

## PART II DRAMA / CHOREOGRAPHY

### 1. A SHAKESPEARE MODULE'S PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS IN THE VOCATIONAL HIGHT EDUCATION: PERSPECTIVES, SOLUTIONS AND NEW DILLEMAS

Ioana Petcu Pădurean<sup>98</sup>

**Abstract:** *If in England William Shakespeare's dramatic work is perceived on the one hand as a tradition and, on the other hand, as a suitable platform for experimentation, in Romania vocational higher education programs in the field of Theater and Performing Arts provide space for practice on Elizabethan dramaturgy. Whether we understand Will's texts as a compulsory subject, or whether it challenges both the teacher and the student to discover new valences of interpretation, the Shakespeare module is an important milestone in the young artist's stage training process. A test subject for the performing arts professor, but also a wide range of characteristics that unfolds in front of the student, the Shakespearean universe is viewed by the artist from the inside in order to be successful on stage. Thus felt and rediscovered, the author transforms into a living material, it is a starting point towards a horizon that is discovered by everyone and is, equally, a return to self and recognition, an inexhaustible effect that classical literature has on many generations in a row.*

**Key words:** *Elizabethan Theater, William Shakespeare, acting, stage directing, pedagogy of theater*

#### 1. Introduction. Thematic guidelines in criticism and extensions in the study of performing arts

In the curriculum dedicated to acting classes, at high school level, William Shakespeare's work is briefly studied as part of History of Universal Theater classes. Which means that those who want to become actors try the great Will on their own skin only during their university studies, and even then, there are professors who question whether the exercises with the texts of the Elizabethan playwright should be done from the beginning years or if not more suitable for the final years. Given that there would be a "competition" at this level, then it could come from Chekhov, close to the Romanian spirit through certain Eastern European, Slavic features and, at the same time, raising the barrier of utterance in verse, through prose that combines the naturalness of utterance, concealing poetry. Realistic drama is, in general, in the Romanian school the counterweight to Shakespeare. In countries such as England, but also in the United States or in high schools with an Anglo-Saxon profile, the Bard's texts are a subject to be learned for graduation exams and, although this approach is a successful one, they still risk remaining on the surface, not being deeply integrated.

There are countless artists, be they playwrights or writers, who later acknowledge that memorizing texts, especially when the goal is notation, does not

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<sup>98</sup> Lecturer PhD. habil., „George Enescu” National University from Iași, Romania, email: ioana.petcu@arteiasi.ro

involve understanding the essence of Shakespeare - although the Socratic paradox could easily be applied. We know nothing as we go deeper into the work of the Elizabethan. But is not such a feature one of the most important that determines the universality of the author?

There are, without a doubt, some common points between the approach of the work by philologists and that undertaken by pedagogues of the art of theater. Research in the field of literature influences the ways in which the subject is observed by artists. Over time, especially in recent decades, philologists have launched several fashionable themes through the filter of which one reads and appreciates Shakespearean drama. Andrew Hiscock explains in the chapter *Shakespeare: The Tragedies* some important landmarks according to which the map of studies on this major subject is placed. In the twentieth century there are directions such as studying from a transdisciplinary perspective, valid in this case for the '80s, in which the balance often leans towards interpretations in historical, political, but also community, aimed at explaining the cultural impact of the playwright. And the aspects of psychocritical analysis represent a core of substance for the '80s, a dimension that in our country also had, perhaps not at the same time, a visible success through the way the directorial themes marked the performances.

From the 1970s to the 1980s, the wave of feminist interpretations and gender studies grew: “Feminist and gender criticism has remained one of the most animated and popular areas of interpretation of Shakespearean tragedies in recent decades. A preoccupation with what had not yet been said in literary and historical narratives, in the stereotypes of gender studies and cultural theories, for the omissions and shady critical studies, for the practice of anatomy from the beginning of modernity, medicine, law and succession, governance and education, work, leisure, acting authority and the performing arts and so on - all of these concerns have preoccupied researchers in the field of feminism and gender studies and decisively repositioned student and audience encounters with tragedies of Shakespeare in the last decades”<sup>99</sup>. Another direction that specialized criticism appeals to is the one materialized in the discussion about post-colonialism.

