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Shakespeare in Romania: The Meandering Road from Adoption to Adaptation

*To William Shakespeare of Stratford-upon-Avon,
“the monument without a tomb”*

As an introduction to my paper, I should like to offer a few lines from a poem written more than a century ago by Mihai Eminescu, the national poet of Romania, at a time when Shakespeare’s works were mostly known there via French and German translations.

Oh, Shakespeare, whom I sadly ponder oft,
Thou art the gentle brother of my soul;
The wealthy springs of verse thou bringst aloft
Leap to my mind – and I repeat them whole.
Thus cruel art thou and yet so very soft;
Thy words – a tempest – yet they gently roll;
In God and thee man many faces sees:
Thou tell’st us more than hosts of centuries.

If I had been coeval to thy rise
Wouldst thou indeed have been so dear to me?
Whate’er I feel, be it or wrong or wise
– Suffice it that I feel – I owe to thee.
‘Tis thou alone that opened’st wide my eyes
I read the world’s great riddle with thy key

E'en if with thee I err, I love my fault:
To be like thee's the glory I exalt.

(Eminescu, *Shakespeare, or the Books*)¹

Productions of Shakespeare's plays are products of the times in which they are conceived and performed. But they also act *on* those times to change the people who see them (McEvoy 107). While the acceptance/appropriation of Shakespeare in former colonies of the British Empire (to which the United States of America should be dutifully added) is generally taken for granted, the situation of the Eastern European non-anglophone countries – Romania included – is entirely different, readers and audiences there being greatly dependent on translations. I am not considering here the institutionalisation of the Bard as a means of accruing capital, power, and cultural prestige – the so-called 'big-time Shakespeare', whereby academics used Shakespeare ideologically to shape the academic study of English.² Rather, I refer to 'small-time Shakespeare' – or what Adrienne Rich has called individual acts of re-vision that may even become acts of survival (33–49). It is this 'small-time Shakespeare' emerging from local, more pointed responses to the bard that satisfy motives ranging from play to political commitment. Outstanding Romanian writers and academics have offered great translations of Shakespeare's plays that are already considered part of the Romanian canon, and an essential source for the students whose knowledge of English will not permit them to read Shakespeare in the original. But the reaction of theatre-goers differs according to the craftsmanship and genius of the director, as well as the talent of the individual actors. Moreover, different historical periods, with their prevailing ideologies, have greatly influenced the acceptance of Shakespeare by Romanian audiences.

From Discovery to adoption

The Romanian 19th century is deeply marked by the Shakespearean obsession. The Shakespearean repertoire found its foremost position among the first theatrical representations; it is the reason why its translation into Romanian started at the same time with the founding of the first Romanian theatres. During a few decades only, the taste of the audience, refined by the Shakespearean productions, came to sanction plagiarism and the cheap localization and to firmly encourage the original plays. This aspect of the stimulation of original

¹ The quoted poems by Eminescu come from the collection *Poezii* [*Poems*] transl. Leon Levițchi and Andrei Bantaș, Bucharest: TEORA, 2007.

² See Desmet 1–12.

creativity is by far the most important of all, as it is difficult to find a Romanian playwright who was not influenced by the Shakespearean model.

I started my presentation by citing Eminescu. In his early years, as a prompter of a theatre company, he knew very well not only the authors – mostly French and German – he was prompting from, but also Shakespeare. Thus, in 1868, when he had started his novel *Geniu pustiu* [Empty Genius], he was mentioning “the genius of the divine Brit” in a sentence that he would resume later, in his story, *Sărmanul Dionis* [Poor Dionis]: “It looked like the genius of Shakespeare, the divine Brit, had expired upon the earth a new lunatic angel, a new Ophelia.” This “new Ophelia” was the prototype of the Eminescian virgin, the seraphic beauty the author and the protagonist of the novel imagine as saying “the prayer of a virgin.” It is in the same period that the young poet dreamed at writing a number of tragedies, one inspired by Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

But the most important moment of this period is the poet’s own translation of H. T. Röttscher’s *Die Kunst der dramatischen Darstellung* [The Art of Dramatic Representation],³ in which Shakespeare’s work is frequently mentioned. This translation – started in Bucharest and completed in Vienna – testifies not only to the young poet’s mastery of all aspects of dramatic representation, but also to his vast literary and humanistic initiation. Eminescu’s indebtedness to Röttscher is fully identifiable in his cult for Shakespeare – the German aesthetician’s treaty being one of the most profound apologies of Shakespeare’s theatre of the time. It also means that Eminescu was not only familiar with the writings of Goethe, or Schiller, but also with the complete works of the “divine Brit.” It is in his poem “Emperor and Proletarian” that, after the fall of the Paris Commune, the Caesar – deep in thought and full of remorse for the horrors committed, seems to see the gigantic shadow of old King Lear:

It seemed to him that under the star-bespangled sky,
Over the crests of forests, over the waters’ sphere,
He saw how, hoary-headed, with a dark brow severe
Upon which there was hanging the crown of straws, all dry,
Passed on the old king Lear.

The Caesar watched intently the shadow in the cloud;
Through rifts where stars peeped trembling his mind could see the sense,
The whole sense of the pictures depicting all intense
And glamorous existence... The peoples’ echoes loud
Were voices that betokened a world of vile offence.

(Eminescu, *Emperor and Proletarian*)

³ H. T. Röttscher, *Die Kunst der dramatischen Darstellung*, 3 vols, Berlin 1841–1846. For his translation, Eminescu used the second edition of the work, H. Th. Röttscher, *Die Kunst der dramatischen Darstellung. In ihrem organischen Zusammenhänge wissenschaftlich entwickelt*, zweite vermehrte Auflage, Leipzig: Verlag von Otto Wigand, 1864.

