

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Romania*, Monica Matei-Chesnoiu (ed.), introductory note by Ton Hoenselaars, București: Humanitas, 2006, 205 p. ISBN (10) 973-973-50-1240-3; *Shakespeare in Romania. 1900-1950*, Monica Matei-Chesnoiu (ed.), introductory note by Stanley Wells, București: Humanitas, 2007, 204 p. ISBN 978-973-50-1793-4; *Shakespeare in Romania. 1950 to the present*, Monica Matei-Chesnoiu (ed.), introductory note by Balz Engler, București: Humanitas, 2008, 374 p. ISBN 978-973-50-2127-6.

Review by IULIA MILICĂ

Do we need another book about Shakespeare? Are people in this age of speed, fast-moving images and computer games at least curious about seeing a production, much less reading a play by Shakespeare, not to mention a critical study on Shakespeare? In fact, is there anything new and of interest that can still be said about the English bard?

From the studies included in the three volumes of *Shakespeare in Romania*, edited by Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, the reader understands that Shakespeare is no longer, as he or she may have imagined, a widely celebrated playwright and poet of another land and another time, fit only for elevated discussions and profound meditations. He/She realizes that Shakespeare is much closer to our own cultural context. This collection of studies on Shakespeare - the analyses of his plays through translations, stage productions, influences in literature or arts - certainly contributes to a better understanding of Shakespeare's impact on Romanian culture.

The period extending from the end of the nineteenth century to the present was one of dramatic transformations in the history, culture and mentality of the Romanians: from the Union of the Romanian principalities in 1859 that was the starting point of a series of reforms that led Romania towards a modern age, to the War of Independence (1877 - 1878) and then to monarchy, the First World War and the Great Union (1918), the nationalistic movements and the royal dictatorship, the Second World War followed by the communist period that ended in 1989, just to enumerate some of the most important historical events. Culturally, this relatively short period of a century and a half was one of dramatic changes: from the search for a national and cultural identity, to the flourishing of the Romanian culture in the first half of the twentieth century,

which ended abruptly in the communist period of compromises, censorship, veiled criticism and silent resistance, to the post-1989 period marked by the attempt to retrieve and reshape a lost or distorted sense of national identity. All these often extreme historical and cultural changes are rendered through the prism of Shakespearean studies which shows how translations, stage or radio productions, critical studies, influences, representations in visual arts have contributed to the creation of a cultural and national identity by enriching the language and refining the artistic tastes, and, above all, by aligning the Romanian culture to Western values. This is the often painful process that these volumes attempt to portray from multiple angles, insisting on the subtle ways in which Shakespeare's works, by being reshaped and integrated through a complex system of influences, translations, different types of performances, have had an impact on various aspects of Romanian culture in its process towards modernization.

Each volume is a valuable source of information on a specific period of time: volume 1 covers the end of the nineteenth century, volume 2 the period between 1900 and 1950, and volume 3 takes us to the present. The focus on translations in the first volume is to be expected, since it was a time when Romanians became seriously engaged in literary translation in their attempt to modernize the Romanian language as one of the main means of expressing their national identity. Analyzing older translations may be a difficult task, as Pia Brînzeu notices in her study "Recycling Old Texts: Petre Carp's Translation of *Macbeth* (1864)", since the language used by the nineteenth century translation may be perceived as obsolete and unfamiliar to the modern reader, hence the need for constantly revising older translations of such texts or, preferably, translating them anew. They must be recorded as important steps towards the introduction of Shakespeare's work to Romanian audiences, particularly as they were used in early stagings of the plays. Translations such as Carp's give us a glimpse of the complicated process of modernization of the Romanian language, and evince the translators' effort to keep a balance between archaic words, neologisms and regionalisms.

The importance of the translation not only as dissemination of a foreign culture, but also as refinement of one's national language is also highlighted by Monica Matei-Chesnoiu in her comments on Scarlat Ion Ghica's translation of *Richard III* (1884). Translated directly from English, his version is considered more modern than others of the time, and it shows the translator's effort to render the subtleties of the Shakespearean language in a more modern Romanian. The same preoccupation with language is evident in both Aida Todi's study on the 1855 translation of *Hamlet* which, according to the author, reveals important information on the attempts to establish a linguistic standard as well as to refine stylistic devices, and in Camelia Bejan's analysis on psych

constructions in Shakespeare's plays and the manner in which they were rendered in nineteenth-century Romanian translations.

Generally, the translations of the period were meant for the stage, which determined lexical choices with immediate appeal to larger audiences. Scarlat Ion Ghica's translation of *Richard III* also includes illustrations, explanatory historical notes and even indications for the pronunciation of certain names. A similar effort is highlighted by Ileana Marin in "Illustrated Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Romanian Translations", enforcing today's truism that a play is, at the same time, literature and representation.