More pronounced for the American reception, the theme grows in the '80s and covers the '90s, and is strongly revived in 2019-2020, with the Black Lives Matter movement, so that, for example, on the website Globe Theater a press release greets visitors: “Shakespeare's opera has been used sinisterly in the past, co-opted by white man's nationalism. But Shakespeare is for everyone. We have been and will be for racial justice. Sometimes we don't succeed, but at the same time we learn and we want to work against the racist system”<sup>100</sup>. The subject is very broad and deserves, in fact, a consistent separate study, so we will not insist on details here. What at the end of the chapter is a conclusion for author Andrew Hiscock is a welcome combination of pedagogical perspectives with research and grants focused on the area of Shakespeareanology: “The great diversity of the

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<sup>99</sup> Andrew Hiscock, Lisa Hopkins (ed.), *Teaching Shakespeare and Early Modern Dramatists*, Hampshire, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 64

<sup>100</sup> Text taken from the website <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2020/06/02/black-lives-matter/>

tradition of scholarships calibrated on tragedies can provide a rich background of stimuli for environmental analysis educational. Several familiar angles of approach, such as the issue of tyranny, royalty, heroism, kinship, rebellion, victimization and social hierarchy, for example, will find ample support in the main apparatus of criticism on these pieces throughout centuries”<sup>101</sup>.

In Romania, these directions that we have listed so far appear with delayed effect, given that, in the period before the '90s, the country is under communism, and Shakespeare, with few exceptions, is treated in a classical, triumphalist way, museum, depending on what is dictated by the authorities. However, after the December 1989 Revolution, directors and actors sought in Will an ally for the renewal of theatrical forms, in experiments or in productions on the stages of national theaters. A short - very short - review of some shows clarifies. *Lear(a)*<sup>102</sup> directed by Andrei Șerban translated the distribution of *King Lear* exclusively on a feminine line, thus opening the interpretation in the feminist horizon, but also of gender policies. The show *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Radu Afrim<sup>103</sup> in which the text is a psychoanalyzable score, located at the intersection of cultures and geographies, is another example that literary documentation also touches on themes. Similar to this, another play example comes from the production of the Apropos Theater entitled *ExperimentUL Shakespeare*<sup>104</sup>, a performance on the border between social, everyday and stage reality. So I drew this rough line between the Romanian stage achievements to prove how the great themes launched in the specialized criticism cross the national spectacular horizon.

Returning to this unmarked, but necessary parenthesis in connection with the thematic trends whose diagram the studies have shaped in recent decades and we will continue from the perspective of the history teacher of universal theater who teaches acting, directing, choreography. What are the challenges for a teacher who unites the two areas - philology and the study of the performing arts? In the hours, as always too few in number, dedicated to the Elizabethan pieces, you must be able to maintain a balance between the above-mentioned major themes in the "market" of international criticism and the initial understanding of the text, especially since students rarely meet Bard's verse in previous years of study. Thus, in the history of

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<sup>101</sup> Andrew Hiscock, Lisa Hopkins (ed.), op.cit., p. 66

<sup>102</sup> *Lear (a)*, Bulandra Theater, Bucharest, 2012, directed by Andrei Șerban, adapted by Daniela Dima, translated by Ioana Ieronim, Daniela Dima, Andrei Șerban, Set by Dragoș Buhagiar, with: Mariana Mihuț (Lear), Dorina Chiriac (Bufonul), Rodica Lazăr (Goneril), Emilia Bebu (Regan), Cosmina Stratan (Cordelia), Virginia Mirea (Edmund), Ana Ioana Macaria (Edgar), Dana Dogaru (Gloucester), Ioana Pavelescu (Kent), Manuela Ciucur (Albany) Maria Obretin (Cornwall).

