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ZSUZSÁNNA KISS
Gáspár Károli Reformed Church University, Hungary
e-mail: drkisszs@t-online.hu

"Playing Handy-Dandy": Early Hungarian Translations of *King Lear*

Abstract

The paper offers a few insights into the textual and dramaturgical challenges of Hungarian *King Lear* playtexts, from the earliest ones till 1922. Since the last decade of the 18th century, when the first full adaptation with the so-called Viennese ending was penned, *King Lear* has constantly been an 'object of desire' in Hungarian theatre, literature and culture. Competing with *Hamlet* and *The Taming of the Shrew* in terms of popularity, *King Lear* quickly became a stock-piece. The task of appropriating *King Lear* attracted the attention of the best actors, authors and translators. Many Hungarian adaptations of *King Lear* promoted the professional development of Hungarian acting companies and theatres, of translation itself, and of national dramaturgy. Shakespeare's darkest tragedy filled a vacuum not only on the stages, but also in Hungarian social life, proving to be the perfectly appropriated, updated, and, to some extent, even politically tolerated representation of crisis.

From the first stage adaptations, *King Lear's* numerous translations into Hungarian have conveyed a compelling sense of 'double bound' between page and stage, text and interpretation, translation and performance.

This paper investigates how context and congruity validated certain texts and performances of Hungarian *King Lears*, and how some texts and performances, having illumined one another, expressed what both actors and audience felt, and thus genuinely filled the void between personal and public spheres.

Keywords: playtext, copied versus genuine *King Lears*, Hungarian social-cultural-geopolitical context, theatre as media

1. Preliminary assumptions

This paper builds on the findings of the author's research of all extant Hungarian *King Lear* translations (canonised and uncanonised) and their playtexts (promptbooks, role books, directorial copies, playbills, etc.).[1] Focusing on the Hungarian theatrical representations of *King Lear* from 1811 to 1922, this article investigates why invention or on the contrary, tradition conferred validity to certain playtexts. Looking at the successive Hungarian *King Lear* performances as an uninterrupted process of cultural appropriation and of shaping national self-awareness, revealing the significance of social, cultural and political context around the Hungarian reception of Shakespeare's darkest tragedy, this study moves away from the authors' previously established research data.

By enacting the apocalyptical chaos of the world on the one hand, and man's almost invisible and unspeakable abilities for recovery from disaster on the other hand, *King Lear* has always amazed Hungarian readers and critics. More than any other Shakespearean play, this tragedy has challenged actors, cast down and consoled audiences.

The dramatised fable of ancient Britain, as it suddenly falls apart and almost perishes by envy, self-conceit and ingratitude proved immensely appealing to Hungarians whose country had almost constantly been occupied and torn apart since 1541. One hundred fifty years of Turkish occupation suspended progress in the once prosperous feudal monarchy; one third of the country was annexed to the Ottoman empire, another third fell under Habsburg rule, and the last third, Transylvania 'enjoyed' an ambiguous or relative freedom (which often became tightrope dancing dependence) from both the Habsburgs and the Turks. From the last decade of 17th century to 1848[2] all the third territories of former Hungary became integrated into the Habsburg empire. All attempts to gain independence were repressed. German became the official language. Transylvania preserved some minor privileges.

Since 1794, when the first full adaptation with the so-called Viennese ending was penned,[3] and another much freer and strongly nationalised adaptation was

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[1] Several studies and books were published by the author in this domain. See Zs. Kiss, *A* Lear Király *magyar fordítás- és színpadtörténete*, 1−2 [The Translation and Stage History of *King Lear*], "Látó" [Spectator], Marosvásárhely [Tg-Mureș], 1997, no. 7, pp. 57−80; and no. 8, pp. 72−84; eadem, *Búnak bohócai* [Clowns of Sorrow], Budapest 2010; eadem (ed.), *Leár.* Lear király [Leár. *King Lear*], Source edition retextum 5, Budapest 2016 [available on the publisher's homepage as well]; eadem (ed.), *6:6 in King Lear. What Calls for the Stage: a World Destroyed or Reestablished?*, in: *Our Wonder and Astonishment: Shakespeare: Varázsod Örök Csodánk*, Nyíregyháza 2016, pp. 175−195.

