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Introduction

The evolution of this issue of *Theatralia* has been marked by two significant years of reckoning for the Shakespeare scholars of the post-Socialist Central European region. 2019 was a year of contemplation as the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the symbolic event that opened up a new era in the former Eastern bloc. 2019 was a celebration of what even in the 1980s seemed an unlikely turn. As a celebration, it occasioned looking back on what had happened since 1989, how the change from Socialism to democracy had taken place in all walks of life from the everyday through the political to the cultural spheres, and how the free flow of cultural influences affected the countries of the region. The following year, 2020 has also been a special year due to the pandemic, a situation for which people had to come to terms with the fact that things unimaginable before could happen, when everyone had to stay at home, wear facemasks, avoid the accustomed means of human contact, work from home, and in general had to learn to let go of what seemed basic aspects of life, when words like 'fundamental,' 'necessary', and 'granted' changed their meanings. These special years, years of celebration and pandemic may well occasion looking back on the reception of Shakespeare and taking stock.

Taking stock of an ongoing flux is fraught with methodological challenges. First and foremost, it is problematic since it is impossible to account for every aspect of the change of political systems and their reverberations in everyday life and culture, as this would mean deploying methodologies of social sciences ranging from history through psychology to political science and cultural studies. Second, this would seem problematic, as even though Shakespeare scholars of the Central European post-Socialist bloc have shared and continue to share a somewhat similar experience, they are divided by language, values, and national specificities. Another difficulty lies in the lack of a reliable theoretical framework that could be applied to the diverse data; ideally, this should be a new framework, not one inherited from cultural theories that were originally born, anchored, and framed in a completely different political, social, and cultural context.

The solution this volume can offer at best lies in negotiations and navigations among a variety of Scyllas and Charybdises. First, instead of trying to account for every aspect of change, or covering all areas of Shakespeare research, the authors of this volume have chosen to shed light on prescient issues that deserve our present and future attention. However, in the course of such analyses, wider socio-cultural phenomena, including overall changes in cultural and academic institutions, also come into play. A project like this must be balanced with broader reception studies of Shakespeare. Another problem concerns language, with very few, if any, Shakespeare scholars speaking all the national languages of the region, a situation which naturally leads to a choice of a *lingua franca* outside of these languages, i.e., English, the shared language of international Shakespeare research. Thus, another necessity for negotiation is between the national languages of the region and English as the *lingua franca* of the project. This negotiation becomes even more problematic since English, like any other language, brings with itself a view and a number of assumptions about the world; thus it is far from a neutral channel of communication. English and English studies introduce into the discourse vocabularies and theoretical assumptions that may or may not enable the nuanced presentation of the intricacies of the post-Socialist experience, presenting a situation which results in a constant struggle to negotiate the hidden undercurrents of English vocabularies, theoretical underpinnings as well as local experiences and assumptions. It is in light of these negotiations that we envisioned the present volume.

Navigating among these obstacles has resulted in this volume: a kaleidoscopic overview of methodologies and approaches instead of one comprehensive theoretical framework. The volume maps out the paths towards the understanding of cultural changes within the individual countries and languages in so far as the reception of Shakespeare is concerned. Most of the approaches revolve around the theatrical production and reception of the works, as this medium seems to be the most sensitive to cultural changes. Within this approach it is possible to explore the topic by presenting a statistical analysis of the number of Shakespeare plays performed in a given country; by analysing a single performance and contextualising it within its wider cultural environment; by exploring the differences between publicly funded and independent theatres and companies; by presenting the history of a particular theatre; or through explorations of patterns emerging in international Shakespeare festivals. Another approach investigates the reception of Shakespeare's *oeuvre* on the page, either by exploring the tendencies in terms of the choice of the language of scholarly publications or various attitudes to translations. Most of the articles, though, deploy more than one of these methodologies to enhance a greater understanding of the motives for changes that have taken place since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Nonetheless, the organisation of essays into sections in the present volume does not follow methodological considerations, but rather thematic ones. The first cluster of articles bears the title 'Raising the (Iron) Curtain: The Heritage of 1989 in the New Europe', the second '(E)Merging Practices in Post-1989 Central European Theatre(s)', while the third set presents 'Performing Power and Identity.' As these sections progress, a narrowing of focus in the analyses takes place in so far as the first section

accounts for broader changes, the second explores theatrical practices, and the third employs in-depth analyses and close-reading performances in order to reveal wider cultural tendencies.

The first section offers a survey of the changes in Shakespeare production and reception between 1989–2019 in four distinctive areas: academia, theatre practice, translation, and education. The articles in this section examine the transition between pre- and post-1989 attitudes, focusing on the disorientation concomitant with the change of regimes, and showcasing the varying forms of cultural reorientation. These texts take a closer look at the national and regional heritages concerning the past (whether institutional, archival or mental), as well as at the new generations of translators, directors, actors, and scholars who have redefined the post-1989 world and their identities through Shakespeare. Furthermore, these articles examine the way(s) these countries and fields have responded to the widening arena of possibilities that came with the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 along with the subsequent re-mappings of Europe, offering general overviews of the continuity and discontinuity signalled by Shakespeare's name through these decades.