<sup>103</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Iași National Theater, directed by Radu Afrim, Scenography: Iuliana Vîlsan, Choreography: Florin Fieroiu, Video: Alexandru Condurache, with Loredana Cosovanu (Hermia), Vlad Volf (Demetrius), Andrei Grigore Sava (Helena), George Cocoș (Lysander), Doru Aftanasiu (Teseu), Anne-Marie Chertic (Titania), Cosmin Maxim (Oberon), Livia Iorga (Hipolita), Ovidiu Ivan (Puck), Dumitru Năstrușnicu (Chief), Cătălin Ștefan Mîndru (Buculiță Culiță), Horia Veriveș (Francisc V. Taragobete), Daniel Busuioc (Toma Boticeli), Cătălina Antal (Duda Zidara), Ionuț Cornilă (Egeu), Cristina Pădurariu (Muștanța), Diana Roman (Molly), Anca Pascu (Pânzeta Arahnida), Alexandra Acalfoae (Floarea), Tinerii dn Forest: Loredana Bran, Tatiana Grigore, Cristina Hohan, Minodora Lungu, Mădălina Munteanu, Amalia Olaru, Sebastian Albișteanu, Andrei Bibire, Daniel Chirilă, Alex Iurașcu, Iustin Șurpănelu, Radu Homiceanu.

<sup>104</sup> *Experimentul Shakespeare*, produced by Teatro Apropos, 2021, Concept: Raisa Ané and Andreea Radu, Performers: Raisa Ané and Teodor Ghiță, Text: Andreea Radu, Pretext: Romeo and Juliet, W. Shakespeare, Music: Andrei Poggo

the theater, having in front of an audience made up of future actors and future directors or playwrights, the teacher must sketch the premises for the performance.

They can take into account both the anchoring in the era and the context of the sixteenth century, as well as the continuing awareness that the message is alive today, that Shakespeare moves and breathes with us, with those perhaps without much experience, and with professionals. After all, in the history of theater classes, where tragedies, comedies or historical plays are studied, the idea would be to find the opportunity and create a ramp for students to read and try to get closer, each in depending on his personality, the text. Later, this material should use them on stage. In support of this approach, the teacher will constantly use the spectacular material. We find that every time the student sees that the discussions, sometimes abstract or slightly distanced from his immediate interests, have applicability in performances, it is much easier for him to assimilate the information and translate it in a practical way. Consistent files containing images from shows by the world's great directors, if not recordings of these productions on Shakespearean texts, references to screenings, documentaries made with actors (such as the famous *Shakespeare Uncovered* interviews, 2012 production of the Public Broadcasting Service) they can be a source of inspiration, a tangential content and fragments of theatrical culture, all fundamental for the academic training of young artists.

But how is it on the other side of the barricade, namely how the teachers of the specialized objects perceive the labor together with the texts of the canonical author? An analysis of the grass is required, because, beyond the fact that there is no single answer, the diversity of freedoms, but also the limits, the working methods, but also the risks and blockages not to be ignored that a practitioner may encounter regarding great texts. What are the boundaries that need to be overcome - to keep a dose of humor - like the Scottish refugees in England in Macbeth's time? What are the valves of survival at the meeting with the translations, but also with the abysmal characters, with the composition roles or with the improvisation? We only intersect with some of the caudal forks of rehearsals, the work of young actors and the teachers who guide them.

## **2. A challenge: character versus language**

From the dramatic text, the young acting student will cut the character with priority and will read the text with increased attention to the score of the character he has to play. He will be interested in his relationships with the other characters and his actions. He will always try to build it, first mentally, then working on stage. Richard, Juliet, Katharina or Prospero. But he will realize that it is not easy to reach them, although it is not the first experiences. But he might feel inhibited in front of complex portraits, which would involve in some cases the role of composition, the tangents with the world of the absurd or the difficulty of saying the meaningful verse. The multitude of characters, the limit situations, the relationships that can be constantly questioned represent for the budding actor real test stones. Acting professor Dana Rotaru from the National University of Theater and Cinematography „I. L. Caragiale” from Bucharest analyzes how the exercises where the most famous Shakespearean scenes are used reach an inner universe of

students to which otherwise they do not have access. A great gain offered by the characterological and situational depth in Shakespeare.