[2] The Habsburg oppression became merciless after 1849. Ruling over so many nationalities, facing the intensifying nationalist movements within her empire, Vienna had used the 'divide et impera' policy. The 1867 compromise between Austria and 'Hungary' did not effectively solve, only delayed the dilemmas Hungary had to face. The Great War followed by the Trianon peace treaty 'released' Hungary three times smaller as she had been before the Turkish occupation.

[3] The first Hungarian *King Lear* translation, preserved as a handwritten prompt copy for the 1811 Kolozsvár premiere of the tragedy was considered lost until found by the author of this study. It lies in the Stage History Repertory of Országos Széchényi Library [National Széchényi Library] Budapest,

staged,[4] *King Lear* has constantly been an 'object of desire' in Hungarian literature and culture.

The 1794 translation was first staged only in 1811,[5] but then its presence could be felt "in the two Hungarian countries"[6] for more than two decades. *King Lear*'s Hungarian premiere was a significant moment in Shakespeare's Hungarian appropriation. It coincided with the beginning of an economically hardened, but culturally prospering time, when acting, writing (and translating) plays and institutionalising Hungarian national theatres became as crucial and necessary activities as political action.[7] Actually, the fight for and by national literature, for and by national theatre often substituted and 'represented' political action in a country that had lost her independence and integrity so long ago.

No wonder Shakespeare symbolised rebirth, renewal and freedom for all those (individuals, communities and nations) who endured the Habsburg rule and yet had the chance of knowing his works.

"Our cold country where the genius holds his tongue or […] declines to speak out like Shakespeare",[8] like Europe of the 19th century in general, did not much employ the Elizabethan theatre-in-the-round. However, when professional acting stepped out from Catholic and Protestant colleges in Hungary, the new institution right in its *statu nascendi* (travelling and even stable companies were hosted in their patrons' houses and mansions) offered some relatively free space for raising topics of urgent public interest. Much like in Shakespeare's time, we may think. Theatre-making was considered a most noble, patriotic endeavour in Hungary; but at the same time, actors were poor and depended on the support and hospitality of humble communities, before or unless they found patronage from members of the elite classes. Often, actors appeared and could feel as "a pack of ragged people wandering through the country as if they were evil-doers chased by sense

under the MM 2315 accession number. The manuscript was published in 2016 (*Shakespeare: Leár. Lear király*, Zsuzsánna Kiss [ed.]).

[4] This adaptation written by Sándor Mérey, entitled *Chieftain Szabolcs*, performed at Buda in autumn 1795 with great success was lost (or has not been found yet).

[5] *King Lear* could not be staged before 1811, because when the acting company at last prospered and was large enough for all the roles of the tragedy, it was decided that half of the company should travel to Pest-Buda to promote theatre-making in the capital.

[6] The whole Hungary was ruled by the Habsburgs in these years, but Translyvania had traditionally been considered a distinguished third of the country, for several historical and geo-political reasons; hence comes the term of "the two coutries", used by Gábor Döbrentei: G. Döbrentei, *Erdélyi Múzeum*, Pest 1818, p. 110.

[7] F. Kerényi, *A radikális színházi program és a közönség a Pesti Magyar Színházban 1838−1840* [The Radical Theatre Program and the Audience at the Pest National Theatre 1838−1840], "Irodalomtörténet" [Literary History] 1976, no. 1, p. 170.

