# William Shakespeare in the Croatian Drama until the Postmodern Period

## PhD. Helena Brautović

Centre for Foreign Languages University of Dubrovnik, Dubrovnik, Croatia Email: helena.brautovic@unidu.hr

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#### Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the very beginnings of Shakespeare in the Croatian drama until the postmodernism period. Shakespeare's plays began to be performed in Croatia in the late 18th century when German theatrical troupes performed Shakespeare's localized dramas, but theatre audience could still not grasp the true size of Shakespeare plays by watching the adaptations. In the late 18th century Shakespeare started to be translated into Croatian thanks to two priests: Ivan Krizmanić and Antun Kazali. These translations have a high cultural and historical value, but are also important for the future reception of Shakespeare in Croatia as they hide a roadmap and valuable help for its future translators and interpreters. In the mid 19th century Shakespeare started to be deliberately exploited for the first time in the Croatian literature as intertext for the purposes of creating a national drama that would trigger patriotic feelings. In the beginning, the borrowings were discreet and occasional but Stjepan Miletić, in an innovative and open manner, started using Shakespeare in his own works. After Miletić era, a period of poor interest in Shakespeare's determents even of questionable quality of the dramas themselves or because of the upcoming nightmarish war and post-war years that generated the structure of the Croatian drama in which Shakespeare's dominant themse did not fit in. However, the period of postmodernism in Croatia used Shakespeare as intertext in creating post-modern

Keywords: Shakespeare; Croatian drama; borrowings; intertext; translation

## 1. Introduction

William Shakespeare has been present in the works of Croatian dramatists since Dimitrije Demetar, i.e. since the Croatian Illyrian movement, through the period of modernist literature until postmodernism.

The motives, intensity or the echoes of the Shakespeare borrowings are not always the same.

During the Illyrian movement and Croatian national revival period, the reasons for the borrowings were national and programmatic. In modernism, Croatian dramatists were trying to identify, i.e. to react to the challenges of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The intensity of Shakespeare borrowings in the period between the two world wars was very feeble. The approach of the new literary movement – postmodernism – was the period when the Croatian dramatists created their works based on the principles and problems of postmodern rules, and one of the basic postulates of postmodern art is citation, i.e. intertextuality. Shakespeare's reaffirmation in Croatia starts with Ivo Brešan's grotesque *Predstava Hamleta u Mrduši Donjoj (Acting Hamlet in the village of Mrduša Donja*). This play is a turning point, as it will greatly influence Croatian dramatists until today.

## 2. William Shakespeare in Croatia in the 18th century

While Shakespeare was greatly recognized and performed writer in his country, the rest of Europe was still under a strong influence of the French classicism and the spirit of Voltaire's philosophy. Of Shakespeare thorough inferiority to the French dramatists Voltaire had no manner of doubt. He wrote that Shakespeare was "the London Corneille, and a great fool into the bargain". Thus it is understandable that in such an anti-English and anti-Shakespeare atmosphere Shakespeare texts were not included into the repertoire of the German, Romanic or Slavic theatres.

However, the situation is about to change in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, first in Germany. The turning point was when Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, a German dramatist and a representative of the civil Enlightment movement criticized in his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* the simple imitation of the French example (especially Corneille and Racine) and pleaded for a serious reception of Shakespeare's works.

In the late 1760s a literary movement *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Drive, Storm and Urge) was established in Germany and their representative recognized Shakespeare as a "genius" of dramaturgy and was seen as a model for German writers.

August Wilhelm Schlegel in collaboration with Ludwig Tieck translated Shakespeare's plays into German. Thanks to them, Shakespeare has become a national poet of Germany. Nineteen years after Schlegel died, i.e. on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1864 *Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft* (German Shakespeare Society) was founded in Weimar, the oldest literary association in the world. It promotes the investigation with William Shakespeare's works, particularly in the German-speaking countries.