One further example is Eminescu's moving obituary upon the death, on 31 December 1882, of Léon Gambetta, Prime Minister of France, where he quotes Shakespeare in prose, but in a surprisingly correct translation:

Life is only a travelling shadow, a comedian that for a full hour shouts and gestures on the stage, and then is not heard any longer; it is a story told by an idiot, full of storms and agitation, and finally meaning nothing (qtd. in Perpessicius 199).⁴

For a comparison, here is the original Shakespearean text:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 5.5)

One remarkable example of the poet's knowledge of Shakespeare is to be found in an article published in 1870 where, commenting on the Romanian dramatist Bolintineanu's plays, more artificial and vulnerable to criticism, he writes:

The cause of the profound failure of Mr Bolintineanu in these creations seems to be that he cast a glance at the genial eagle of the North: on Shakespeare. Indeed, when you have his [Shakespeare's] works in your hand, they seem so broken, so disconnected that you think there is nothing easier to write like him, and even exceed him in regularity. But perhaps there never lived a tragic author with such a command upon his matter, an author who wove so consciously all the threads of his work, like Shakespeare; it is because the break is only apparent, and a clear sight would immediately visualize that unity full of symbolism and profoundness which rules in all the creations of this powerful genius. Goethe – a genius – stated that a dramatist that reads more than one play by Shakespeare per year should not be read, but studied in such a way that should allow you to know as much as you can in order to imitate him because, on my opinion, the Shakespearean domain that Mr Bolintineanu could have more successfully tackled would have been that of absolute abstraction, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Winter's Tale*, *As You Like It*, etc... (qtd. in Perpessicius 199).⁵

It would seem that as early as 1870 Eminescu had read "all the creations of this powerful genius." But Eminescu does not only eulogize his master by opposing him to the artificial and vulnerable drama of the 19th century, but also goes deeper in defining the essence of this creation by its roots, starting from the folk songs, whom he calls

⁴ Translation mine.

⁵ The article was first published in *Familia* – 30 January 1870. Translation mine.

fragrant flowers, but as wild as the flowers in mad King Lear's crown. Isn't the seemingly meaningless mixture of the wild flowers that mingle in the locks of the old king the vivid metaphor of his brain, in which the images – flowers of his thought – mingled wildly and without any meaning? And how profound those thoughts are, and how fragrant the flowers! This is how the wild flowers – the folk songs – are. It is on their field that Shakespeare and any other national poet harvested. [...] Shakespeare spoke of man as he really is. His drunkard is a drunkard, his hero a hero, his fool a fool, his sceptic a sceptic, and each of them generously painted with the colour of his character, because the People creates what he sees, and Shakespeare was one of his people, by excellence (qtd. in Grid Modorcea 228).⁶

One mention should be made: Eminescu had seen *King Lear* in Vienna, in 1870, before Christmas.

During his years in Berlin (1872–1874), Eminescu was trying a failed attempt at a parody meant for the puppet-show and entitled *The Infamy, Cruelty, and Dispair, or The Black Cave and the bad Censers, or Elvira in the Desperation of Love*. The characters are the King, the Queen, the Ministers, and Pepele, the schemer. Here is a sample of his notes for the play:

It is highly necessary to translate the foreign classics.
Therefore, let us start with Shakespeare.
Accepted – but he should be naturalized.
Good – which play are we starting with?
Richard III.
Good. Let's nationalize the types. We turn the king
into a Turkish captain,
the queen into a virgin and R. III into a Jesuit.
When would you like the translation completed?
Who's the idiot to ask such a question? Tonight, of course.
How could it be? A tragedy until tonight?
Oh! How stupid you are! Aren't you a genius, like us all?
Pepelea, you write the parts of the captain and the Jesuit.

(qtd. in Perpessicius 201 and Modorcea 230).

One last example could be the Romanian poet's interpretation of the famous words uttered by Jaques, the philosopher: All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players (2.7):

In the world's dramatic show,
Deem yourself a looker-on:
Should some men feign joy or woe,
Their true face you'll read anon;
Should they weep or insults dart –

⁶ Translation mine.

Inwardly rejoicing, lie,
 Sifting out from all their art
 What is right and what is wry.
 [...]
 For no matter what appears
 By the same means will be swirled,
 And for many thousand years,
 Mirth and grief have ruled the world;
 Other masks – the play's the same;
 Other lips – the same tune all;
 Duped too often, you keep game:
 Don't be Hope's or Terror's thrall.

(Eminescu, *The Gloss*)

All these are the strivings and feelings of a poet.

Thus Shakespeare crossed the Channel and travelled from London to Bucharest via Paris, at a time when French (and not English) was the *lingua franca*, and – not surprisingly – found its way into the conscience of the Romanian audience. But a further investigation of the Shakespearean appropriations and adaptations in the twentieth century Romania will hopefully form the substance of a further study.

Undercover Shakespeare: Communist Interpretations

One might say that the post-World War II history of a 150 years old Romanian theatre is marked by the Communist take-over of power, leading to a so-called arduously desired and hoped for revolution in thought and feeling meant to influence all kinds of human manifestation, without leaving aside the theatrical institution. After August 23rd 1944,⁷ the Craiova theatre – and the whole Romanian theatrical movement – passed through a long period of fumbling about, too often floundering in the meanders created by the new ideologizing tendencies, more and more aggressive and penetrating. It was the rulers' manifested purpose to promote a dramaturgy placed under the sign of a devastating proletcult, the tackling of the "great Soviet dramaturgy" which preferentially advanced minor texts, more than often dictated by a vigorous and aggressive politicianism that had nothing to do with the traditional autochthonous doctrines. It was also meant to translate the world dramaturgy at the outskirts of the

⁷ The day 23 August 1944 – Romania's national holiday until December 1989 – was the date when the Romanian government decided to change sides and fight alongside with the allies against fascist Germany.

repertoires, encouraging a fierce censorship that considered the fundamental values of this great literature as dangerous, diversionist, and destined to oblivion. An ever stronger policy of dictation, fully supported by the Communist newspapers of the time, thwarted the courageous attempts of the men of theatre to promote a select repertoire, condemning with childish and inquisitorial arguments the inclusion in the repertoire of some important dramatic texts.⁸ At all levels possible, they were forcefully imposing the “socialist-realist” method of creation, “the only one that could possibly ensure the emergence of a new and great original dramaturgy”.⁹ In the 1978 version of the *History of the National Theatre in Craiova* we read:

The historic act of August 23rd, a landmark in the country’s existence and its great evolution, opened a new era in the history of the Romanian people, and meant the beginning of the popular revolution which has changed from the bottom Romania’s entire life. The victorious popular insurrection, carried out under the never defeated banner of the Romanian Communist Party marked the beginning of the real affirmation of the forces and talents of our people, creating the conditions for the transformation of our ancient hope into concrete achievements, as real as the mountains, valleys, rivers. In their full effort of healing the wounds of the war – which had seriously hit the Romanian culture, and our theatre as well – the people took immediate action to rebuild the demolished homes and souls, that of the Romanian theatre among them. It is worth mentioning that the opening of the 1944–1945 season took place in due course all over the country, this event being an opportunity for the affirmation of the confidence in the new mission of the theatre, and in the human being as well – in that human being liberated from his/her servitudes, with an advanced conscience, and creative forces verified along the new, ascending road of fierce fights that the country was starting on. (Firan 257)¹⁰

This was the cultural climate in which a theatre already centennial had to resume its work. In order to ensure a correct orientation of the theatrical activity, the Communist newspapers had a determining impact. In different theoretical articles, Marxist aesthetic comments and reviews, it was stressed that “the great change in our history does not mean a return to the old political and cultural climate,” and that “the deep and overwhelming forces of history have moved and changed the bases of the whole world, which is now confronted with new problems and facts.” *Scînteia*, the leading Communist newspaper, estimated that the activity of many theatres lacked the “understanding of the historic role of the theatre as participant in the construction of a new world,” for which reason they staged “amorous plots, the dramas of adultery, financial transactions, miraculous

⁸ As an example, the performance of Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* was sanctioned because the “social side” was not fully rendered evident (See note 11 below).

⁹ All citations refer to an editorial that appeared in the Communist party official newspaper, *Scînteia* 84 (1944): 2.

¹⁰ All quotations from Romanian sources, unless otherwise stated, were translated by Emil Sîrbulescu.

occurrences, romantic and sentimental mawkishness, and the gratuitous play on words.”¹¹ The characteristics and advanced qualities of the *realist-socialist* method of creation were stressed upon as the only capable of ensuring the apparition of great, original drama. The media and the direct guidance of the Party activists represented impulses, reasons, and pillars of a new substantiation of the position of the theatre in society. The repertoires were to include only those plays corresponding to the new aesthetic criteria. Social critique, the presentation of the life of the working class, the indictment of the capitalist order, and so on, were to become obligatory elements in choosing the plays, and Shakespeare’s dramas were no exception.

Not surprisingly, the first post-World War II performance of a Shakespearean play on this stage was the 1957 production of *As You Like It*. A review of this masterpiece of ambiguities introduces it in the already traditional ideological framework of the period: Shakespeare brings on the stage characteristic aspects of his time, when the nobles were removing one another from the leadership of different dukedoms... Frederic and Oliver represent the struggle of a part of the nobility for the acquisition of large estates... The exiled duke, Orlando, and Rosalind represent that part of the nobility animated by the desire for social justice... The shepherds and the old servant embody the honesty and love capable of any sacrifices of the ordinary man as opposed to the meanness and avarice of the rich feudal lord.¹² What follows is a regular theatre review, concentrating on the quality of the staging and acting. Fortunately enough, the Communist party activists who were supposed to attend the preview and give their approval for the performance to come were generally uneducated persons, whose knowledge of “comrade” Shakespeare was less than satisfactory. Luckily, the great bard had died too long before to represent any threat to the new social order. On the other hand, the Romanian actors have always considered Shakespeare’s text as *the* text, the culmination of everything that has ever been written for the stage. To the great disappointment of those who expect the inclusion of any amount of anti-Communist undertones in a Shakespearean text, I can testify to the actors’ willingness to observe the text, and pay homage to it by faithfully reciting each and every line in the play. This was a form of resistance to the imposed repertoires containing Russian and Soviet plays, as well as plays

¹¹ The first complete and complex scientific monograph of a Romanian theatre that, unfortunately, could not avoid the limitations imposed by the Communist ideology, was replaced by a second *History of the National Theatre in Craiova – 1850–2000* (Craiova: AIUS, 2000) which entirely re-writes the chapters devoted to the fifty years of Communist regime and covers the first decade of the post-Communist era.

¹² All references come from an anonymous propagandistic brochure published by the literary secretariat of the theatre that, unfortunately, places the history and activity of the theatre within the patterns of Stalinist ideology.

written by Romanian playwrights and following the party directives. As a matter of fact, there is hardly an actor who has never dreamt of saying the latest word of his art by doing Hamlet, thus proving his maturity of thought and wholeness of his talent. This could be the explanation to the fearful reserve towards the tragedy of the young Prince of Denmark, which had not been seen on the Romanian stage for almost two decades.

It is interesting to note that ten different Shakespearean titles were staged during the fifty years of Communist rule in this country on the stage of the national Theatre of Craiova. The list includes: *As You Like It* (1955), *Hamlet* (1958), *The Twelfth Night* (1962), *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1963), *Othello* (1965), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1965), *King Lear* (1969), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1972), *Macbeth* (1976), and *Richard II* (1981).

I have already mentioned the position of the Romanian theatre companies towards the Shakespearean performances: despite the Communist censors' reluctance to the actors' references to kings, liberty, and other notions carefully excluded from the everyday discourse, such performances were entirely artistic, cultural events, in which the original texts were religiously observed. Such texts were canonized translations by well-established Romanian writers and academics, and generally protected by the very ignorance of those whose declared task was to prevent the audience from contamination with undesired "capitalist" principles.

Re-Discovery: Appropriations for a new century

From *Ubu Rex with Scenes from Macbeth* to *Twelfth Night* or Silviu Purcărete at his best

Paradoxically, performances in the first decade following the dramatic changes in Romania in 1989 reflect all the restrictions and frustrations dogging Romanian theatrical activity during half a century of Communism.

The version of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Rex* to which the Romanian director added scenes from *Macbeth*, as an inspired play-within-a-play, startles the audience with the words of a third couple – besides the Ubus and the Macbeths – who comment upon the happenings on stage with a cool gentility that sets everything in relief. Their words are perhaps the most resonant part of the play: "The action takes place in Poland; that is to say nowhere. *Nowhere is everywhere, and, in the main, it is the country you are in right now.*" (Berceanu, 7).¹³

¹³ From the Prologue to the play. Purcărete takes the basic text of *Ubu Roi* as written by Jarry, and adds fragments from other variants of the same play, excerpts from the programme of the

While it is common knowledge that Jarry used Shakespeare's tragedy as the inspiration for his play, it was his description of Ubu Rex which prompted Purcărete to combine the two plays.¹⁴ The equivocal image of the late Ceaușescu, the former Romanian Communist dictator, is perfectly represented in the director's mixing of the Jarry text with the Shakespearean one. The clown-like Ubu stands side by side with the bloody dictator Macbeth, and the result is as much a tragedy as a comedy.