After a presentation of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, Dana Rotaru concludes: “the approach of the play from inside and from outside produced in the student-actors comfort, the pleasure to explore, the ability to (lead) (them) in the stage process, to analyze postfactum. And then the idea that we function as actors, as we function in life, in the entirety of our being, of which we are and are not aware, combining possible realities of the inner and outer world made me actively discover, on my own skin, the need to respect this principle in working with student-actors”<sup>105</sup>. Therefore, as always, the process is reciprocal, students gain leverage through which to self-recognize, through a double lens, external and internal, and teachers, offering and receiving feedback are in turn disciples in an invisible school of continuous training.

In Iasi, the teacher and actor Doru Aftanasiu also offers some clues about the importance of the Shakespeare module for those who are just training in the spotlight. He notes that “precisely because of the malleability of his characters we can see him as an extremely tolerant playwright with the actor (...) who poses problems of interpretation, but also leaves room for quick and effective solutions”<sup>106</sup>. Otherwise, it is known that Shakespeare wrote for actors and this is one of the reasons why, on the one hand, there are disturbing monologues by their depth and beauty, and, on the other hand, there are scenes in which the verve of the lines in prose or verse could be supported by talented actors in this direction. The idea is still circulating today that the tirade of Hamlet or Richard, and many others, were written precisely because Richard Burdage, the actor and shareholder of Globe Theater, was the protagonist who convincingly supported the pathos, the meditative, the tension or the irony in the lyrics that today it is one of the important scores that an actor must have in his portfolio. Also, Will Kempe and Robert Armin were the actors for whom Shakespeare wrote the roles of jesters, actors with many valences for comedy, with physical mobility and a sense of humor through which the text was capitalized on stage.

Liviu Lucaci, actor and actor's art teacher, offers a pragmatic experience in approaching the Shakespearean character during rehearsals. He speaks from the perspective of the "sculptor" of emotions and acting techniques and sees in working with students, experience based on the texts of the great Will, a journey in several stages: 1. Friendship - the moment when the student, after reading the play, must to tell it in his own words; 2. The retelling - level at which the story must be told through the voice of another character, an important and weighing moment, because the initial overall image, as simplistic as any view from above, fades, showing its limits; and 3. The Shakespeare test - a complex moment in which the student must show what he would do if he were faced with Shakespearean extreme situations, such as hatred, love at paroxysmal levels, betrayal and so many others<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Dana Rotaru, *Shakespeare în formarea studentului actor de azi* in Bogdana Darie (coord *Shakespeare în studiul artei actorului*, Bucharest, UNATC Press, 2016, p. 74

<sup>106</sup> Doru Aftanasiu, *Shakespeare – un drum spre compoziția scenică*, Iași, Artes Publishing House, 2014, p. 54

<sup>107</sup> Liviu Lucaci, *Matricea Shakespeare* in Bogdana Darie (coord.), vol. cit., pp. 21-35 and following

Professor Liviu Lucaci concludes, in a refined formula, that Shakespeare is a seismograph. In his plays, the intense feelings, the moments of rest, the disturbing questions that, even if not immediately, will still find an echo in the future artist of the stage, find their place. With inflections sometimes higher, sometimes lower, conscious or somewhat more ignorant, the young man who has to play Henric, Othello or Puck, from the historical character to the imaginary one, will feel how he gains amplitude, substance and maybe, just in the moment he thinks he has mastered the optimal solution, he will understand that nothing is immutable.