Shakespeareomanie started spreading into other parts of Europe in the beginning of the Romantic era, first in Italy and then finally in France, the cradle of classicism where (at the time) Shakespeare is more esteemed than Racine.

First encounters of the Shakespeare plays with the Croatian theatre audience happened in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century through German theatrical companies who performed localized Shakespeare texts. The repertoire of the German theatrical companies mostly included adapted and localized plays of many world classical writers, including Shakespeare. It is important to emphasize that the adaptation and localization of the plays in that time was not unusual, and it was quite common. Even Shakespeare did not always conceive plots for his own works but he would use and (re)arrange some old, already known plots using his immense talent, the ability to clearly express ideas and feelings and having good insights into human psyche. Localized Shakespeare plays that were performed in Zagreb by German theatrical groups were so far from the original Shakespeare texts that it was hard to recognize most of them, let alone link them to their original author.

In 1785 a German theatrical group performed in Zagreb a play named Gassner der Zweyte oder Der ausgetriebene Teufel, which was probably an adaptation of the Shakespeare Taming of the Shrew. An author named Schinck adapted it.

In 1791 a theatrical group from Germany performed an Eckartshausen utterly liberal adaptation of a Shakespeare play in German language. It is not known which Shakespeare play they performed, but the author (Eckartshausen) put William Shakespeare in the title of the play (*Lieberecht und Hörwald oder So geht's zuweilen auf dem Lande, Ein Schauspiel in drei Aufzügen nach Schakespear von Karl von Eckartshausen*) to make sure to have more audience watching his play. In 1792, seminarians, i.e. members of the seminary theatre in Kaptol performed the same Eckartshausen play in Croatian language. Croatian version of the title leaves out Shakespeare's name but not the name of the German author. This proves that Shakespeare was still just an unknown name, whereas German authors guaranteed success of a play. Croatian cultural, theatrical or literary circles in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century still knew nothing about Shakespeare despite the German theatrical troupes who played adapted Shakespeare. Croatians were still unaware of the true size of the literary works of William Shakespeare, as the adaptation of already adapted plays could not ensure the full enjoyment in Shakespeare plays. However, this play as well as this year (1792) is very much significant as it is considered as the beginning of the Shakespeare era in Croatia.

Performance of Hensler's localization of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* followed. In 1802 the play *Eugenius Skokko, Erbprinz von Dalmatien* was performed in Zagreb where Hamlet, the Danish prince became hereditary prince of Dalmatia. Adapted *Macbeth* was shown in 1804, followed by *Merry Wives of Vienna*, a reworking of Shakespeare's comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, performed by National Theatrical Group from Zagreb.

In the second and third decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Shakespeare's adaptations of *Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, A Midsummer's Night Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* were performed in Zagreb.

The end of the third and fourth decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century recorded the first translations of the Shakespeare's texts into Croatian. Namely, two Croatian priests, Ivan Krizmanić from Bistrica and Antun Paskoje Kazali from Dubrovnik were the first Shakespeare translators in Croatia. Their first attempts at translating Shakespeare's works into the Croatian language are evaluated as translations that have great cultural and historical value. Those translations are the first printed translations, the first complete translations of the manuscript and the first Shakespeare in Croatia because they are also the guidance and assistance for future translators and interpreters of Shakespeare in Croatia. Their translations have significantly contributed to the development of the Croatian literary and theatrical language, and represent the beginning of fruitful translational activities that will follow a hundred or more years later. Also it has to be emphasized that translators were the ones who first approached the works of Shakespeare to Croatian theatre and literary audience, and that since then interest in Shakespeare in Croatia continues.