Actually, the scenes from *Macbeth* begin as a court performance for the pair watching it. Obviously enough, Ubu – just like Claudius watching “The Mouse-trap” in *Hamlet* – is being treated to a fictionalised stage-recapitulation of his own crime. Calling for lights at the point where Macbeth is about to drive an axe into the skull of Duncan, Ubu cannot stop this drama from continuing to infiltrate his life. When his wife rummages in a treasure chest, out pops Lady Macbeth herself, in her mad mode. Still wielding his axe, Macbeth cavorts around the stage, his quarry now Ubu.

Parallels with the Romanian dictatorial couple are quite unmistakable in the 95-year-old *Ubu Roi*, with its tale of a married couple murderously usurping a country, destroying its villages, and holding tyrannous, bloody sway over it. The plot resemblance to *Macbeth* is also plain enough to explain why the director thought of interlacing the two plays, to the point where the characters start to swap lines. Pa and Ma Ubu are so much the latter-day heirs of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, that they actually become them: like – one cannot help feeling, as the nightmare escalates – the Ceaușescus.

The original Craiova production of the play shocked the audience who, during the intermission, unexpectedly found the foyers lit up by candlelight, and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth themselves watching everybody from glass cases. Then Ubu himself and his followers descended from the stage, sat down on their royal chairs, and watched excerpts from the *Macbeth* tragedy unfolding in front of their eyes. Irrespective of the variants devised by the director according to the material conditions offered by different theatres in Europe and elsewhere, the result of this original and unexpected play-within-a-play is a profoundly political show which, on the one hand, presents in general terms the obnoxious and corrupting character of power and, on the other, achieves obvious parallels with

premiere (10 December 1986), and even Jarry's inscription to the *editio princeps* of the play. The same technique of combination is seen in *The Danaides*, for which too Purcărete compiled different texts by various classical Greek authors and came up with his own.

¹⁴ “Thereatte Lord Ubu shook his peare-head, whence he is by the Englysshe yclept Shakespeare, and you have from him under thatte name many goodlie tragedies in his own hand” (Alfred Jarry's inscription to *Ubu Roi*, Methuen Edition, transl. C. Connolly and S. Watson-Tyle, qtd. in *Silviu Purcărete Talks to Claudia Woolgar in Romania*, Plays International, 1991).

Romania's recent history. It goes without saying that, during Ceaușescu's rule, such a stage rendering would have been unacceptable, if not impossible.

This production is not an *Ubu Rex* according to the letter of the play-text. Purcărete introduces references to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, drawing parallels between these great evil-doers of literary history. Such parallels are, as a matter of fact, at hand: in every case, the ambitious wife incites her husband to regicide; the usurpation is followed by a host of monstrous atrocities; and, finally, the oppressed take up arms to put an end to terror. Such must have been Jarry's intention, as his own references to the Shakespearean play bear the traits of a parody. But the case is different with the Romanian director. He introduces Ubu as if he were Macbeth and, as the play proceeds, more Shakespearean scenes are introduced: the Weird Sisters, Duncan's killing, Lady Macbeth's monologue, the besieging of Dunsinane Castle. Meanwhile the Ubuses sit there, watching the play within their own play. Finally, the couple take over fragments of the Shakespearean text: the two plays interpenetrate totally.

There are no proper sets on the stage: just a few metallic structures, or sometimes only some scaffolding, perhaps covered with cloths that are pushed to and fro. At a certain moment, Ubu sits on a high dais, just as Ceaușescu used to sit on the balcony of the Communist Party headquarters in Bucharest less than a decade before. He eulogises the classless society, the nobility having been liquidated by the leader's orders. He buys the mob's favours with money practically stolen from them, standing behind a conference table just like the late dictator conducting a meeting of the Politburo, and urging the people to procreation in accord with the same model. As Colin Donald says in his review of the Edinburgh performance of the play,

[Purcărete] has artfully confused the story of the grotesque king and his obscene wife with the scenes from *Macbeth* not so much to add weight to the former, but to point up the absurd blankness of *Macbeth*'s lust for ever bigger helpings of power. Anyway, it is dangerous to interpret what the Bard means to Eastern Europeans – he is compared, at one stage, to the chaotic king himself. In another deft Shakespearean parallel, Ubu ... evacuates the auditorium screaming vengeance. (Donald 13)

In this adaptation Ubu and his wife meet a fate not unlike the *Macbeths*', except that the Romanian director instantly resurrects them after a fashion. Revealed at the end in upright, satin-lined coffins, they give us a fatuous, knowing smile. Don't discount us yet, these discarded dictators could be saying. It is a concluding image to which the events of yesteryear have given an unsettling topicality. The performance, to cite British reviewer Michael Ratcliffe, "drew its power from the Ceaușescu nightmare and its exuberance from the joy of having woken up alive." (Ratcliffe 9)

In Silviu Purcărete's performances, the deciphering of the story comes from the game, as he starts from an exterior mood that he brings to the text and infiltrates into the text. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night or What You Will* or Purcărete's *What You Will, or the Night After the Feast* offers the director a key to modernity, or even post-modernity, as an attitude – a disintegration in an anarchical ebb and flow, where life is similar to fiction. The borders are indefinite, everything seems to overlap, things become imbued with the print of the others, and their separation is difficult. It is the mood of the 'night after the feast', when the spell is broken, the mirage disappears. What remains is the trace of the magical moment which has just passed by, without capturing it in a form.

To the director, the stage is a multiple world, the characters he creates are almost Gargantua-like by their carnality given by the co-planarity of spaces. All the heroes are present, and the text acts as a limelight that brings the groups to life; some of them participate by watching, others are deeply immersed in their own action. The dimension is not only horizontal, but also vertical: Malvolio is blocked in a suspended container, Olivia glides up and down in a presumed flight of love.