Several of the essays in this section begin their investigations in the decades of Socialism and point out how these backstories are essential to understanding the current state of affairs. Anna Cetera-Włodarczyk considers the ethical and professional complexities of working with archival materials, looking back at the history of the archives of national secret services, but also difficulties regarding privately preserved materials, focusing on the challenges posed by decades of censorship, the potential consequences of revealing or not revealing sensitive materials. She exemplifies material from the Jan Kott archives in a process that gives the reader a glimpse of the further treasures still awaiting discovery. George Volceanov, on the other hand, examines the ways academic publications can reflect on socio-political issues, providing an overview of Romanian Shakespeare scholarship since the post-war decades. He emphasises the complex socio-cultural forces at work, including the role of political pressure and state propaganda, but also issues like the choice of language, various attitudes towards translation, and the increased international mobility of an opening job market, all of which have played a role in the emergence of the current situation, one in which academic advancement often means leaving behind one's native language and country.

Also within this section, Péter P. Müller's essay offers an overview of the changes in the institutional structure in the Hungarian theatrical scene both leading up to, and, particularly, in the thirty years following the 1989 political changes. He points out the intricate connections between the rise (and sometimes fall) of new theatres, the changes or continuities within the *oeuvres* of translators, directors, and theatre managers. Müller argues for ways in which the current Hungarian theatre world carries the legacies of the past while also displays signs of change and innovation. In a more specific, in-depth case study, Natália Pikli focuses on the ways the Hungarian University of Theatre and Film Arts relies on Shakespeare's work to combine the canonical with the experimental; and how one of the leading Budapest theatres, the Katona József Theatre, continues to channel these self-same trends into an artistic, but more mainstream

performance style. Finally, Nicoleta Cinpoeş looks at a new trend, one not confined to the Central European region, but which contributes to several processes noticeable in these countries as well: the birth and rise – but sometimes also the short life-span and subsequent fall – of Shakespeare festivals. Her overview points out regional and international trends and challenges, and ends this section of the issue by asking pertinent questions concerning methodology and the future directions of research that could further contextualise the phenomenon and allow us to understand the role of 'Shakestivalling' within the broader framework of Shakespeare tourism and Shakespeare studies.

The second section explores a notable rise in Central European Shakespeare productions which have been directed, interpreted, and received in innovative ways. On the one hand, the section discusses the shift from the unified and coherent realistic acting style in both independent and state-funded theatres towards a new theatrical language which has begun addressing the politics of perception, body, gender, cultural identity, and memory on a formal and a thematic level. These are issues that have become critical for Central European societies, currently going through a process of re-inventing themselves in the post-1989 economy and culture. On the other hand, this group of essays also examines how new theatre practices such as postdramatic theatre, puppet theatre, as well as cross-gender, multi-ethnic casting and performance have challenged the hegemonic tradition of representational theatre, thus allowing radically new interpretations of Shakespearean dramas. This section, moreover, emphasises changes in the established aesthetic and cultural centres and peripheries, affecting not only the Central European region, but also theatre worldwide.

Within this section, Kornélia Deres employs the theoretical background of postdramatic theatre, examining how postdramatic tendencies have emerged in post-1989 Hungarian Shakespeare production. Her analysis points out how the relationship between the textual and the visual, acoustic, even kinaesthetic elements has undergone noticeable changes, and particularly how contemporary theatre's attitude towards the textual has become considerably more flexible than before. Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik's article discusses ways Polish theatrical approaches to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reflect on the changing attitudes not only to Shakespeare's play, but also to its potential power to reflect contemporary attitudes and the role of cultural memory in the representation of historical traumas. Focusing on the post-memory of the Shoah, she points out the interpretational role of migratory aesthetics in several contemporary productions. Also focusing on Polish Shakespeare theatre, Jacek Fabiszak examines a recent performance of *Hamlet* that challenges the cultural stereotypes of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, showing intricate ways in which Shakespeare can serve the purposes of inter- and trans-cultural dialogues. Similarly broadening a national context to include an international background, Gabriella Reuss offers an overview of Shakespeare performances on the Hungarian puppet stage placed against the backdrop of Central European puppetry traditions. Focusing on several pre- and post-1989 Hungarian performances, she delineates the opposing forces of tradition and innovation, along with the artistic courage of several visionary artists who use this often neglected medium for complex meaning-making through the use of Shakespearean drama. Finally, Ivona

Mišterová considers the various uses of cross-gender dressing and even cross-gender casting as practised in Shakespeare productions on Czech stages after 1989. Showcasing the interpretational potential arising from the socio-cultural situation as much as the early modern performance traditions, she describes how such seemingly innovative, newly emerging practices should always be placed in the broader contexts of their cultural heritage.