## 3. William Shakespeare in Croatia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

A milestone in the Croatian theatre life occurred on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1840. This date is considered the birthday of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb because an original Croatian play Juran and Sofiia by Ivan Kukuliević was performed for the first time in Croatian language. The very next year, in 1841 a tragedy by William Shakespeare Romeo and Juliet was on the repertoire, performed by National Theatrical Company from Zagreb. This play was first reworked into German by a German author Christian Felix Weisse, then a Serbian author translated it into Serbian and finally a Croatian author Dimitrije Demeter adapted the Serbian translation for the Croatian stage. The adjustment of the revised translation resulted in a significant and almost unrecognizable original (Shakespeare) play. Next on the repertoire was Ljubav sve može ili Ukroćena tverdokornica (Taming of the Shrew) in 1863. Franz Ignaz Holbein adapted it into a German text Liebe kann alles oder der ausgetriebene Teufel and the Croat author Špiro Dimitrović Kotaranin translated and localized it into Croatian language. This performance was considered for a long time a first Shakespeare performance in Croatian language in Zagreb, and in fact it was the first for something else. Ukroćena tverdokornica is a play that was for the first time directed by a Croatian director and an actor who played the main mail character Petruchio (localized name in the play was Colonel Delibašić) that at the time was usual. The main male role in the play took on the role of the director of the ply as well. The director's play was not written on the theatrical posters as it could be read and recognized in the name of the main character of the play (it was always the main male role). The performance of this play hides an interesting story behind it. Namely, the main male role, as it has already been said, was assigned to an actor Adam Mandrović, and a woman playing a key role was Maca Peris (whose localized name in the play was Anica). Mr. Mandrović was a married man, but fell in love with his partner Miss. Peris. The actor decided to leave his legitimate spouse and Zagreb and to elope with his new love to Belgrade in Serbia. In Belgrade they performed this play on the summer stage "Arena". Serbian theatre historians claim that this was the first Shakespeare performed in Serbia. Thus, thanks to the love affair of the two main protagonists this was the first Shakespeare in Belgrade and not in Zagreb, as it has long been thought.

Next play on the repertoire was *The Merchant of Venice* in 1867 and by 1894 (the beginning of the Miletić era) the following plays were performed on the Croatian theatre stages: *Much Ado About Nothing* (1868), *Romeo and Juliet* (1871), *Macbeth* 

(1875), Othello (1876), The Merry Wives of Windsor (1877) and King Lear (1885). The text of all the mentioned plays was adapted, i.e. translated from German to Croatian.

In Croatia, Shakespeare was consciously started to been borrowed from during the Croatian national revival. After a timid entry into Croatian theatre spaces and after the first attempts of the translations of Shakespeare plays into Croatian, the mid 19th century was the time when the Croatian authors deliberately used Shakespeare to write their own plays, or in other words, Shakespeare was used as an intertext for the first time in the Croatian literature. The characteristics of the Croatian Revival literature determined the relationship between Shakespeare and plays of the Croatian authors created at that time. In fact, the plays written during the Croatian Revival period had a solely national mark. Their purpose was to foster patriotic feelings and the feelings of belonging to the Croatian national and cultural area. Their purpose was to unite the nation through the establishment of general Croatian linguistic, literal and political unity, thus celebrating their homeland. From this it follows that it was also a time of the establishment of national theater. The beginnings of a national drama and the national theater are associated in many countries with Shakespeare plays even if the countries are geographically distant to England and have no direct contact with the English culture. Croatia was no exception in this regard. Croatian writers had a homeland as a central political and literary theme. The question is why Shakespeare, but other English writers as well such as Byron, Milton or Scott when it is known that the Croatian writers were under the heavy influence of German literature? The Croatian cultural circles of the time developed a strong resistance toward a previously dominating German culture, and the Croatian romantics, in the spirit of Romanticism in general, were willing to learn about the culture and literature of other nations. The contact with the British, whose works were read by the Croatian writers, went exclusively through Germany, but as more and more educated people in Croatia mastered the English language so the direct contacts were more frequent and more intense.