[8] Author, journalist, critic and translator Gábor Döbrentei, wrote this in the tenth issue of cultural magazine *Transylvanian Museum*, four years after his famous call for original national tragedies. It was to this competition that József Katona handed in his play *Viceroy Bánk*, which became *the* national Hungarian tragedy, but Katona's respect (as our Hungarian Shakespeare) and acknowledgement started only two decades later. See G. Döbrentei, op. cit., pp. 144−145.

of guilt".[9] But most actors were enthusiasts with stamina and a strong sense of their mission, who came to enlighten people, to fill the void, to overcome crisis and loss of illusions.

In both cases, theatre constituted a relatively unconstrained space for public debate of public concerns, intellectual and emotional, personal and collective effort-making. As for the tragic genre, tragedies offered both crowd-attracting boisterous spectacle and mutual exchange of energies on the one hand, and were regarded as political deeds on the other hand. The validity (or the success) of a tragedy staged in both cases depended on the audience response, whether the spectators accepted and recognised the performance as representation of their own crises. Journalist and literary critic Imre Vahot, reviewing successive *King Lear* performances at the National Theatre in the 1840s, wrote about the tragic sense conveyed by the actors. He pointed out a significant question, namely: "who was the greatest tragedian, [the actor playing] Lear of the audience?".[10]

Shakespeare's stage deliberately mocks at the discrepancy between the sophisticated contents of a play and the primitive forms of stage expression. The early Hungarian theatre recognised this paradox as well. Shakespeare in *Hamlet* tells much about the function of the theatre; the first Hungarian directors similarly were aware of the mimetic function of acting and its possible impact on the spectators' conscience. Although neoclassicism dictated the use of much decor on stage, the very first Hungarian directors of Shakespeare's plays preferred less props in favour of more fluent shift from scene to scene: one of the hardest tasks at staging Shakespeare. They encouraged and trained their actors to use their talent to ennoble the spectators' souls, to seize the conscience of the audience, and to achieve this while mirroring ("copying") nature.[11]

2. Translating theatre

When the translator ventures on the task of bridging the invincible distance between two languages, s/he starts a process which seems to be more indirect and, therefore, more under control than the process of creating the work of art itself. It is hardly ever consoling that the translator only recreates a work of literary art already extant. He must approach this task with more humbleness and less freedom than the writer of the original work. Translation in this sense is mostly related to the art of performing. While the original work of art does not necessarily explain

[9] This is how actor József Szigeti (1822−1902) in his memoir remembers his youth, the years when he was a travelling actor. See J. Szigeti, *Egy színész naplója* [An Actor's Diary], Pest 1856, p. 61.

[10] I. Vahot, *Lear király*, in: S. Maller, K. Ruttkay (ed.), *Magyar Shakespeare-tükör* [Hungarian Shakespeare Mirror], Budapest 1984, p. 132.

[11] The actors' talent was compared to seeds by actor and first director of Kolozsvár Theatre, János Kótsi Patkó, who held a training day for his actors every week, and who ordered that rehearsal times should start exactly by the most exact watch of the town. Somewhat later actor and director Gábor Egressy (in the Hungarian capital) claimed that if theatrical art followed any model, this model ought to be nature and the creator of the universe. See Z. Ferenczi, *A kolozsvári színészet és színház története* [The History of Acting and of the Theatre in Kolozsvár], Kolozsvár 1897, and Egressy (1866).

or elucidate its own aim, both performing and translating do it by implying some kind of grateful relatedness to the original. Nevertheless, their result is never entirely identical with the original work, but a sort of interpretation. Accordingly, performing and translating are quite paradoxical activities.

Literary translation leads us to an inverse world where, as poet Mihály Babits says, "It is not the singer who makes the melody,/it is the melody that creates its singer".[12] The translation is determined by at least two languages and two writers, still we expect that it should become self-contained and worth considering for its own merits.