Another problem tackled by the writers of these studies refers to the way in which translators chose the texts they wanted to translate. Monica Matei-Chesnoiu comments on the preference of the great itinerant actors for certain plays, but also on the political circumstances determining text choice. Thus, in a period when the major political concerns were the advancement of national cultures in the 1848 revolutionary setting, or the formation of the Romanian independent state certain texts were preferred and adapted to suit the general mood at that time.

In terms of the great Bard's impact on the Romanian literature of the time, Eugenia Gavrilu's article on "Shakespeare in Eminescu's Early Gazeteering" and Marina Cap-Bun's analysis on "Shakespeare's Influence on the Plays of I.L.Caragiale" are particularly interesting. The two contributors link Shakespeare to two iconic figures of Romanian literature, who were enthusiastic about the dramatist's ability to create unforgettable characters of universal relevance.

The articles in the second volume of the collection, *Shakespeare in Romania: 1900-1950*, are more varied, reflecting a diversification of cultural productions in Romania in the first decades of the twentieth century. To the traditional sections of the first volume devoted to translation and performance and influence, are added valuable contributions in literary criticism, since many translators were also critics. This is the case of Dragoș Protopopescu who, as Mădălina Nicolaescu argues, pointed out that the great writer should not be seen as a fixed and unchangeable point in time but in an ever-shifting relationship with his audience and their own times, with all the political and ideological transformations this entails.

Several studies deal with the different critical approaches to Shakespeare's works. Pia Brînzeu's essay focuses on Haig Acterian's study which insists on the promotion of classical drama with the purpose of integrating those cultural values that could be adapted to national interests and cultural specificity. Dan Grigorescu's essay entitled "The Earliest Romanian Critics of English Culture" mentions other important names of translators, critics or professors - D. N. Ciotory, Peter Grimm, Ioan Botez, Marcu Beza, Anghel Demetrescu etc. - who promoted Shakespeare in essays, monographs or articles,

which suggests an increasing interest in English culture in a society dominated mostly by French and German influences. Maria-Ana Tupan's "Shakespeare and the Modernist Hypotext" highlights the connections between the Romanian cultural movements of the first half of the twentieth century and the European ideas of the time, thus arguing that Romania was not an isolated cultural enclave. These articles suggest these critics' genuine interest in aligning Romanian criticism to Western models, while also promoting the Romanian culture.

These connections with the Western culture are not to be spotted only on the critical level, but also on the literary one. Shakespeare's influences are visible in many Romanian works, and two extended analyses are dedicated to such instances: Eugenia Gavrilu's "I am Always in Shakespeare: Recourse to Shakespeare in the 1940s – The Case of Mihail Sebastian" and Marina Cap-Bun's "From Stage to Page: The Intricate Mechanisms of Intercultural Transfer – A Case-Study of *Macbeth* and Caragiale." Eugenia Gavrilu's article dealing with Mihail Sebastian's *Journal 1935-1944* may function as part of a cultural biography as it refers to the writer's life and work in close connection to the historical realities that may have influenced his choices in terms of literary production. The writer's preference for Shakespeare is seen as an escape or source of comfort for this Jewish intellectual experiencing the hardships of war, degradation, neglect, constant fear. For him reading Shakespeare and writing about his work represented more than an intellectual activity; it was a form of escape. In her article, Marina Cap-Bun analyzes Caragiale's last volume of sketches insisting on the relationship between *Poveste (Fairy-Tale)* and *Macbeth*. According to the author, Caragiale wanted to demonstrate how *Macbeth*'s story of cruelty, tyranny and power – like most themes and characters of universal value – can be reformulated endlessly in various ages and circumstances.

The same universal values can be represented not only by different writers belonging to different ages, but also by different types of creators. In her article "Shakespeare in Romanian Art of the First Half of the Twentieth Century", Ileana Marin analyzes two works of art influenced by Shakespeare: a bronze bust dedicated to Shakespeare and created by Dimitrie Paciurea, and a painting by Theodor Pallady representing Ophelia's drowning. The bust, created in a classical manner, is meant to suggest that Shakespeare is a representative of classical theatre and of universal values. The painting, in the manner of impressionist painter Monet, suggests that the Romanian arts at that time were in close connection with the Western artistic movements. Both, however, display elements of Romanian cultural specificity noted especially in some details in Pallady's painting, and they represent two important instances of Romanian art in the first half of the twentieth century.