Two years after the premiere, Silviu Purcărete's *Night* seems to have achieved the perfect harmony between the comic and the tragic, its moments of course comedy alternating with the elegiac ones, according to the two tunes played live by the pianist. Overwhelming is the state of exhaustion, of a certain wear that does not only belong to the endless winter holiday season Shakespeare had in mind, but also to an existential agony, a nausea, remembering us of Sartre. Orsino, Duke of Illyria, is hopelessly laid down with his hopeless love for Countess Olivia who, in her turn, pines for a different kind of love discovered in the femininity of Cesario, Orsino's messenger. Even the jolly group led by Sir Toby Belch – comprised of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste, the clown, and Maria – are completely worn out after eleven nights of drunkenness.

Anyway, we know that we are at the theatre, attending a performance: the whole cast is on stage, from the very beginning to the end. There are no enters or exits, only enters and exits to/from the centre of attention. Nevertheless, we are not watching a "group theatre" – so often practiced by Silviu Purcărete – because the characters never plunge into the anonymity of the group, and have a very strong theatrical personality. Perhaps, more than in other occasions, the actors are rendered valuable in a most spectacular manner.

One important detail about this amazing production is that the audience are seated on the stage, in the close proximity of the actors. The stage is open. There is no curtain, just several wardrobes and bookcases. Further on one can see the cloakroom – a space usually hidden to the theatre-goers. There are also a piano, a fridge, a gas cooker – all making up a surrealist painting in which all the characters move from one room to the other. Doors open, and the bookcases become rooms communicating in the dark, in the mournful atmosphere of Illyria.

Silviu Purcărete's play lives under the sign of the mirror. To the right of the stage, there is the specular horizon, projecting our being – so full of contradictions and censored obsessions – to an unknown realm, an extension of the dream, the search and completion of the self. Death and wedding, face and mask, Viola is Olivia's name in the mirror, and she feels how her own being opens, reflected in the whole that unites the nocturnal to the diurnal register, at a certain time, at the end of the feast.

Somewhere, on the precincts of the National Theatre of Craiova, the director found some locked bookcases which had not been opened for a long time. He had the inspiration to remove the books and thus transform them in translucent, reflecting bodies, suitable for the background of Illyria in Shakespeare's play. The book/show cases are turned into mobile, translucent partitions of the performance space, thus suggesting the indistinct delimitation and the ambiguities of the identities. The garden dwarves on top of the bookcases might suggest the refuge of the souls in the missing books.

With two reflecting panels located to the right of the stage, the director creates fascinating moments of theatre, at the very centre of which is the charming and inaccessible Olivia, whom he turns into a bird, or a person endowed with the gift of levitation who rises to heaven and disappears when the world proves too boring to her, leaving behind a trace of perfume. She is half half-woman and half-image in a mirror, a fragile femininity, arrived from the world beyond and who – for a good part of her appearance – is covered by a most fateful shroud.

For those who know the play, or have seen other stage versions as well, everything looks different and full of new meanings. Feste, the clown, takes part in the general joy of the group with an inward look, interrupting the course of the comic action with his bitter meditations on love, death, and madness. Sir Toby Belch is a copious creation of jovial rudeness, while Sir Andrew exhibits an expression of a charming foolishness. Malvolio, victim of the flat pranks of the jolly fellows at Olivia's court, is severe and ridiculous only in comparison with the others' euphoria.

Determined not to idealize anything, the director chooses for Duke Orsino a counter-cast, finding the ideal actor for the anti-illusion of the whole performance: an elderly, overweight lover whom Olivia had all the reasons in the world to reject, while Shakespeare had done his best to convince us to the contrary.

Not the director, but the scenographer of the play – the same Silviu Purcărete – speaks about the new interpretation of the Shakespearean text. He despises the symmetries, volumes and harmonies, being preoccupied with the final refrain of Feste the clown, who suddenly turns a comedy into a sad play, with his profoundly philosophical meditations on the passing of time and the merciless ages of man who suffers, rejoices, and drinks because "the rain it raineth every day." This heavy rain neutralised by a severe thirst leads Purcărete

to the idea of a convex roofing above the stage, a roof of the world, on which a real rain pours, with thunders and lightnings, and eaves overflowing. For the rest, a few used bookcases, the glass often broken, allowing us to peep at the burlesque adventures of the characters more curiously than when they are on the open stage.

According to Purcărete, “the play is about the power and obnoxiousness of fantasy, about its poisoning power; about the ambiguity of sexes and individuals, of space and time. Madness, cross-dressing, quiproquo – here are a few of the themes artistically expressed in the performance. We have no idea where the artist’s fantasy ends and where the domain of the morbid starts. In the particular case of this play, madness is related to the ambiguity of borders, and the lack of precision of the contours. Moreover, even sexuality is ambiguous – love is viewed both as homoerotic and as heteroerotic.” Here are the director’s words again: “Here are all the performances I have ever directed, the great majority of the actors I worked with; it is a succession of mirrors distorted by nostalgia, a melancholy look upon the time I spent here, with all the feelings and fragrances that have existed ever since...” (qtd. in Berceanu 10).

***Romeo and Juliet* or how far an adaptation can go**

In a recent approach to Shakespeare, Marjorie Garber remarks:

What is often described as the timelessness of Shakespeare, the transcendent qualities for which his plays have been praised around the world and across the centuries, is perhaps better understood as an uncanny timelessness, a capacity to speak directly to circumstances the playwright could not have anticipated or foreseen. Like a portrait whose eyes seem to follow you around the room, engaging your glance from every angle, the plays and their characters seem always to be ‘modern,’ always to be ‘us.’ (Garber 3)

It is a way of confirming the world-acclaimed the late 1960s Jan Kott thesis of “Shakespeare – our contemporary” and it applies very well to the 2005 production of *Romeo and Juliet* on the stage of the same Romanian theatre, where the modern-ness or contemporary-ness quality of Shakespeare is fully demonstrated. The Greek director Yiannis Paraskievopoulos has his own explanation on his choice of the play, which

[the play] addresses our youth, when we lack experience and everything is free. We fearlessly fall in love then, because we do not know... I do not think I will feel the need to direct this play again after one year, because ideal love will seem funny to me. While working on this performance, I felt it in my being that something was coming to an end, and something different was on the point of coming to life. (12)

The director conceived *Romeo and Juliet* as “a performance for two dreams: Romeo’s Love Dream, and Juliet’s Nightmare.” The source of the unusual emotional load that characterises the acting of the two leading actors has to do with the methods used by the director. Not many people know that J. L. Moreno, the founder of psychodrama was born in Bucharest, Romania, in 1889. This is perhaps the first performance in which Morenian psychotherapy techniques are used. There is nothing special in the beginning of the performance that starts with the murmur of an audience unaware that ‘they are playing.’ The actors enter their roles just like during a psychodrama session, by successively pronouncing their real names and the names of the characters acted. The same procedure, included in the ball scene, takes the form of a strange dance of the masks which gradually cover the face of the real person turned into a character in a drama. The only exception is Romeo-Cătălin who does not enter his role via the psycho-therapeutic procedure, and aimlessly wanders in the world of the masks. He continually oscillates between the correct intensity of his acting and the emotional stress given by the moments of improvising, when he actually voices his own personal experiences. It seems that the director asked his characters to identify in their own past incidents similar to those in Shakespeare’s play, and starting from them, to build up their parts.