Ideally, the drama translator doesn't simply translate for the theatre, but translates theatre itself.[13] On Shakespeare's stage the word had a creative power. There were hardly any show devices or impressive props on the stage. On such stage space the word with its magic power could both create and destroy. The effect of early modern English words was great. The beat of Shakespeare's blank verse is not unknown in Hungarian poetry, where the accentual versification may simultaneously function as metrical versification. Besides, Hungarian, although an agglutinative language with words often much longer than English words, is capable of compacting ideas almost like in English, simply by its flexibility and the freedom of its word order.

The thematic, linguistic and stylistic polyphony of *King Lear* is an extraordinary challenge to all translators. The next great challenge concerns the 'instability' of the text of the tragedy. The translator, if cautious enough, stumbles upon the different variations of the text in different editions. This can result in a greater awareness and more freedom on his part. The quality of the translation is not determined by the results of textual studies; however, it may be influenced by them.

In the beginning, neither translators, nor theatres were interested in revision criticism, authorial manuscript versus theatrical text, Quarto, Folio or conflated editions. The Restoration England freely, or rather brutally adapted Shakespeare, leaving the original complexity of his plays aside. This was not the case on the early Hungarian stages.

3. *King Lear* Dresses Hungarian

Kolozsvár: 1811

The first extant Hungarian adaptation of Shakespeare's greatest tragedy was completed before September 1794, when translator József Sófalvi suddenly died. SJ, as his initials figure on the promptbook's cover, was related to one of the leading actors of Kolozsvár[14] theatre. His high culture and education (the best Tran-

[12] Quotation from 20th century poet, translator of *The Tempest*, Mihály Babits; these lines appear in his 1932 poem *Mint forró csontok a máglyán* (*As burning bones on the stake*) [rough translation by the author of this paper]. M. Babits, *Összegyűjtött versei* [Collected Poems], Budapest 1999, p. 408.

[13] J.-M. Déprats, *Towards Specifying Theatre Translation*, L. Kruger (transl.), London 1992, pp. 136–159.

[14] Kolozsvár (*Klausenburg* in German, *Cluj-Napoca* in Romanian, a most significant city in Transylvania).

sylvanian college[15] and the University of Göttingen) may have been the reason for the actors to invite him to contribute to the theatre repertory. Actors in Kolozsvár were patronised by educated and generous noblemen of the time. *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew* had been staged before 1800, but there had not been enough actors for the full cast of *King Lear* before April 4th, 1811.

Mihály Wándza, painter, engraver, designer, actor, director and author of several volumes (a lyrical novel, six plays and several dramatic translations), set Sófalvi's *King Lear* for the stage.[16] Wándza was leader of the Hungarian actors in Kolozsvár at the time when their patron, baron Miklós Wesselényi suddenly died. Wándza asked for the late baron's unused riding hall from Wesselényi's widow, and transformed it into a beautifully decorated, elegant and well equipped theatre hall in a short time. The playbills[17] show a significant change in the length of performance time of *King Lear* over the years. While the early performances of the tragedy lasted two hours, according to a playbill from 1821, the same *King Lear* production was an hour longer. This may mean that dense cuts marked in the promptbook may have been rejected at successively revised performances. Also playbills and theatre annals testify that Wándza's *King Lear* production travelled widely, from Transylvania to the western, northern and southern regions of Hungary.

The text of the Kolozsvár *Leár* promptbook constitutes a prose translation from Friedrich Ludwig Schröder's (also prose) stage adaptation, the widely popular *König Lear* Trauerspiel (1778).[18] By the introduction of the so-called Viennese ending, Schröder ignored only the integrity of the final scene (his *Hamlet* adaptation suffered more alterations). Thus, neither the German nor the Hungarian early stage adaptations did not distort and mutilate Shakespeare's original as severely as Nahum Tate did (1681) in his *King Lear* adaptation for the English restoration theatre. Comparing Schröder's adaptation and the Kolozsvár playtext, one can notice some small, but quite special alterations.

