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In Double Trust: Shakespeare in Central Europe

Jana Bžochová-Wild (ed.). *"In Double Trust." Shakespeare in Central Europe*. Bratislava: Academy of Performing Arts, 2014. 202 pp.

Jana Bžochová-Wild's *In Double Trust* is a respectable attempt at capturing the commonalities and diversities of Shakespeare translation, production, and cultural appropriation in Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) from the entrance of his plays into the cultural sphere, to the present day. As such, the collection follows in the footsteps of such transformative tomes as Michael Hattaway, Boika Sokolova, and Derek Roper's *Shakespeare in the New Europe* (1994), Zdenek Stříbrný's *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe* (2000), and Irena Makaryk and Joseph Price's *Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism* (2006) in considering the way the Bard has been used in the nation-building process. Unlike its predecessors who attempted to encompass an enormous diversity of regions – all of Europe, all of Eastern Europe (and swaths of Russia), and all of the former 'Second World', respectively – *In Double Trust* takes on the far more manageable task of examining a relatively confined geopolitical region over a relatively short historical period. This alone allows for focus, depth, and the potential for fruitful comparative study, simply not possible for collections that attempt a broad geographical survey.

The collection is strategically divided into two topical units. The first, "Horizons", consists of four essays that provide a short survey of Shakespeare reception and production in each of the regions. Though indi-

vidual essays are contained to their respective locales, they overall describe a similar pattern of Shakespeare 'nostrification' and incorporation into each respective nation-building process as the respective nation-states attempted to distance themselves from the stigma associated with the culturally 'backward' East and sought to orient themselves toward the 'civilized' Western Europe. This developmental arc tends to begin with a first awareness of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century to first professional translations and enthusiastic popular reception in the early nineteenth century. This coincides, more or less, with the establishment of a domestic theater scene, foundation of national academies of science, and punctuated by regular heated public debates about correct translation, interpretation, and staging of Shakespeare's plays. Each respective nation's leading enlightenment intellectuals bolstered their status with Shakespearean credentials as translators, directors, scholars, critics, and adopters.

By 1848, when much of Europe revolted in the name of independent nationalism, Shakespeare capital was fully mobilized in service of nationalistic resistance to colonial regimes and/or perceived threats to domestic culture(s) from foreign sources in all regions but Slovakia. Once established, nostrified Shakespeare continued to serve as a political battlefield where opposed ideological forces strove for the authority to

define the core of each respective national culture throughout the twentieth century that brought to the region two bloody world wars and four decades of totalitarian Communism. In Poland, as Marta Gibinska compellingly describes, Shakespeare initially became the site of resistance to no fewer than three separate colonial authorities that controlled the partitioned regions (tsarist Russia in the East, Prussia in the West, and Austria in the South) before being enlisted by intellectuals who resisted totalitarian Communism in the second half of twentieth century. For Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), Pavel Drábek nimbly follows the trajectory of *Macbeth* as the play surfaced in tense political situations as a touchstone of nationalistic consciousness and inherent critique of political intrigue and ruthless ambition. Marta Minier describes the intense efforts of generations of Hungarian intellectuals and artists to use Shakespeare to correct a West-European misperception, publicly voiced by Goethe, that Hungary was not capable of cultural progress (39). Of the four, Slovakia came to Shakespeare later, at the outset of the 20th century; but, as Jana Bžochová-Wild attests, even then Shakespeare was closely intertwined with nascent nationalism that functioned as fodder to ongoing tensions between official Shakespearean doctrine, maintained by the authorities, and carefully censored Shakespeare interpretations, both during the Second World War and subsequent Communist totalitarianism.

The second section, “Spots”, is a collection of essays devoted to localized issues in Shakespeare performance and translation, including Lilla Szalisnyo’s consideration of

Gabor Egressy’s Hungarian interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays; Agnes Matuska’s survey of the ways in which Hungarian theater has incorporated Shakespeare’s concept of “Theatrum Mundi”; and Anna Cetera’s compelling account of the role of censorship in shaping Shakespeare interpretation and production in communist Poland. Anna Kowalcze-Pavlik contributes an incisive analysis of restrictive gendered perspectives on Ophelia in nationalistic Polish interpretation, which she argues has only recently been challenged by non-normative recasting of Ophelia in two contemporary Polish novels. This section concludes with two contributions from prominent contemporary translators of Shakespeare into Czech, Jiří Josek, and into Slovak, Lubomír Feldek. Both provide an informative counterpoint to the more scholarly contributions in the volume by offering practical insight into the creative process of bringing Shakespeare from a specific historical moment, cultural background, and canonical position, into the contemporary geopolitical context, detailing some of the irreconcilable challenges they have encountered and the various possibilities – and their implications – of addressing them.

Like any volume, *In Double Trust* is not without imperfections, which are perhaps inherent to the wide scope of purposes the collection aims to serve. The book seems uncertain about its desired audience: many of the essays give the impression of long-overdue commemoration of prominent, but repressed or otherwise formerly underappreciated Shakespeare directors, actors, critics, or translators, whose names are undoubtedly familiar to a local national audience, but

will likely be incomprehensible to an international audience to whom presumably the book is offered (considering its delivery in English). Some of the pieces offer passages or examples of translation or Shakespeare criticism in a local language, with no translation into English. For instance, Lubomír Feldek provides multiple exempla of the ways he has chosen to deal with particularly tricky-to-translate passages in Shakespeare's plays; without knowledge of Slovak, however, those illustrative and informative moments are unfortunately incomprehensible.

Further, most of the essays in *In Double Trust* document – and frequently demonstrate – deep symbolic and competitive pride in each populace's early and immediate assimilation of Shakespeare's cultural capital. This unquestioning subscription to the equation of competitive demonstrated popular affection for Shakespeare with cultural progress – and lack of Shakespearean engagement as evidence of 'backwardness' (181) – is testament to the unspoken but palpable sense of national trauma inflicted by the ongoing geopolitical turmoil of post-colonial and subsequently post-Communist sense of nationhood that needs rely on externally established markers of comparative cultural superiority. While understandable in the context of Central Europe, long

subjected to the whims of more powerful neighbors on all sides, such ready subscription to the Bardolatrous Shakespeare Imperative prevents the volume from a fruitful cross-border comparative study, and leaves many potentially intriguing questions unanswered. For instance, how might Shakespeare cultural capital – in any of the historical periods addressed – be transformed by its geographical relocation from the British empire (loosely defined) to Britain-neutral territory? What are the specific implications of utilization of one – rather than another – of Shakespeare plays? How has the symbolic cultural embrace of Shakespeare influenced specific development of domestic theater scene? Its cultural concepts? If Shakespeare has served as the quintessential blue-print of a nation, what are to be its demarcations?

Nevertheless, the collection serves as an important contribution to the study of Central European Shakespeares. As such, it serves as a touchstone in the process of transcending the tradition of a friendly-but-fierce competition over the most ardent and authentic national assimilation of Shakespeare to establish a collaborative scholarly inquiry into the iconic qualities of Shakespearean cultural capital in the region and, inevitably, on a global scale.