Creating a national drama in many European countries was initiated by adapting or borrowing Shakespeare royal or historical dramas. They felt that this kind of drama fully meets the demands of the time. Croatia was not the exception, but apart from Shakespeare history plays Croatian authors skillfully exploited themes, motives, scenes or characters from other Shakespeare plays as well. Croatian authors most borrow from *Hamlet*, but there are also elements from *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*. First Croatian writers who borrowed from Shakespeare in order to write their own dramas in the purpose of fostering national and patriotic feelings were: Dimitrije Demeter (1811-

1872), Mirko Bogović (1816-1893), Franjo Marković (1845-1914), Ante Benešić (1864-1916), Ante Tresić-Pavičić (1867-1949), Milan Šenoa (1869-1961) and Stjepan Miletić (1868-1908).

Dimitrije Demetar in his play *Teuta* uses several of Shakespeare's plays, such as the royal histories *Richard II* and *Richard III*, tragedies *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, comedy *Taming of the Shrew* and romance *The Winter's Tale*.

Franjo Marković in his play Benko Bot borrows from Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello and Richard III.

In the plays *Damjan Juda* by Ante Benešić, Finis *Republicae* by Ante Tresić Pavičić and *Ban Pavao* by Milan Senoa allusions from Shakespeare are discrete, reminiscence

is reduced to a minimum, until the works of Stjepan Miletić who used the elements of the great English poet consciously and inventively.

## 4. Stjepan Miletić

Stjepan Miletić already as a young man gained a rich literary education. He was thoroughly acquainted with the world literature, yet he knew best English literature, especially Shakespeare. In 1889 Miletić wrote a review for the premiere of *Hamlet* translated by August Harambašić and directed by Andrija Fijan. Reviews of theatre plays had been written before in Croatia but Miletić was the first who managed to write a systematic critical review where his capacity for critical thinking is apparent and not only has he opened the door of modernism in Croatia but this critical work was the beginning of a serious relationship between Shakespeare and Croatian stages, Croatian literary criticism and Croatian literature. Miletić decided to formalize his vast knowledge about Shakespeare so he wrote a doctoral thesis on the aesthetic form of catharsis in Shakespeare's plays which he defended at the University of Vienna in 1892 at the age of twenty-four. Just two years later, in 1894, Ban (Governor) Khuen Hedervary appointed Stjepan Miletić director of the Croatian theatre. For Miletić it was the perfect opportunity to introduce Shakespeare's plays to a wider audience in Zagreb in a new way in terms of quality and quantity of Shakespeare plays performed in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb.

In the period between 1894 and 1898 thirteen Shakespeare's premiers were performed in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, of which Miletić himself directed eleven. The first year of his directorship was marked with three premieres (*Coriolanus, Julius Caesar* and *King Lear*) of which Andrija Fijan directed *Coriolanus* just because Miletić was absent visiting different European theatre centers. The very next year even five Shakespeare premieres were performed all directed by Stjepan Miletić (*Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew, The Midsummer's Night Dream* and *The Winter's Tale*). In 1896 there were only two Shakespeare premieres (*King Henry IV* part one and *Richard III*) both directed by Miletić. The following year Miletić directed three Shakespeare premieres (*King Henry IV* part two, *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night or What You Will*). Miletić had a great desire to stage on the model of Burgtheater from Wien, i.e. to stage a full cycle of Shakespeare royal dramas, from *Richard II* to *Richard III*.

Solid quality of the staged and performed Shakespeare plays in the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb during the Miletić era was the result of his efforts to professionalize the work in the theatre and the whole theatre ensemble. His book *Hrvatsko glumište* (1904)(*Croatian Theatre*) best testifies of how Miletić visionary understood theatre in general and theatre critique and how he was the leader of the Croatian cultural elite of the time yet very modest and self-effacing.