It is worth mentioning that both Schröder and his Hungarian follower decide that Edmund's illegitimacy and Gloster's adultery ought to be mitigated somehow: that is why Edmund in their versions appears to be Edgar's elder brother. Inclined to rearrange the order of scenes to avoid frequent shifts of stage scenery,

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[15] The gymnasium of Nagyenyed (southern Transylvanian town, Aiud in Romanian), famous for its professors and students alike, was founded by Gábor Bethlen (prince of Transylvania, king-elect of Hungary) in 1622. Dozens of the first professional Hungarian actors studied and grew familiar with Shakespeare there.

[16] Mihály Wándza learnt painting and theatrical arts (the latter from Schikaneder) in Vienna. His lyrical novel and one of his plays were published; another play of his, a Sturm und Drang tragedy, has also been found in manuscript by the author of this paper.

[17] The earliest Hungarian *King Lear* playbills can be found the playbill collections of the Erdélyi Múzeum [Transylvanian Museum] Kolozsvár and of the National Széchényi Library Budapest. See also Bayer (1909), II. 275−277.

[18] Friedrich Ludwig Schröder adapted, staged and acted in many Shakespeare plays in Hamburg and mainly at the Burgtheater in Vienna; his adaptations constituted a significant transition from Neoclassicist to the early Romantic stage conventions. For his *König Lear* Schröder used Wieland's translation.

both adaptations locate Edgar's first Poor Tom monologue at the beginning of the storm scenes. As for the differences, while Schröder allows old Lear to die and keeps only Cordelia alive, the Hungarian translator saves them both. Both adaptations transfer the mock-trial scene from Act 3 to the prison scene of Act 5, with only Lear and Cordelia present. The astounding play-within-the play is stopped by soldiers who enter their cell. Cordelia swoons. In Schröder's version Lear weeps, takes her in his arms, tells much of his magnificent final lines, and dies heartbroken. Cordelia gets back to consciousness and inherits the throne. According to Wándza's promptbook, Edgar, Albany and Kent come just in time to rescue both the king and his daughter. Interestingly, the first Hungarian Cordelia marries not France, but the Scottish king − a detail that has never elsewhere occurred. It is to Scotland where Lear accompanies Cordelia, leaving the throne to Albany, Kent and Edgar. No wonder in this translation, and only here, we have Carlisle [Karlille] instead of Dover for the location where news and letters are exchanged between the exiled daughter and her father's loyal subjects. Why did the translator prefer a Scottish to a French husband for Cordelia, is a question that may lead us to see a larger historical and cultural context.[19] All in all, the 1811 promptbook ends with all the survivors stand, not leave the stage while some (not mourning) music is played.

The first Hungarian King Lear promptbook contains 11 different scenic locations. In fact, the Kolozsvár company owned four basic backcloths to start with when setting the scenes: one for a palace interior, one for some open space (street or yard), one for forest and one for prison (or home interior). According to the promptbook, these four basic designs were altered and completed with different props to create the needed settings. Disregarding Shakespeare's dramaturgy, few scenes were grouped together and dislocated in order not to need many scene shifts; this happened according to Schröder's *König Lear*. The culmination of the blinding scene happened offstage, just like the duel between Edgar and Oswald.

Official censorship is not noticeable on the title page or other pages of the promptbook, however, we may speak of a self-censoring attitude towards the grave matters of the tragedy. Wándza's *King Lear* production travelled widely, from Transylvania to the western, northern and southern regions of Hungary. The much used, but still well preserved promptbook testifies that the translator JS (who had completed his translation at an earlier phase of development of the Kolozsvár theatre), and later actors and directors (and prompters and copiers, too) took much interest in preparing the production of this tragedy. One can see many additional notes, corrections, cuts inserted into the pages. Director Mihály Wándza was well

