a part of the compulsory curriculum, the stage performances seem to motivate the reading of his dramas, especially in the ranks of the gallery audients – the students. The author speaks about the mutually complementary and assuming process of reading and stage adaptation, pointing out at the same time the existence of an extremely conscious, young group of audience blest with a responsible critical sense, which frequents the theatres not merely for entertainment, and from which would later emerge an advocacy and critical stratum.

¹ The first Transylvanian cultural journal written in Hungarian and published between 1814 and 1818.

The examination has a unique dual perspective: it validates the aspects of the history of literature and history of theatre together; it mixes the methods of disciplines in a natural way by portraying theatrical personalities who have also been readers, translators and critics of Shakespeare. Besides the dominant, elite and qualified literary personalities like Kazinczy or Döbrentei, she also involves in the scientific discourse scholarly interpreters, readers, amateur translators and actors who until now had been pushed to the canonical periphery or who had been completely forgotten, even though they played a significant role, especially in the adaptation of Shakespeare and his application to the Hungarian scenic and social conditions.

The author evaluates the two versions of Döbrentei's *Macbeth* from a detailed philological and dramaturgical perspective and highlights such dramatic text- and scenic adaptation-shaping dramaturgical decision-making, like the missing players, role mergers, doubling – specific exercises used in actor's training. In addition, she pays particular attention to an early Shakespeare textbook and a modified version of *The Taming of the Shrew* from 1818: the analysis of *A Megszelidített viszátkodó* (The Tamed Brawler) or *Második Gaszner* (Gaszner II). Alongside Kazinczy's and Döbrentei's translations of canonical literary value, Ágnes Bartha brings György Shener's translation of *The Taming of the Shrew* into the limelight of the examinations concerned with the history of reception and attempts to attribute significant value to it. *Második Gaszner* is a translation adapted to the Hungarian host culture and its success reflects its social validity – as opposed to Döbrentei's *Macbeth*, which in terms of form and content is faithful to the English original, but it was brought to stage only once, since neither the audience, nor the actors were sufficiently prepared for the performance. (The former were raised on French classicist moralities, while the latter were "specialized" in prose texts.)

The author mentions Mihály Benke, a philosophy professor from Nagyenyed/Aiud, who can be compared to György Szerdahelyi, the first to mention Shakespeare. His two-volume notes entitled *Erköltsi Philosophia* (Moral Philosophy) mentions by name the great English playwright on two occasions – both are quoted by the present volume. Although the professor read in Latin and our author is unable to mention secure sources regarding the identity of the person who put the professor's teachings on paper, it is certain that the notes were written in Hungarian, and as such it precedes Szerdahelyi's *Poesis Dramatica*, which mentioned the name of Shakespeare earlier, but in Latin.

The author depicts Baron Lázár Petrichevich Horváth as a Transylvanian-born critic from Pest of the *Honderű*¹, who acquired his devotion to the world of theatre from his father back in his childhood days spent in Kolozsvár/Cluj. (The father, Dániel P. Horváth had a significant contribution to the founding of the Theatre of Kolozsvár/Cluj, supporting the cause financially and morally. As an amateur actor he played in Körner's *Zrínyi* and organized an aristocratic dilettante society.) In the author's presentation the critic of aristocratic origin is considered to be on the same level as Egressy and Bajza and as a translator he is depicted as a local propagator of Chateaubriand. Katalin Ágnes Bartha proves that his work, entitled *Shakespeare és drámái* (Shakespeare and His Dramas), which appeared in the *Athenaeum*,² is in fact a

¹ A Hungarian literature, art and fashion magazine created especially for the aristocracy. It appeared between 1843 and 1848.

² A political, social and literary magazine published by József Bajza and Mihály Vörösmarty. It appeared between 1837 and 1843.

translation of Chateaubriand, overriding this way Bayer's contemptuous attitude toward Petrichevich's work. Bartha argues that the editor of the periodical and the ulterior reception simplified matters by indicating that the translator is the author of the respective text. The volume's interesting sociological recognition is that it provides data according to which Petrichevich's translation of Chateaubriand was read by several people in the Unitarian Academy of Kolozsvár/Cluj. Moreover, László Gedő (whose father, József, was friends with Döbrentei and Sándor Bölöni Farkas) copied several of its passages in order to improve his own dramaturgical knowledge. Dávidházi would call this kind of passion a mythicization of Shakespeare. In this case, similarly to the case of the above mentioned scholar, the thematic evaluation of the phenomenon's role in the history of literature and theatre is postponed.