Another merit is attributed to Miletić. Shakespeare, as well as other great works of the world literature performed in the Croatian theatres, largely ceased to be adapted or reworked from German or any other language. Miletić urged Croatian writers, many of whom were his personal friends, to translate plays from their original into Croatian language. In this way, a lot of good translations of foreign plays were obtained which were now more complete and suitable to perform on the Croatian theatre stages. Miletić translated few works himself as he was well versed in the English drama in general and as he spoke fluent English. Well versed in Shakespeare, as Miletić undoubtedly was, will notice and argumentatively criticize (in his book) bad translations such as *King Lear* translated by Josip Miškatović.

Miletć also believed that it is necessary to publish new complete works of Shakespeare, as new translations generate greater interest in Shakespeare and greater number of Shakespeare performances. But if Miletić already in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thought that it was about time for something like this, it can be assumed that he would be greatly disappointed to find out that it will take more than a hundred years before the first edition of the collected works of Shakespeare. Namely, in 2006-2007 four-volume edition of William Shakespeare was published in the edition of Matica hrvatska, Zagreb.

It should also be noted that Stjepan Miletić, a man who has repeatedly indebted Croatian drama, wrote three plays: Boleslav, Tomislav and Pribina. These plays are interesting not only in the context of expressing aspirations for

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creating a national theatre in Croatia but also in the way Miletić intended to achieve it. Shakespeare played a great role in this because European "fin de siècle" sought "the soul of people" in the myths of ancient Celts and while his European contemporaries browsed exotic and oriental myths of the Far East, Miletić turned to Shakespeare. In fact, he wanted to catch up, fill in the gap in the Croatian literature i.e. that part of the literature celebrating Croatian historical events and heroes and at the same time proudly showing his role model and idol – Shakespeare.

Miletić's drama *Boleslav* (1894) is a story about a Croatian ruler located in Split, based on historical facts. According to dramaturgical conventions, as well as according to its theme, this drama has the characteristics of Shakespeare's history plays, but at the same time the main character that, according to Fotez "represents Miletić himself" (Fotez,1943, p.80.), as well as some other minor characters in the play have the essential features of the tragic characters in *Hamlet*. In this play there are also motives and verbal echoes of *Romeo and Juliet, The Midsummer's Night Dream, Measure for Measure, Macbeth, Richard II, Richard III* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. We will find grave, gravediggers and worms; "The world's a stage" says Boleslav; the action is sometimes interrupted by witty jokes of a socially inferior characters or noblemen who by their character tend to be wicked and cruel.

Tomislav (1902) is inspired by Shakespeare's play Henry V. This tragedy served to awake consciousness in people. It was supposed to meet art and patriotic appetites of the Croatian cultural audience of the time. Apart from this, we would say normal use of Shakespeare as intertext in the plays at the turn of the century there are at least two other aspects of intertextuality in *Tomislav* characteristic for postmodernism - period on which other writers will have to wait for another seventy years. Namely, in the play *Tomislav* Miletić not only used historiographical data of Vjekoslav Klaić but his literally copied text as well, in other words his citations. Such a connection between art and science is one of the most important characteristics of postmodernism. Another aspect of intertextual characteristic for postmodernism (though not new, but newly reviewed and actual in postmodernism) is juxtaposing "high" and "low". In Miletić's play *Tomislav* he joined literary discourse with decasyllabic folk poetry.

*Pribina* (1903) was modeled according to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in which he almost nowhere deviates from the default template in respect of the story, some scenes and verbal echoes.

#### 5. William Shakespeare after the Miletić era until postmodernism

After Miletić retreated from the Croatian theatre scene, a period of low or weak interest in Shakespeare began. In the period of Croatian modernism Shakespeare will not significantly influence the Croatian dramatic or theatrical production. Few literary attempts to insert Shakespeare elements into the plays remained largely unnoticed because of questionable quality of the plays and because of the upcoming difficult war and postwar years that generated the structure of Croatian drama in which Shakespeare's dominant themes did not fit.