The young Greek director chose to show the rivalry between the two Verona families as a brawl between the groups of supporters of two rival football teams. The stage was entirely covered by a green carpet – the artificial grass of a football ground – thus turning it into an arena for the coming confrontations; on both sides, two rows of huge chairs, the spectators seats taken by the two families and their close relatives and friends. Once the curtain is raised, like true athletes, the characters leave their block-starts and proceed in their personal race, impeded by human obstacles from the opponents’ camp. Each of them has a war to fight, a revenge to accomplish, or even a verbal duel to complete. The hate between the two families openly shows its anatomy, by impulses and reactions, and a series of movements, steps, and gestures.

As the most suitable background for the two protagonists, the scenographer imagined a space dominated by a table and eight chairs, all huge, and manufactured of a cold metal. That table, after being a maiden’s bed, then a matrimonial bed, fencing ground, and site of murder, ends up by turning into a tombstone, enclosed and protected by the same heavy chairs.

The balcony scene was projected in the theatre hall. The official box became Juliet’s balcony, and the same stage covered by the artificial green carpet, was now turned – from a site of aggression – into a natural garden of dreaming. Between the two, the spectators. The unusual solution for the balcony scene mystified the audience who, though wishing to see the two protagonists together, unwillingly formed a human wall between the two and their passion, thus putting

off their meeting. They can only see their huge shadows projected on the stage. And the two finally meet, hesitantly and dangerously walking on top of the chair backs, like two acrobats on a rope – a reminder, perhaps, of their approaching fall.

One of the most moving scenes was the moment when the bodies of Tybalt and Mercutio are removed from the stage. Each of them is carried on the others' arms like two unbroken pillars, which had previously supported the canopy of stars in a most precarious balance.

The final gave brilliance to the whole performance. The director chose to represent the violent and unjust death of Romeo and Juliet by renouncing any words. The author's lines disappear with Paris's entering the family vault. Heretofore presented as a fashion victim, the narcissist Paris suddenly becomes lucid, normal, and simple. He dies by Romeo's sword, speechless. Romeo himself commits suicide in complete silence, and the audience miss the lines Shakespeare dedicated to Death, seen as a possessive lover:

Ah, dear Juliet,
 Why art thou yet so fair? shall I believe
 That unsubstantial death is amorous,
 And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
 Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
 For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
 And never from this palace of dim night
 Depart again: here, here will I remain
 With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
 Will I set up my everlasting rest,
 And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
 From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!
 Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
 The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
 A dateless bargain to engrossing death!
 Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide!
 Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
 The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
 Here's to my love!
 (5.3)

Above all, a grand, broken cello mourns, as an illiterate nurse, on the tune of *Nothing Else Matters* of Guns'n Roses. It is an attempt at an explanation on the uselessness of things once two human lives were so suddenly and absurdly lost. But, as a final hope, the table turned into a common grave is suddenly lifted up, and the chairs are violently removed. Those empty chairs, symbols of each and every member of the Capulet and Montague families implied in the tragedy, are 'abused' by a heaven that seems to want revenge for the death of the two. The very fact that the dead couple are visibly risen to heaven, adds a touch of hope to

this terrible tragedy of the impossibility of the couple: after all, God might forgive these suicides, and they will live together in death, in a space covered by a synthetic green carpet and populated by red flowers grown from the stage floor during the first and last love night of Romeo and Juliet.

The whole performance was conceived as a series of vivid tableaux, delimited by light and dark. The idea of actuality is mostly visible during the final, when the actors leave their characters and take over the message of Romeo and his Juliet. One by one, the actors on the stage, start adding names to the list – names of ordinary people who lived or live the great love which Shakespeare's characters were declined. And, in order to prove that such people do exist, the actors produce photographs – black and white, coloured, small and large – of different couples, of anonymous Romeos and Juliets who doubtless have seen their love fulfilled. They speak up their names to a modern world in which being in love is not fashionable any longer. It is the same technique of psychotherapy that gives one the feeling of witnessing a confession.

One particular mention to this unusual performance: feeling that the twenty first century spectator is almost pain-proof and difficult to impress, he chose a few fragments of Sarah Kane's *4:48 Psychosis*. Who knows, maybe Romeo did commit suicide at 4:48 in the morning, and Juliet followed him a few seconds later, but during the same psychotic minute...

One final word: the director continually dangles between reality and fiction, dangerously playing with the psychic of the main actors to whom the border between reality and imagination is suddenly blurred. This is the source of the strangeness of this performance, justified by the words of the director himself: "The theatre allows for mistakes, while life..."

Measure for Measure: A Tragic Requiem of Crepuscular Times

Considered a "problem play" or a "dark comedy", *Measure for Measure* continues to be a mysterious stage construction. Written little more than four centuries ago – the play was first performed before James in 1604 during the Christmas festivities – *Measure for Measure* is still subject to a variety of possible readings and interpretation of its possible levels or meaning.