The character and the action are dramatic elements closely related, in the case of the Elizabethan playwrights and, especially in Will, to the rhythm of the verse - the pentametric symbol. In England, workshops are dedicated to professional actors who are meant to teach them how to relate to the rhythm and flow of the verse<sup>108</sup>. That there is an inner musicality of poetry is a proven theme with wide applicability and there is still a very controversial discussion about the association between the pentametric iambic and the heartbeat<sup>109</sup>. This is how Shakespeare's text, for English speakers, "speaks" organically, is inserted fibrillar. For the Romanian student, for the director who guides him through the universe from Dunsinane or on Prospero's island, the difficulty lies in finding a suitable translation, which will not be able to be equivalent to the rhythmicity of the original text. Bogdana Darie wonders and analyzes in this context the difficulties and limits that the student, along with his teacher must overcome in the exercise with the text "what should a young actor in the situation, not exactly comfortable, to address such roles that do you live such complex stage situations?"

He must first remember that, being written by an actor, all the dramaturgically created situations are, in fact, a huge chain of actions. Shakespeare wrote a series of actions and not plays in which there are times dedicated to descriptions. (...) The monologues so well known and rich are ... also actions, in which the actor breaks the fourth wall (...) This aspect, of the existence of actions as the basic structure of Shakespearean pieces, leads to the very fast inner rhythm that the scenes have in their succession"<sup>110</sup> Not at all easy for someone at the beginning of the road to test and, at the same time, to have the ability to filter critically, analytically all these revealing points in the stage play. Peter Brook summarizes the relationship between the psychological meanders of the characters he created and his versification: "In fact, Shakespeare, as a man of practical spirit, was forced to use verse to suggest at the same time the deepest and most mysterious transformations. psychological, psychic and spiritual events that take place in his characters, without losing a

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<sup>108</sup> For example, at the Royal Shakespeare Company there are workshops where professional actors study the iambic utterance that they fail to deepen during the courses during their university studies, in the economics of educational programs <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/romeo-and-juliet/language/key-terms>

<sup>109</sup> There are still voices trying to show that the pentametric iambic is related to heart rate. For example, Ashley Lawler, *Shakespeare's Peacemaker: A study in poetic meter and cardiac rhythms*, 2014 [https://bioethics.miami.edu/\\_assets/pdf/education/ethics-and-medical-humanities-pathway/ethics-and-medical-humanities-pathway-student-projects/2013-lawler.pdf](https://bioethics.miami.edu/_assets/pdf/education/ethics-and-medical-humanities-pathway/ethics-and-medical-humanities-pathway-student-projects/2013-lawler.pdf). On the other hand, imposing voices point out that there is no scientific basis on which to base the discussion. In the field of theater, artists still work taking into account the heart rate and the rhythm of the lyrics - the American company DE CRUIT, which conducts workshops with war veterans using Shakespearean texts, has developed a method - Hunter Heartbeat Method. More information can be found in Sonya Freeman Loftis, *Shakespeare and Disability Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 84

<sup>110</sup> Bogdana Darie, *Shakespeare și păstrarea metodei* in Bogdana Darie (coord.) vol. cit., p. 15

moment of sight their reality well embedded in everyday life"<sup>111</sup> And the director who revolutionized theatrical productions in the '70s with the illusionist staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* continues his observation: "And with difficulty - he could reach a form of essentialization that would surpass the one he achieved ..."

There is no room for denial, Shakespeare is producing changes. Being still at the beginning of the road, the students feel the transformations, from one year to another, in terms of emotional inflections, but also of the technical acquisitions of acting. We leave, in the space below, the testimony of a former student of the program Art of the actor who had to play the Danish queen Gertrude, a difficult role precisely because the character does not leave his thoughts in sight, seeming to always live inside, saying what he has to say, not what he really feels. Ioana Dobrea met Gertrude several times during her years of study: "Looking back, I realize that the period in which I was given the opportunity to play the character of Queen Gertrude was very beneficial for me, both professionally and personal plan. The first time I met this character was in the second year, the second semester of the actor's art exam, the Shakespeare module, the scene of the attack.