The third group of essays aims to elucidate various strategies as practised on Central European stages to negotiate power and identity through Shakespearean performance. The articles in this section all present selected case studies to conceptualise the new forms Shakespeare has taken within the context of regional and national cultural heritage and interpretive traditions. The productions under discussion display various approaches to representing and questioning power, referring to contemporary political discourses that inform the productions. Textual strategies, modes of performance, including choices of space, casting, representations of political-ideological stances are examined within the context of performative explorations of identity in *Macbeth*, *Othello,* and the history plays.

Within this section, Šárka Havlíčková Kysová looks at the medium of the opera, focusing on performances of Verdi's *Othello* and *Macbeth* in the Czech Republic after 1989. She examines changing staging traditions in the past three decades employing a cognitive analytical approach to highlight multimodal elements in scenography and their significance in the reception and interpretation of the performances. Jana Wild also focuses on stagings of *Macbeth*, this time in post-1989 Slovakia, arguing that the emerging significance of *Macbeth* as a central text in contemporary Shakespeare performance is rooted in earlier non-Shakespearean theatrical traditions along with their topicality within the socio-cultural context of Slovakia. Zsolt Almási undertakes a close-reading of a recent Hungarian production of *Macbeth* with a particular focus on its textual policies, highlighting the role of the insertion of non-Shakespearean elements into the canonical textual body of the play. He points out how this practice is also characteristic of several further contemporary Shakespeare performances as well as the ways such in-depth analyses can also shed light on the complex forces that contribute to the power of the performance as a whole. Last but not least, Kinga Földváry's article examines Hungarian productions of Shakespeare's history plays with a particular emphasis on three recent productions in terms of the ways they employ early modern historical conflicts. Shakespearean dramatic representation is shown to reflect on Hungarian as well as broader contemporary socio-political contexts.

The kaleidoscopic representation of such colourful approaches cast into three thematic sections allows us to see the volume as a stage in an ongoing process rather than as simply the results of research. Like every process, this project also has a past paving the way to the present moment of publishing the collection as well as a future in which the collaborative efforts of the researchers will continue. The events that led to this collection date back several years, including several international conferences, some within the Central and Eastern European region, in Budapest, Bucharest, and Craiova, others elsewhere, including the ESRA (European Shakespeare Research

Association) conferences in Montpellier, Worcester, Gdańsk, and Rome, the Shakespeare 450 Conference in Paris, and the World Shakespeare Congress in Stratford-upon-Avon and London. Most importantly, it was Jana Wild's efforts that brought together scholars from all corners of the region to work together, to learn from each other about these countries united by similar historical experience and divided by languages and historical prejudices. In 2012–2013, Jana embarked on the grant project 'Shakespeare in Central Europe', followed by the three subsequent grant projects concerned with Shakespeare from 2015 to 2018. The outputs, which have brought together scholars from Central Europe, included several individual guest lectures at the Theatre Faculty of VŠMU (Academy of Performing Arts Bratislava), three international collections (*'In double trust'. Shakespeare in Central Europe*, 2014, a volume with 10 international essays; *Zrkadlá pre doby. Shakespeare v divadle strednej Európy*, 2015, with 12 essays; *Shakespeare in Between*, 2018, with 23 essays) along with three international conferences in Bratislava: 'Chronicles of the Time' in 2013; 'Shakespeare in Between' in 2016; along with 'Shakespeare in Changing Cultural Paradigms' in 2018. During the 2018 conference in Bratislava, an initiative was launched for the scholars to work together to explore how the reception of Shakespeare has reflected the regional specificity of post-Communist countries in the region within the past 30 years. At this point, a decision was made regarding the formalisation of cooperation for a grant application to the Visegrad Fund in 2019, which to our greatest joy was successful. As we all have enjoyed working together, we are also looking forward to organising the results of our research into a more unified, more comprehensive and nuanced narrative of the post-Socialist Central European reception of Shakespeare in the future, with the inclusion of additional countries in the region.

No matter how much we have enjoyed working together, the present collection representing a thematic issue of *Theatralia* could not have come into being without the generous help of certain institutions and individuals. We are grateful to the Visegrad Fund for their financial support and flexibility through the 18 months of the project, and especially to Kateřina Šrámková, who always helped us to find administrative solutions to our difficulties. Second, we are grateful to Pázmány Péter Catholic University for their trust in us to shoulder all the institutional responsibilities for carrying out the project and also for hosting conferences, even if we were eventually forced to organise two of the planned events online. We are especially grateful to Zsuzsanna Angyal, Laura Mihályi, and Gergely Kováts at the International and Financial Departments at PPCU. Thirdly, our heartfelt thanks go to the managing staff of *Theatralia*, without whose professionalism we would have been unable to produce a collection of this quality, and our gratitude goes especially to the copy editors and the peer reviewers, whose expertise have improved the contents of this collection in all imaginable ways. Our greatest fear that so much may remain unsaid is tempered by our anticipation that the cooperation among the contributors to this volume will continue. The fact that our data might be looked at from so many different angles also represents our sincere hope that we will be able to fill in even more gaps and ferret out more truths about Shakespeare's reception in the Central European post-

Socialist countries, with our ultimate goal remaining to enrich our individual as well as group cultural memory in order to present a common cultural heritage that unites countries and nations rather than divides them.

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