Scholars have proposed that Shakespeare was political in the sense that his plays reflect and comment on the crucial governmental issues and figures of his day, that his plays contribute to "pressing problems about prerogative, power, and authority" (Goldberg 239). It has been argued that *Measure for Measure*, in particular, reflects on James I and his political doctrines and actions. In fact, it is recorded that the play was performed before James in 1604 during the Christmas festivities. Critics have seen parallels between passages in the play and in

James's book on his philosophy about governing – the *Basilicon Doron*. Shakespeare's fictional character of Duke Vincentio also embodies some of the characteristics of the ideal ruler that James delineates in his book and some of James's own character traits, such as his dedication to virtue and chastity, his reclusiveness, his scholarly nature, and his discomfort with crowds. Because the play was performed for James and because the male protagonist seems a mirror image of James and his model ruler, numerous scholars interpret the play and its main character as a tribute to James and his conception of government, as a dramatic presentation that was meant to entertain and please the king. Although much of the new historicism underscores the subversiveness of Renaissance literature some new historicists – Jonathan Dollimore and Leonard Tennenhouse, in particular – continue to see the play as a validation of not only James but also the Tudor doctrines of monarchy (Dollimore 73; Tennenhouse 153–154).

Other critics are more skeptical of Shakespeare's intentions and suggest that he may be counseling or educating his king on proper governing procedures. Some go so far as to suggest that Shakespeare is covertly criticizing, even demystifying, James's rule. While James touted his virtue, moderation, and piety, the reality of his life and rule was anything but praiseworthy. G. P. V. Akrigg contends that any contemporary of James, and I think we could include Shakespeare, could not “but note a painful discrepancy between theory and practice” (Akrigg 227). Although Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* appeared relatively early in the new monarch's government – twenty months into his reign – James's indiscretions when he ruled Scotland were well known in England by the time he ascended the throne. Moreover, his political blunders once he became king of England were so similar to those he had exercised as magistrate of Scotland and so conspicuous, especially in comparison to Elizabeth's previous shrewdness and governmental acumen, that he very early developed a poor reputation in England – as early as Shakespeare's writing of *Measure for Measure*. The often irreverent stage did not spare James. An English agent in Scotland noted that his faults were such common knowledge “that the very stage players in England jeered at him for being the poorest prince in Christendom” (qtd. in Bevington 13). Roy Battenhouse contends that to think that Shakespeare was uncritical of a king who was “termed ‘the wisest fool in Christendom,’ and whose version of Divine Right has been lamented by modern historians, seems to predicate of Shakespeare either a lack of insight in areas of political theory, or else a merely opportunist concern to feather his own nest through sycophancy” (Battenhouse 194). Charles Swann believes that “there is no reason to expect the play to have a simple or coherent ideological position” and that we should “expect that the play will need decoding; it is not unfair to expect that there will be two (or more) levels of meaning” (Swann 62).

As often as the Duke has been compared to King James, he has also been compared to Shakespeare. Or to a playwright, ordering his cast and bringing about his plot devices, dramatic surprises, and denouements. *Measure for Measure* is a play about *representation* and about *substitution*, two concepts that are as foundational for the theatre as they are for the state. Who represents God? Who represents the Duke, or the King? How does an actor represent a character, or a set of ideas, on the stage?

Several critics have attempted to decode the play and to detect the covert criticism of James and monarchy hidden under a surface meaning that Shakespeare meant to please the king and his supporters. A few critics have seen direct parallels between the last act of the play and a specific event during James's reign that occurred in December of 1603 – only a year before the performance of *Measure for Measure*. This was the prosecution of the conspirators of the Bye plot (including Sir Walter Raleigh), for whom the king staged a public execution, one which he secretly did not intend to enact. He made each offender prepare for death and approach the scaffold – twice. Only at the last moment were they reprieved. Shakespeare has his duke in act 5 devise a spectacle as elaborate and self-enhancing as James did, with both rulers showing their astute appreciation of the art of self-promotion and image enhancing. Josephine Waters Bennett argues that Shakespeare means for his duke to be a tribute to the king and to embody “James's love of stratagems” and a “fondness for dramatics” (Bennett 98–99). More recently, Craig A. Bernthal has explored the similarities between the historical event and Shakespeare's last act, but he argues that Shakespeare means to “demystify James's actions” by displaying his duke as an ordinary man who resorts to “elaborate theatrical fakery” in order to project a “mightier image” of himself and the state (Bernthal 256, 263).

As *Measure for Measure* opens, Vienna is a city riddled with decay and corruption, where laws have been allowed to lapse, morality to slacken, and order to become disorder. The latest production of the play on the stage of the Marin Sorescu National Theatre of Craiova starts at the background wall on which a group of citizens write or draw their discontent. As the wall advances towards the audience, it becomes obvious that we are facing obscenity and unrestrained sexuality, the brutality of love turning into torture. It is a orgy of the senses in which the citizens of Vienna are glad to participate. According to Romanian reviewer of the play, Ludmila Patlanjoglu,

In Silviu Purcărete's vision, *Measure for Measure* is a tragic and comic requiem of crepuscular times. Vienna in Shakespeare's play becomes a world shipwrecked on the stage of history. Immediate actuality exerts a dramatic pressure, the Shakespearean heroes, ruled and rulers alike, live in a carbonized universe. (Patlanjoglu 22)

In Purcărete's production, the setting suggests the inferno of the great metropolis. The empty stage is enclosed by mobile walls, whose delirious, almost obsessive movement turns it in a prison, a lunatic asylum, a crematorium, a desert. This mobile setting generating as many enclosures that the director needs seems to emphasize the idea that the inner world of this play is realized by subtraction rather than by addition or movement: the inner world is the world of Vienna without the Duke. The Duke leaves, and disorder is revealed, but it was always there. So instead of transformation there is confrontation and discovery. In keeping with this, there is in this play an inner world that is largely composed of enclosed spaces, spaces that confine and compress rather than setting characters free. Claudio's dungeon is an enclosed space, as is Isabella's nunnery, and the Duke's monastery, and Mariana's "moated grange," a farmhouse surrounded by a moat that serves in place of a wall, like the enclosed and walled garden, the *hortus conclusus*, of medieval and biblical tradition. Each is imaginatively a sign of a set of other enclosures: virginity and chastity; brotherhood and obedience; even death, imagined by Claudio as a physical confinement.

As the play progresses all the enclosed spaces wait to be opened. Mariana waits to be freed from the isolation of her moated grange; Claudio, and even the drunken prisoner Barnardine, to be freed from prison; Isabela to be freed from the nunnery to a world of human sexuality, choice and marriage; Angelo to be freed from the walled prison of the self. But initially Vienna appears as a place without appropriate law, and the very lack of good laws locks its central characters into their several and separate, but analogous, prisons.