The third remarkable portrait is that of another aristocrat, the actor Count Miklós Bethlen the Younger. The exciting career path, a micro-monograph in its own way (similarly to Petrichevich or Gyula E. Kovács), provides important lessons. The emphasis of the origin is important in the case of the first two, because their activities (theatre criticism, working as a trained actor) indicate a "transformation in the prestige hierarchy" of the theatre. The formerly despised status of the theatre is gradually transformed, and together with education and literature, the theatre becomes the trustee of the republican notion (also known in our region as national policy). Shakespeare became topical in the last third of the 18th century (not only in our region, but in other European states as well) due to the fact that the playwright's works represent political events and problems (among other aspects). In Shakespeare's time the theatre of London and the royal court were held together by political events and aspects. The theatre was capable of simultaneously limiting and representing the power, and as such it was considered a "republican" institution. This is the reason why Shakespeare became a public domain: when two aristocrats accept him in their intellectual community (in both cases due to childhood theatrical experiences – which indicates rather his cult than his acknowledgement), then they automatically accept all that Shakespeare represented in the modern England of his era, as well as in the 18th–19th century enlightened Europe.

The title of the volume's last chapter brings the personality in the limelight: *Az E. Kovács-korszak – kb. 1886-1899* (The E. Kovács Era (ca. 1886-1899)). A prominent period in Shakespeare's reception is the E. Kovács era. The Meiningen Ensemble and E. Kovács' strong ties with the National Theatre of Pest, as well as his mutually committed affection toward the troupe from Kolozsvár/Cluj have made this period a golden era in the life of the Theatre of Kolozsvár/Cluj, regardless of Shakespeare (the same applies to the National Theatre of Pest). But if we keep in mind that the Meiningen Ensemble urged the staging of plays written by classical authors, as well as of extremely important Hungarian works, then the realization of the Shakespeare cycle in the 1894–1895 theatrical season is undoubtedly a milestone in the life of the National Theatre of Kolozsvár/Cluj. The exceptional talent, competence and commitment to work of the actor, director and foreman have been recognized in its own time. The golden age of the Theatre of Kolozsvár/Cluj is tied to his name. His unique personality as an actor made possible the realization of the first Shakespeare cycle in a Hungarian-speaking area. From the total of twenty performances held, fifteen of them had E. Kovács in a leading role. The author draws attention to the fact that thus far the specialized literature has not dealt in detail with the Shakespeare cycle associated with the names of E. Kovács and

intendant Mór Ditrői. Another important merit of this chapter is that it places Ecsedi's art in an international context. The author draws attention to a piece of news from the turn of the century which relates about E. Kovács' invitation to London. In her commentary the author starts out from such actor-oriented critiques and theoretical writings of Rakodczay and Beöthy, which immortalize the Shakespeare actor, similar to how William Hazlitt praised Edmund Kean's Othello or Sarah Siddons' Lady Macbeth. The study of the audience is an important legacy of the research concerned with the Shakespeare performances of the E. Kovács era, which can be perceived as observations of moral rather than aesthetic nature. Interesting aspects of the chapter are the analysis of the contemporary scene image, which is seen as a visual object, the presentation of the great inventions of the era, the effect of photography on the stage panels and on the visual language of the drama critique. In connection with the latter, the author mentions performances directed by István Szentgyörgyi, the celebrated actor, whose work as a director has been unexplored until now. In the end, the author works out the 'master copy' of performance reconstructions by analyzing a prompt book from December 21, 1889, used for an Othello performance that was presented to the public for many years.