[19] The reason for such a modified detail may be found among several religious, historical and cultural circumstances. Scottish supporters for Cordelia and her father's bleeding country seemed perhaps more reliable in front of the Transylvanian audience, half of which was Calvinist. In terms of history, France signified, to some degree, loss of hopes for the Hungarians who had been promised French diplomatic and military support in their successive (17th century) fight for independence against the Habsburgs, but did not succeed. Finally, literary collaborations may have lead to the translator's preference for Carlisle: his contemporary György Aranka translated some scenes from *Richard II*. In *Richard II* Bishop Carlisle is a remarkable character, whom the translator of *King Lear* may have vividly remembered.

reputed for his Shakespeare performances, for dynamic scenes and spectacular set designs, for his ability to employ actors to double roles in a production, and for ballet or dumb shows. At the beginning of Act 5 in *Lear* (briefly entitled *Leár* by the copyist of the only promptbook), an elaborate dumbshow is introduced, where all the forthcoming events are anticipated by a series of gestures and movements performed by the actors who play in the final act. Since *Hamlet* had been shown earlier in Kolozsvár, the audience certainly remembered the usage of the mouse-trap scene. No wonder the director invented an intermission-like play-within-the play scene to entertain *Lear*'s audience before the tragic dénoument was unfolded with its sudden alleviation.

Pest-Buda: 1838

Two and a half decades after the Transylvanian *King Lear*'s premiere, artists, intellectuals as well as lay people (tailors, technical persons around the theatre, etc.) in the recently opened National Theatre of Pest wanted modern and more authentic translations of Shakespeare's works. Romanticism had brought about the reverence for the genuine text. "Let this nation naturalize for once someone who brings and does not take. […] Shakespeare is a fairy castle. […] Just open it: and you will find in it whatever you think of or wish. […] Naturalize Shakespeare and you will have literature, great and eternal", wrote Gábor Egressy in his *Proposition for Spiritual Naturalisation*.[20]

Not only educated readers, writers and critics, but also theatres began to look for the genuine, unabridged Shakespearean plays. Remarkably, it was in 1838 when both in England and in Hungary the fully restored *King Lear* tragedy was for the first time staged. It was in January 1838 when actor and stage manager William Charles Macready 'brought back the Fool', casting a nineteen-year-old actress in the role.[21] As for Hungary, the Fool's role had already been present in the earliest Hungarian translation of the tragedy; nevertheless, the original ending was still to be accepted. So, only three months after the London production, on the 30th of April 1838, the Hungarian stages of Pest-Buda hosted the first entirely faithful translation of *King Lear*.

The 1838 Hungarian *King Lear* was translated by poet, scholar, writer and philosophy teacher Péter Vajda and partly by author and doctor in law István Jakab. Vajda, a son of serf parents, studied medicine in several western European countries. While teaching at a southern Hungarian Lutheran school, he translated Novalis, Defoe and Shakespeare (*Lear, Hamlet, Othello, Richard III*). Beside the English source for his *Lear*, Vajda used several German texts as well. István Jakab wrote and translated drawing-room comedies, opera librettoes and fairy comedies. He also copied for the theatre. As for *King Lear*, Jakab translated from English, his contribution being many of the prose passages.

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[20] February 20th, 1848, first published in the weekly "Életképek" [Pictures of Life]. See S. Maller, K. Ruttkay (ed.) *Magyar Shakespeare-tükör* [Hungarian Shakespeare Mirror], Budapest 1984, p. 174.

[21] W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, J.L. Halio (ed.), The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge 1992, pp. 41–42.

However, in the spectacularly lavishly corrected handwritten promptbook[22] it is difficult to identify who translated what. The copy was penned by prompter (and sometime actor) Sándor Gillyén, a most respected and beloved member of the National Theatre. Many of the notes and corrections derive from Egressy's own hand, but several other directors' handwriting has been identified on the pages of the promptbook, as the copy remained in use after Egressy's death, and it certainly served as model or 'guide' for quite some time. Egressy's promptbook has been signed and of course revised, severely cut by notorious censor of the time, Antal Pongrácz, appointed by Vienna. Censor's traces can be well discerned by the thick black ink and the continuous horizontal cuts the authority made right before the premiere. Evidently, we do not know to what degree the actors respected the censorial cuts when they performed *King Lear* again and again, to changing audiences, under changing circumstances. The promptbook is crammed with revisions: notes, signs, alterations, additions, all written in different colours, pencil or ink. Some pages were cut and then replaced by additional slips of paper stuck into the promptbook; these modifications helped the reordering of certain scenes with the aim of reducing the number of sudden scene shifts.