What is law? What are its limits? On what should it be based? There is a desperate need to re-establish moral order, to eliminate corruption. Paradoxically, Duke Vincentio – a licentious tyrant – is the law-maker. His face hidden by dark glasses, wearing a monk's attire Vincentio mercilessly punishes both his corrupt subjects and his open critics. His decision of handing over the power to Angelo is symbolically marked by the handing over of the very symbol of power: the pen. It is the very pen used to sign death penalties or pardons, the instrument of a dictatorship based on bureaucracy. The Duke's substitute, Angelo – in the true fashion of a devoted and pedantic employee – wears a black suit and handles the pen almost ritually. He embarks on a fierce struggle against all those addicted to carnal pleasures, and his very first action is to wipe off all the obscene graffiti on the city walls. Absolute power triggers in Angelo hidden frustrations and inner demons. He brings to light forbidden laws, never put into practice, such as intimate relations between partners before marriage. Angelo closes up all the brothels, and chains up and brings to trial all those guilty of premarital sex. But the sentence to death is already signed by the Duke's deputy. Claudio is one of them, as the woman he loves and is going to marry is already pregnant.

But Angelo develops a blind obsession for Claudio's sister, Isabella, a young maiden ready to join a monastic order. Angelo is subdued not by the girl's beauty but by her chastity. Though he preached saintliness, her presence drives him mad. His is a shameless offer: her brother's life for her chastity. The Duke in disguise enters the scene with a mischievous plot. From one day to another, Angelo's respect for the law turns into a delirium. The depraved society before his era becomes the battlefield of the small dictator.

Alternating with the musical background, the director chooses the obsessive sound of a huge mixer that continually crushes destinies. The grey walls seem to come to life, menacingly gliding in all directions imaginable, closing now and then with a deep sound, like a prison gate. Thus, Purcărete's world of the play becomes a prison with its interrogation rooms. The prisoners are collected directly from the streets of the city by armed soldiers, and forced to confess real or imaginary crimes. Their confessions, fabricated under torture, at simple, wooden tables, fitted with blinding lamps. It is from the mass of the condemned that Authority recruits its future faithful members. It is a direct and painful allusion to the practice common under the Communist rule. Even a former brothel owner is given the chance to become a torturer himself, just like in the reeducation centers in the Communist jails. The future executioner agrees to treason. To cite Dr. Ludmila Patlanjoglu again, "the law of Satan, according to which there is no other world, no other judge, no other reality, there is Nobody and no forgiveness". (Patlanjoglu 22)

The master of ceremonies for all this nightmare is Lucio, a modern quintessence of Shakespeare's fools. He manipulates and comments on this human circle, becoming our guide. Lucio is both actor and director of the play. Sometimes he sits at a writing table, ready to prompt the other actors the text. He is also the DJ, providing the musical background. Lucio implies himself in the action of the play, and sometimes he is an outsider. It is as if everything happens in his mind. He seems an author, a philosopher imagining a world led by the dictatorship of the absurd. Lucio is the only one who challenges political and ecclesiastical reality. The characters suspect each other, changing roles, changing from executioners into judges, and vice-versa. Both Isabella and Lucio will finally end tragically, one eliminated physically, the other psychically.

In Shakespeare's play the Duke, who appears *dues ex machine*, seems to settle things straight, offering justice, giving everyone 'measure for measure'. In Purcărete's staging, the Duke seems to be more than that. The Duke character speaks about the ambiguity of the demiurge. He has a voyeuristic pleasure in watching the suffering of his subjects, their destinies are but simple puzzle pieces for him. He wins the game, placing the pieces according to his own volition, irrespective of the others' opinions. He marries Angelo with a woman he does not love, he marries Lucio with a whore and kills him afterwards, he

marries Isabella himself, by force, denying her the monastic vocation. There is nothing like “and they lived happily thereafter” in Purcărete’s vision. The mill grinds its victims, the others are still waiting for their turn to justice, eating a long soup in a proletarian canteen. One single character is forgotten on his straw bed, an old drunk, the only free person in the whole empire.

To conclude, Silviu Purcărete’s production offers a profound meditation on the power games, irrespective of the ideology triggering them. To the question “Where is the Duke?” Escalus answers “The Duke’s in us”: instead of being grasped, power can be internalized. “They say best men are moulded out of faults, / and, for the most, become much more the better / For being a little bad.” (5.1.436–38) Mariana’s words seem to summarize and justify both the Duke and Angelo. Purcărete’s message is crystal-clear: “Evil will never disappear, it can only be given some make-up by civilization. Wherever you are, if you despise your demons, they will come back to life” (qtd. in Patlanjoglu 22).

* * *

I started the present article by citing a Romanian poet reporting himself to Shakespeare. To round it up, I will conclude with a poem written by Marin Sorescu, another Romanian poet who, in one of his plays, considered himself “Shakespeare’s cousin.” The poem¹⁵ – which could be considered emblematic for any appropriation of Shakespeare – is a masterpiece of concision and deep understanding of his work:

Shakespeare Created the World in Seven Days

The first day he made the sky,
The mountains, and the spiritual abysses.
The second day he made the rivers, the seas
The oceans, and the sentiments
Giving them to Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Antony,
Cleopatra and Ophelia
To Othello and others
To master, they and their descendants,
Unto eternity.
The third day he gathered all people
And taught them the tastes:
The taste or happiness, of love, of distress,
The taste or jealousy, glory and more
Until all tastes had been accounted for.

¹⁵ Posted at <http://www.transcript.review.org>

Then some characters came along late.
 The creator patted them fondly on the head
 And said the only thing left for them to become
 Was literary critics
 To deny his works.
 The fourth and fifth days
 Were dedicated to laughter.
 He let out the clowns to do somersaults
 And let kings, emperors
 And other unfortunates have fun.
 The sixth day
 He solved some administrative problems
 Plotted a storm
 And taught King Lear
 To wear the crown of straws.
 There was still some waste left
 From the creation of the world
 So he made Richard III.
 The seventh day he wondered whether
 There was anything left to do:
 Stage directors had already
 Flooded the earth with posters
 So Shakespeare decided after so much labour
 He deserved to see a show himself.
 But first, as he felt quite exhausted,
 He passed away for a while.

(translated by Constantin Roman)

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