The author discusses about the Transylvanian reception of Shakespeare in a chronological order, but while reading the book, she repeatedly wanders from the subject; the reader can observe unexpected links between professors and students, actors, critics, institutional organizers, audience groups, cities and performances. The mosaic-like aspect – partly explained by the monumentality of the topic (the fragmentation is accentuated by the typesetting and formatting of the text) – develops into a coherent and compelling cultural history. More is involved than the immortal playwright's Transylvanian stage: Shakespeare is an excuse for a 19th century theatre history-writing, the value of which is due to the specific and undeniable "Transylvanian" perspective.

The example of Transylvania illustrates the mechanism of the Hungarian canonization of Shakespeare: initially the dramas of the great English classic became known through German mediation; at the beginning of the century dramas like *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, *Richard III*, *The Winter's Tale* are read in German. The stories of *Hamlet* (the Hungarian premiere of which was held in Kolozsvár/Cluj on 23 November 1793), *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* were presented to the Hungarian audience in a relatively short time by the stage as well. The opening of the National Theatre of Pest on 22 August 1837 represented a significant competition to the National Theatre of Kolozsvár/Cluj, given the fact that many actors transferred to the awaited representative theatre institution of the rapidly developing Hungarian cultural centre. The phenomenon was painful for those living outside the capital, but the thought that the mission of the national theatre was to recruit the nation's best actors, which meant that the first company of the National Theatre of Pest was mainly formed from the former members of the company of Kolozsvár/Cluj, was somewhat comforting. During the '50s and '60s there were not many Shakespeare performances. These most often coincided with the appearance of a guest performer from Pest. The author's research shows that the readers' reception and the theatrical reception seem to merge during the '70s.

The naturalization of Shakespeare is closely related to the latent problem that we can call the regaining of the national consciousness, the value-based theatrical creation. In every European country, playing Shakespeare meant the coming of age of nations – the truth of which is confirmed by the Hungarian example. Thus the 19th-

century Transylvanian reception of Shakespeare is a phenomenon similar not only to the one valid in the mother country, but in the broader European context as well.

Eliminating Taboos and Social Veils
Marius Rotar: *Eternity through Ash. A History of Crematoriums*
and *Human Cremation in 19th-20th Century Romania*
– Review –

Adriana TEODORESCU
1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia

Keywords: cremation, history, Romanian Orthodox Church, Communism, The Evil Politics of Cremation

E-mail: adriana.teodorescu@gmail.com

*

The book by Marius Rotar, published at the European Institute in Iași, in 2011¹ is 630 pages long and also, it is the first fundamental Romanian book dedicated to an extremely delicate subject: cremation. The author, a researcher at the „1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, is one of the few specialists on the subject of death and the process of dying, treating it individually through research materialised in books² or articles hosted by prestigious journals from our country as well as abroad³, but also in a way that has ample and generous openings towards the scientific community. Marius Rotar has organized an annual international conference in 2008, in Alba Iulia, meant to get closer to death from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary point of view, in regarding its various aspects, whether social, cultural, medical, anthropological or architectural.⁴

If death has represented and, under different forms, continues to represent a cultural and social taboo – we refer to the paradigm of refusing death⁵ – the destiny of

¹ Marius Rotar, *Eternity through Ash. A History of Crematoriums and Human Cremation in Romania in 19th-20th Centuries* (Iași: The European Institute, 2011), 630 p., ISBN 978-973-611-778-7.

² Marius Rotar, *Death in 19th Century Transylvania. Vol. 1: Ten Years of Concubinage with Death. Historical Dimensions and Contemporary Perspectives on Death* (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2006).

³ Marius Rotar, “The Mask of the Red Death: the Evil Politics of Cremation in Romania in December 1989”, *Mortality* 15, 1 (2010): 1–17; Marius Rotar, “Between Two Fires: Cremation in Romania during 20th–21st Centuries,” *Pharos International* 3 (2010): 4–9.

⁴ The website for the conference and the researcher, Marius Rotar: <http://romaniandeathcremation.blogspot.com/>

⁵ A western and American paradigm of death that was debated starting with Ariès or Gorer and which means, largely, the exclusion of the process of death, as an idea, as an individual and social reality, as well as of dying people from the visible social field. As a result, sick people die in hospital, far from the eyes of beloved ones, becoming incapable of confronting death and even cremation is seen by researchers such as Louis-Vincent Thomas, at least in one stage, as a form of