From Monica Matei-Chesnoiu's analysis in "Early *Hamlets* in Romanian Productions: 1861-1942" it is clear that this period also displays a

remarkable evolution and refinement in the theatrical language, productions of Shakespeare's plays helping create a standard that was to be followed, in broad lines, throughout the century. Starting, as Monica Matei-Chesnoiu suggests, from the conventions of the nineteenth-century grand opera, theatrical productions will change towards the middle of the twentieth-century. It is a point made by Marian Popescu in his study of a modern *Macbeth*. Opening on February 27, 1946 and directed by Ioan Sava, this production took both audience and critics by surprise. This *Macbeth* used masks enhancing the symbolic significance of characters and scenes, coming against the general trend in post-Second World War Romania, when the cultural effervescence of the previous decades was replaced by a growing control and centralization of culture. Ioan Sava's purpose in staging this classic play by appealing to modern, experimental techniques was meant to familiarize the audiences with practices often employed in Western theatre, and it can be regarded as a major step towards the modernization of the Romanian stage.

An interesting cultural phenomenon in post-war Romania is well delineated by Ana-Maria Munteanu in "Shakespeare in the Repertory of the National Radio Theatre: Silence Seen as a Figural Event." Considered acceptable by the communist regime as part of their program of educating Romanian audiences, the adaptations became a very important tool of criticism and subversion through their main themes: power, corruption and politics. Based on good quality translations, with high standard musical tracks and an exceptional cast, these productions became works of art in themselves, developing their own techniques to replace the lack of visual support, primarily a complex system of voice modulations, accents, inflections or silences which enhanced theatrical symbolism, and became thus another instance of resistance to an oppressive regime.

The last volume of the collection deals with the communist and post-communist periods. Though the communist period was characterized by censorship, separation from the Western world and isolation, art was a means of resistance and escape. In a period in which books were more and more difficult to find, theatre became one of the main forms of entertainment, solace and even means to criticize the regime without, however, tampering with the significance of the original, as demonstrated in Nicoleta Cinpoes' article "A Long Night's Journey into Today: The Romanian *Hamlet* of the '80s". On the one hand, the productions highlight the similarities between Hamlet's Denmark and the political situation of Romania at the time, enhancing the feeling of oppression, constant surveillance, control and destruction of privacy that lead to the fragmentation of the self. Moreover, the numerous allusions to the political situation made the public accomplice to a form of criticism of the regime. On the other hand, these elements did not diminish the importance and value of the Shakespearean text supported by a script whose language provided a contrast to

the degradation of the Romanian language promoted in newspapers and on television and suggesting a return to the genuine Romanian values. After 1989, many of the elements of such productions no longer appealed to the audiences living in different political circumstances. The relationship between the historical context of a production and its audience is tackled by Odette Blumenfeld in “Strategies of Power: *Richard III* and *Richard II* on the Romanian Stage”. The destiny of Shakespeare’s chronicle plays is traced from the nineteenth century till after 1989. Odette Blumenfeld notices that, while in the nineteenth-century the chronicle plays were a great source of influence for Romanian writers such as Vasile Alecsandri or Bogdan Petriceicu-Hasdeu and many were translated into Romanian, they were staged rather late. They became popular in the communist period being read in a subversive and critical manner. After 1989, the productions retained political relevance by referring to the 1989 events and the flattery, deceitfulness and opportunism of politicians at the time, demonstrating, once more, the close and complex relationship created between text, director/actor and audiences in Romanian theatre.

Whereas before 1989, art provided a haven for the individual caught in a terrifying regime, after 1989 the arts were means of reconnecting Romanian art to the Western realities without betraying local specificity. In “Relocating Shakespeare in the 1950’s: V. Voiculescu’s “Imaginary Translation” of Shakespeare’s *Fancied Sonnets*”, Eugenia Gavrilu discusses a very interesting example of how *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* also influenced Romanian writers. Voiculescu introduces his original sonnets as “translations” by recognizing Shakespeare as frame, term of reference, as well as intellectual and lyrical challenge. This volume sets a new landmark in the reception of Shakespeare in Romania, passing from translation to original writing, as if relocating Shakespeare’s poetic universe in a different territory, while still recognizing his massive influence in the evolution of the Romanian culture. A similar conclusion is reached by Marina Cap-Bun in “Shakespearean Traces in Twentieth-Century Romanian Poetry”, where she discusses the echoes of Shakespeare’s themes, characters and attitudes in the writings of various Romanian poets.

After 1989, Romanian art continued to affirm its ties with Western art while also focusing on spiritual values shared with Moldovan art. Ileana Marin’s article entitled “Shakespeare – An Icon of (Post)Modernity” discusses a tapestry and a multimedia dramatic performance. Maria Saca-Răcilă’s tapestry *Romeo and Juliet* (1990) suggests a pro-national, ethnocentric impulse by combining the timeless representation of love with elements pertaining to local spirituality, asserting that Moldovan art is actually Romanian art, the political and historical barriers being of an artificial nature. Sixteen years later, Carmen Vidu comes with a totally different representation in her multimedia dramatic performance

entitled *Baby Smile*, which affirms the pro-western, globalizing impulse yet does not betray that it is the work of a Romanian artist.

