

## THE TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSION OF THE SHAKESPEAREAN WORK

Elena PALIȚĂ

“Constantin Brancusi” University of Targu-Jiu

### **Abstract:**

*The richness of Shakespeare's English text, not once blamed for inadequacies because of its exuberance, paradoxically stands for the value of the text. Today it seems that the force and the authenticity of an artistic show inspired by Shakespeare's work is directly linked to a new translation and adaptation of the text and the success of such a performance depends in the first place on the force of the words, on their impact on the audience. The emergence of a theatrical direction, assumed, deeply personalized, stimulated interpretation of William Shakespeare, reading his work differently, depending on numerous factors: social, religious, political, aesthetic, moral, etc. Therefore, the cultural politics become an essential factor to analyse in the study of the Shakespearean adaptations.*

**Keywords:** *adaptation, authenticity, transnational dimension, translation, impact.*

Adaptations and appropriations inspired by the Shakespearean work have brought an important contribution to the consolidation of a canonical position for the Renaissance writer and in the same time have contributed a lot to the building of national identities of the receptors. This paradoxical double value of his literary work leads to the idea that cultural politics can be categorization criteria for the adaptations that we try to analyse. Nowadays adaptations do not keep any longer the same quality, but try to break the Shakespearean canon and in the same time to dislocate representations from any kind of geographical or cultural space, generating what critics call a transnational dimension of the literary text. This aspect can be considered through an interdisciplinary approach as it involves different fields of study such as translation, the original text or cultural studies.

The 20th century rejected, more than any other age classifications, being characterised by the dynamism of shapes and trends. The dialectic is not an extravagant one, but it represents the social movement of which art is not, nor can be foreign. The inner struggle betrays the attention for a new artistic language, a language able to redefine not only specific categories of theatrical performance, but the human existence itself, whose reflection is. The emergence of film directing at the end of the 19th century includes forever the dramatic text in a complex artistic unit which is performance, and considers it – sometimes as determinant, other times as a subordinate factor – a component of the theatrical act.

Just because Shakespeare was performed in abundance, of course with those long intervals of oblivion, followed by those of rediscovery and recycling, of reinterpretation, especially in the last century, today he is at the centre of artistic and philosophical interpretations even much more.

To perform Shakespeare without using a creative text, is a real crime. The force of the staging is entirely another when the comment is expressed through the world of Shakespeare.

At the same time it's natural to wonder why this constant call for Shakespeare's dramaturgy? Contemporary theater seems to have relieved the director of the necessity of an assiduous searching for a contemporary feature of a classic text. However the most important directors nowadays go back to those texts, go back to Shakespeare. Why this attraction for his plays? Maybe it is because stories such as *Hamlet* or *King Lear* are simple and complex at the same time. Charles Boyce remarked that Shakespearean plays "anticipate modern psychological dramas" (Boyce, 2005:134). They can easily be understood by a child or raise philosophical questions in the mind of an adult.

W. Shakespeare's dramaturgy is provocative on two plans: it encourages an original, personal or artistic approach of the ideas from his plays and at the same time it causes a constant debate with Shakespeare, the man of the stage, with the techniques, the methods to implement the drama on the stage.

Shakespeare's work breaks the geographical and the historical borders in adaptations, representations, but first of all in translations. It is necessary to ask what is a translation made for? For whom? For the dramatic literature or possibly for a single performance? Its only true value is to be a natural stage of a Shakespearean text. A translation betrays the original in a nice way. Its advantage is that it can speak the language of the present. With the new translations appear new interpretations of Shakespeare's text. Because translation is itself an interpretation, it casts a new light on the text in question and it's able to pave the way for one or more new performance visions.

Adaptation is subordinated more than the translation to a certain stage project. They are created without making structural changes or giving new directions to the printed text, without falling into the trap of excessive implementation to various contexts. There are changes in the sphere of time, skipping of scenes or doubling of characters; changes to support the new approaches of the Shakespearean text and to be harmony with the concept of the show. Usually in such performances, the lines sound naturally, without exaggerations, are comprehensible to the contemporary spectator and at the same time easy to speak for the actors.

One of the pioneers of the motion to reconsider Shakespeare was William Poel. When he worked at the show *Much ado about nothing*, Poel came to rehearsals with a box full of newspapers from which he had removed the bizarre photos, drawings, pictures and gave them to the actors for inspiration. This apparently childish manner to perceive the classical text is not only an innovation, but it also gives consistency and originality to the modern reinterpretations of the dramatic text.