The situation in Croatian theatres was not much different. After Miletić until the end of World War I Croatian National Theatre had sixteen premieres of Shakespeare's plays but the performances were poor and coldly received by the audience according to testimony and criticism in a variety of literary magazines of the time, with the exception of *The Midsummer's Night Dream* that was performed in 1913 in the ambient surroundings of the Maksimir park in Zagreb.

After the World War I a famous Croatian director Branko Gavella again incorporates Shakespeare's works in the repertoire of the Croatian National Theatre. In the period between the two World Wars there were nineteen premieres of Shakespeare's works. During the Second World War Shakespeare was on the list of writers of "enemy" nations, thus not one Shakespeare premiere was performed until the end of the war, i.e. until 1946 when Shakespeare play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* premiere was shown to the Zagreb theatre public.

The interest in Shakespeare was almost unnoticed until the early 70s. To prove this we can state that there were only nine Shakespeare' plays premieres in the Croatian National Theatre within the period of 25 years.

Croatian National Theatre in Osijek two years after its establishment, i.e. in 1907 stage the premiere of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, and by 1970 a total of 27 Shakespeare's premieres were performed. During this period Shakespeare is constancy. The longest period in Osijek without staging Shakespeare's play was four consecutive years, and the Osijek theatre public could enjoy in Shakespeare's premieres during the First and Second World War as well.

Croatian National Theatre in Split (founded in 1940 and closed only seven months later due to the fast approaching World War II) staged *Hamlet* in 1940. Croatian National Theatre in Split was newly founded in 1945. In 1945 *The Taming of the Shrew* was staged, and by 1970 only ten of Shakespeare's work will be staged.

The situation in other smaller theatres throughout Croatia was even worse. Acting School in Zagreb (1939-1944), which however acted as a part of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, staged three Shakespeare's drama premieres

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(A Midsummer's Night Dream in 1941 and in 1942, Romeo and Juliet in 1944). ZKM theatre from Zagreb also had three Shakespeare's drama premieres (*Twelfth Night* in 1953 and 1954, and Romeo and Juliet in 1954). Branko Gavella staged four drama premieres (*As you like it* in 1955, *Winter's Tale* in 1956, *Macbeth* in 1957 and *Hamlet* 1964). Komedija theatre from Zagreb only had one drama premiere in 1954, when they staged *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Other national and city theatres throughout Croatia had a total of 28 Shakespeare's drama premieres until 1970.

As far as the theatre festivals in Croatia are concerned, only the Dubrovnik Summer Festival staged thirteen Shakespeare's premieres from its foundation in 1951 until 1970. The longest period without any premiere was from 1955 until 1959.

## 6. Conclusion

Shakespeare in Croatia began appearing in the time of romanticism. In fact, after Shakespeare entered the Croatian theater spaces through German theatrical groups and after the first Croatian translations by the two Croatian priests, Krizmanić and Kazali, in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century some Croatian authors used Shakespeare's plays, especially his history plays (or royal dramas), to write their own plays. Croatian revival literature in general had a duty to inspire patriotic feelings and unite Croatian people, to celebrate the country and to create a national drama and national theatre. Motherland was a central theme in these dramas and Shakespeare served as "a layout in which the authors build their dramas with a particular national function" (Vidan, 1995, p. 54.).

Croatian romantics considered Shakespeare's tragedies of a high mimetic mode to fully meet the requirements of the time, which was to create a national drama. The result of the adaptation or borrowing was mainly again a tragedy in a high mimetic mode with a national prefix. Romanticism had just arrived in Croatia with great delay and Croatian writers had a huge and difficult task before them. They had to create a national, Croatian drama at a time when most European nations had already had their own national dramas. After establish national drama and national theatre in Croatia, the interest for Shakespeare declined, as far as the borrowings and adaptations are concerned, until the arrival of a new, postmodern era when the interest for Shakespeare intensified. In other words, Shakespeare is a common model for postmodern Croatian playwrights.

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