The communist regime was not particularly favourable to Romanian scholars, who struggled with limited access to foreign publications and reduced mobility. According to Pia Brînzeu, the consequence was that criticism moved in two new directions: one was to approach Shakespeare from a Romanian vantage point, the other was to come with totally new perspectives of analysis. In “Escapist Strategies in Communist Romania: Shakespeare and the Computer” she speaks of a cybernetic approach to *Othello* which combined literary study with the newly-developing computer techniques offering interesting interpretative and analytic models to be applied to other literary works as well. After 1989, however, Romanian critics had to make up for the lost time. In “The Ups and Downs of the Enlargement of the Shakespeare Canon: A Romanian Example”, George Volceanov attempts to portray the post-1989 critical scene and points out that Shakespeare has been used as a vehicle for new and modern ideas that have helped promote and refine the Romanian culture. In this context, the enlargement of the Shakespearean canon by accepting, translating and also staging previously neglected plays provides not only fresh interpretations, but also aligns the Romanian culture to the Western critical tendencies.

And so, after reading this three-volume collection of studies, one question still remains. This work on Shakespeare is undoubtedly an important landmark for Romanian readers, offering them a fresh perspective on the situation of Shakespeare studies in Romania while also providing them with a new and challenging perspective on our own culture. But what is the relevance of such an enterprise in a larger, international context? The answer can be found in the forewords to each volume written by reputed Shakespearean scholars such as Ton Hoenselaars, Stanley Wells and Balz Engler, respectively. Ton Hoenselaars, for instance, speaks of the modern trend towards “decentralizing” Shakespeare. International research networks and conferences have been organized in the past two decades, their aim being to “theorize the ways in which Shakespeare may be looked upon as a ‘European’ rather than simply as an ‘English’ writer, to assess how each individual country contributes to this transnational phenomenon, to analyze how ‘Shakespeare’ is constitutive of what is generally termed ‘Europe.’” (vol. I, p. 8) This proves that *Shakespeare in Romania* is a contribution to the study of Shakespeare as a European writer, made accessible to readers and audiences via translations and stage productions that have interpreted and altered the meaning of the original texts.

Therefore, this collection of studies that are so diverse that they can even create, at first, the feeling of a “medley of great but somewhat disordered variety” (vol. III, p. 7) is, as Balz Engler notices, a very coherent effort to present to the reader, foreign or not, the diversity of the Romanian culture. He is right in pointing out that “[f]or an outsider the strength of the volume lies in the

way the individual contributions illuminate, from different perspectives, the way academic, theatrical and literary practices were affected by difficult and changing political conditions, and how these were dealt with in a productive manner.” (vol. III, pp. 7-8)

*William Shakespeare's Sonnets. For the First Time Globally Reprinted. A Quatercentenary Anthology (1609-2009)*. Pfister, Manfred and Jürgen Gutsch (eds.). Dozwil TG Schweiz: Edition SIGNATHUR. 2009. 752 pp. + 1 DVD. ISBN 978-3-908141-54-9. 100 sfr or € 63.

Reviewed by VERONICA POPESCU

One of the most important editorial events in the field of Shakespeare studies in 2009, the present volume marks the cultural venture and worldwide appreciation of Shakespeare's most controversial and intriguing work, the *Sonnets* (1609). And it does that by mapping out the four hundred years of translation, interpretation, imitation, influence, and transposition in other media that these 154 sonnets have known in cultures as remote from England as the Chinese, Indian, South African, Maori or Georgian, or in languages that are entirely experimental and unnatural such as Esperanto or Klingon.

With this surprising book, editors Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch practically reformed the common practice of anthologizing translations by deconstructing *Shakespeare's Sonnets* culturally and translingually and turning it into a collection of sonnets in no less than 70 languages (not counting the twelve Italian dialects represented here virtually for the first time as translating idioms of the *Sonnets*), only a part of the translations being what most specialists would call faithful or correct translations of the original ones. That, as Manfred Pfister plainly states in the Introduction (p. 13), reflects the editors' choice to include the minor and the marginal – a deconstructive twist to anthology-making which demonstrates quite convincingly that meanings are always irreducibly complex and unstable, and that the mysteries of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are far from having been completely solved.

This is a book that refuses a complete reading, from the first page to the last, inviting instead a random perusal of national histories of translation, adaptation, emulation, rewriting of these poems across temporal and national boundaries. The introductory notes written by scholars and/or professional translators are followed by a selection of at least twelve versions of one or several sonnets according to such criteria as representativeness, historical relevance, quality of translation or, on the contrary, degree of liberty taken from the original in creative rewritings of the Shakespearean sonnets, the result being an approximation of the trajectory of the sonnets within a particular culture rather than an evaluative comment on the philological quality of the translations,