The beginning of this study was marked by the construction of the character sheet. (...) I saw it as a symbol of sin and as an example of the great possessors of power. It was also hard for me to understand if I could be on her side. I had come to say that she agreed to be Claudius' wife because of her thirst for power, but at the same time I had formed an opinion that Gertrude found out about the act that Claudius had committed, the murder of her husband and brother, and began to play a mask on all the people in the yard just to protect his own son and make sure he doesn't get killed by Claudius. This hypothesis helped me a lot during the exam, so the whole set of thoughts and opinions I had formed was in contradiction with the thoughts of the stage partner, thus being able to create a tension and a strong relationship between the two characters. Another obstacle was the writing of the text. Being a fragment in verse, I had intended that everything I was going to say should not sound like poetry and contain that emotional charge (...) At the end of the exam I realized how my ability to understand a character and to get to feel her own feelings has evolved and how all the obstacles I encountered during the construction of the exam have only laid another foundation for my construction as a future actress"<sup>112</sup>

### **3. Conclusions perpetual fascination. Talking to ourselves**

A director who has lived step by step the scenic revelation of Shakespearean texts, from incomprehension, to groping, to certainty and again to the difficulty of giving answers, Peter Brook sees, after so long, a simple line that for him highlights a meaning: "In the history of theater, nothing expresses this paradox better than the structure of Shakespeare's plays. In essence, his theater is a religious one, it brings the spiritual world, invisible in the plane of the concrete, of the visible and

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Brook, *Fără secrete – gânduri despre actorie și teatru*, translated by Monica Andronescu, Bucharest, Nemira Publishing House, 2012, p. 25

<sup>112</sup> Ioana Dobrea, *Firul Gertrudei prin labirintul actorului. De la Shakespeare la Aldo Nicolaj spre o Gertrude personală*, bachelor's thesis presented in the July 2019 session, UNAGE, Iași, pp. 19-20 and following

recognizable acts and forms. Shakespeare makes no concessions at any end of the human scale. His theater neither vulgarizes the spiritual to make it easier to assimilate by the ordinary man, nor does it set aside the misery, the violence, the ugly, the absurd and the comic of normal existence"<sup>113</sup>. Regardless of age, level of professional training, contact with the tumult of the characters, with the tensions or improbability of Will's plays, with the unusual contortions of the pun, with the metaphor, we will be tempted to see the approach, as through an image obtained by inverting a spyglass, between his work and our reality.

The years of study during college are only a starting point for the characters and meanings of his work. Some kind of shy attempt. A start, an introduction, a familiarization. A challenge for some, a bad dream - who knows ?! - for others. A kind of appetizer to increase the appetite for more. An important role, of course, is played by the mentor teacher. The way he understands high-speed time crossings, which sometimes make the action seem to take place only at night or just in the small hours of the morning, his detailed searches of the characters, whether in the foreground or secondary, if not even marginal, his cultural openness or creativity can raise so many questions in the student as to cause him to look for the Shakespearean game of life and death alone through the ash desert. But leaving aside the paraphrases of Lovinescu's plays, we think that, whatever the barriers that need to be raised and whatever the unsuspected inner springs that Shakespearean heroes would search, it is fundamental the exercise from reading to play, to assumption and until internalization.

Time will obviously replace many of the unknowns from the first years spent in the study of theater, and subsequent meetings with other pedagogues of theater art, with playwrights or directors will enhance the uninterrupted dialogue with the challenges offered by a role or a text, be it Shakespearean. The basic elements will remain, like roots, deeply rooted in the fertile loose earth of the artist's being. They will take it to the left, to the right and will constantly feed the trunk and the crown of the tree. But, once assimilated - the character or the complex theme from Will's texts - the invisible dialogue opens with the playwright and with yourself. At that moment when you feel that, through a text, after a guy, you get to talk to yourself, to ask questions or to contradict yourself, when you understand that something from the darkness of Elsinore or from the glows of the nocturnal Athenian forest is reflected In your daily life, then is the moment of substance of the encounter with the self through an exchange of remarks with ourselves, hard to imagine, but paradoxically true. Shakespeare invites us into this contradictory and seemingly improbable setting. And the exercise in college prepares us.

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Brook, op.cit., pp. 100



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