The French theatre director and film director, Ariane Mnouchkine engaged in a challenging process the translation and adaptation of twelve of the Shakespeare texts. Of these only three texts will be translated and staged: *Richard II*(1981), *Night of the Kings* (1982) and the first part of *Henry IV* (1984). Drawing inspiration from traditional techniques of Kabuki and Kathakali theatres, Mnouchkine is trying to underscore the theatrical value of the Shakespearean

work, recapturing the French Theatre taste for beautiful, for the aesthetic values: “When we decided to perform Shakespeare, a recourse to Asia became a necessity. Because Shakespeare is located within the metaphor of human truths. So we seek ways of staging him which avoid the realistic and the prosaic at all costs. Why choose the approach of an Asian Shakespeare? The example of Asian theatre, especially Japanese, suggested itself because of its stories, peopled with great warriors, nobles, princes and kings. The reference to this great traditional form imposes rules for working: precision of gesture, cleanliness of line, the meeting of an extreme truth and an extreme artifice within a kind of performance that might be called hyperrealist.” (quoted by Patrice Pavis, 1996: 95). Mnouchkine's case, but also many other very personal filmmakers in the art they make, represent an argument in favor of the elasticity of Shakespeare that can be fold with dignity in any form and in any language or aesthetics.

The director is working on the text also on the grounds that they would allow him a malleable structure in relation to the vision stage. Beyond this, when re-write the works of Shakespeare, the author of the stage production has intuition of what will be said by theatrical means. The drama theorists closely concerned with the drama of William Shakespeare today, conclude that when a director wants to stage a Shakespearean text, he must meditate on three historical moments: the time Shakespeare was writing about; the second is the time when he wrote; the time when get the result, when we are a part of the audience.

Filmmakers today are using the texts of William Shakespeare in exactly the same way that the ancient Greeks developed their compendium of myths, by Homer, Hesiod and other authors of the time. It is an accepted fact that Shakespeare himself made use of various sources of inspiration of his time.

There are today deeply contemporary shows without abandoning the Shakespearean text meaning, whether the text is faithfully adapted or not. A primary contemporary feature in the art of theatre is that a theatrical creation is produced dynamically, in a very personal manner, subjective, where the final product, the only one that matters, is the artistic show.

The German director Thomas Ostermeier, one of the most acclaimed at the moment, considers that: „Every generation writes its own Shakespeare, every zeitgeist communicate with him in a different way[...] Actually there was a nice article in a German newspaper describing 10 different Hamlets playing on German stage at this time. And the conclusion was that the young audience was listening to the text and not following the director's vision on the play, especially if that version was made without working on the text, only esthetically made but not concerned with the meaning of the text.”

John Elsom stated that “Shakespeare left behind a rich wardrobe of clothes, props and ideas which we could wear according to our moods and necessities” (J. Elsom, 1989: 3). His metaphorical observation underlines an essential aspect, that there is an essential difference between interpretation and distortion. Shakespeare became an experiment showing almost scientifically that this playwright and man of the theatre is the source of an endless inspiration. Shakespeare's dramaturgy included in its content the most serious debates about acute problems of contemporary humanity, as well as answers to questions about the theatrical creation. About how to turn thought into action, the idea, the energy into form, keeping the story and spirit of the Shakespearean text. It developed an extremely rich variety of infinite scenic discourse.

The European theatre is traditionally linked to the text. But things were not always like this. There have been periods in the evolution of the European theatre when text was nothing

more than the origin of the stage performance. In the European theatrical culture, especially after the emergence of the printed press, the idea of the theater to the stage evolved through the presence of the actor who speaks, often accompanied by the presence of the printed text. It is said that the theater could not create than the present. It's always a precise moment. Therefore it is natural that the classics, including Shakespeare, to be played in a great way. The theatre of the present makes Shakespeare contemporary. He must be adapted to the ideas of contemporary spirituality, of essence of life at present. There cannot be a new Shakespeare without a new philosophy.

## REFERENCES

1. Boyce, C. (2005) *Critical companion to William Shakespeare, A literary reference to his life and work*, New York: Facts on File
2. Elsom, J. (2004) *Is Shakespeare still our contemporary?*, New York: Taylor & Francis
3. Graham, J.F. (1985) *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
4. Pavis, P. (1996), *The intercultural performance reader*, London: Routledge