As compared to the 11 scenic locations of the 1811 promptbook, in the 1838 promptbook there are 14 scene settings. The most merciless moments of the blinding scene and the fight between Edgar and Oswald are here as well 'sent' offstage, to be just overheard. But the Fool's songs, all his text and Merlin's prophecy as well figure in the promptbook.

Luckily, two other playtexts derived from the 1838 promptbook, and the three playtexts together provide a clearer insight into the second extant Hungarian *King Lear*. There is a much cleaner copy compiled in 1856 in Kecskemét town; this promptbook ignores most of those lines of the tragedy which were (or were not always) crossed out in the 1838 promptbook (before 1856).[23] Thirdly, there is Lear's rolebook, copied, at places rewritten, at certain lines retranslated by corrected by Gábor Egressy himself.[24]

Several documents (critiques, memoirs, studies) describe how Gábor Egressy prepared for Lear's role. He must have known the Kolozsvár *Lear* text, as he had played in the tragedy as guest actor in Pécs, Kassa (now Kosice) and other towns, some years before he ordered the new translation. He knew and collaborated with some of the actors who performed in the first Hungarian Lear in Kolozsvár. He visited Vienna to see Heinrich Anshütz's perform Lear. Critics often debated whether he was an original Lear or a mere copy, and whether he developed from one performance to the following. Egressy read, studied, directed and and per-

[22] Egressy's promptbook, copied and first used by prompter Sándor Gillyén, can be found in the Stage History Repertory of OSZK [National Széchényi Library] Budapest, under the NSZL 41 accession number.

[23] This copy belonged to actor, director Antal Gárdonyi. Today it can be found in the Stage History Repertory of OSZK [National Széchényi Library] Budapest, under accession number MM 4668.

[24] Lear's rolebook can be found in the Stage History Repertory of OSZK [National Széchényi Library] Budapest, under accession number MM 5021. The findings of these three playtexts and the entire prompt copy were published together with the 1811 *Lear* translation in 2016, edited by the author of this study.

formed several of the great Shakespearean tragedies and histories. He ardently militated for the 'nationalisation' of Shakespeare. He travelled to various regional acting companies to direct and play Shakespeare above all other playwrights. He organised and reviewed performances, tried his hand at translating and paid for the best translators' work.

Egressy and his age have been considered Shakespearean in the sense that turbulent events continuously challenged people's character, their spiritual growth, tenacity and humaneness as well as their individual and collective resources for survival.[25] The National Theatre worked with understudies for the main roles, so after 1838 the Hungarian capital soon saw different types of Lear: a possessive father who suffers and goes mad, a weak king who reshapes his dignity by losing his crown, and occasional transitions between these two. Although Egressy was criticised for his weak voice and his new, 'calculating' playing style, he became the first one among the unforgettable and most beloved King Lears preserved in the memory of Hungarian audiences. When after turbulent years and his long absence from stage the authorities allowed him to perform again, he chose to greet his audience by playing Lear.[26]

Egressy's 1838 prompt copy still made its appearance in a series of 'new' performances which proudly announced that they would be staging the new text. So, around 1880 and after, while in England critics and editors faced the textual problems of Quarto and Folio, of parallel and conflated editions of *King Lear*, Hungarians celebrated the unparalleled magic of the new romantic translation of Lear's tragedy by Vajda and Jakab; it had been reverently published, but the theatrical practice was slow to fully accept it. Vajda's and Jakab's, marked the dawn of modern, faithful translations and of a new, romantic acting style as well. It conquered all Hungarian stages and was kept alive for decades, although it remained unpublished until 2016, and, interestingly, although 16 years after its first performance, it was followed by a poetically more accomplished new translation, completed by Hungary's great romantic poet, Mihály Vörösmarty.

Hide-and-seek of old and new texts on stage: 1870, 1897, 1922

Vörösmarty's *King Lear* translation is the tragedy per se, 'the thing itself'. It became an inestimable but weighty legacy to his age and to succeeding generations, comparable to the worshiped but unfulfilled legacy of the ideals of 1848 for generations of Hungarians.[27] Vörösmarty's translation was probably the result of the coincidence of two factors: the poet's genius comparable to Shakespeare's and the chaotic political circumstances in Hungary after 1848.

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[25] F. Kerényi, *Magyar színháztörténet, 1790–1873* [Hungarian Theatre History, 1790–1873], Budapest 1990; P. Rakodczay, *Shakespeare Lear királya* [Shakespeare's King Lear], Torda 1899; idem, *Egressy Gábor és kora* [Gábor Egressy and His Age] 1–2, Budapest 1911.

[26] The peaceful Revolution of 1848 was followed by the War of Independence in which many intellectuals, actors too participated. This was followed by the dark Bach régime, years of severe repression from Austrian authorities and by sporadic eruptions of mutinies from the nationalities.

[27] The ideals of 1848 projected a peaceful, free and prosperous Hungary in spite of unsettled external and internal circumstances.

Like Shakespeare, Vörösmarty was sensitive to the manyfold realities of life. As early as in 1830, his fairy-play *Csongor és Tünde* ('Csongor and Tünde') shows strong spiritual relationship with the Shakespearean dramaturgy. When Vörösmarty first saw *Macbeth* and *King Lear* at the German Theatre of Pest, he enthusiastically began to study the English language. In 1838, collaborating with Egressy, he began translating *Julius Caesar,* which was presented with success in 1839. He started working on the translation of *Lear* towards the end of 1847 and in the spring of 1848. The events of March 1848, the Revolution and the War of Independence changed the nation's and, with it, the poet's life radically. When the revolution turned into defeat, Vörösmarty, like thousands of people, became a fugitive. He returned to Budapest only in 1850. Then he retired to the provinces and worked the land to maintain his family. His poems of the time are tragic and dramatic. Vörösmarty continued to work on his translation of *King Lear* in 1853. In 1854 he still wanted to correct and copy the final text, but he had neither the strength nor the time to do so. He died in 1855.[28]

The visionary romantic poet's *King Lear* translation is entirely faithful to Shakespeare (to the conflated text). It conquered its readers, but it did not conquer the stage. Hungarian theatres came up against particular difficulties following defeat in the War of Independence. Although theatres were not closed for long, there was a shortage of actors, and censors banned many plays from the stage.[29] Playing Shakespeare seemed safer than staging Hungarian plays. National theatres continued to mediate between ideals and reality, and represented a forum for national resistance against the foreign rule. In spite of poverty and prohibitions, more than 100 leading actors worked in the country and many travelled, with their troupes and repertory, from the capital to the provinces.

Director Ede Paulay, familiar with the Meiningen theatre in Germany, required natural speech and precise ensemble play from his company at the National Theatre. Four years after Gábor Egressy's death, on September 7th 1870, he staged *King Lear* in Vörösmarty's translation for the first time. The extant playtexts,[30] are proof that the highly poetical new text was often revised and rewritten on the basis of the 1838 translation.

Vörösmarty's translation was performed in Kolozsvár earlier than in the capital. There, Vörösmarty's textual solutions were preferred to the great monologues

[28] Vörösmarty's funeral on November 21st, 1855 was the first occasion when great masses (between 20 and 40,000) of people were allowed to gather during the deadly repressive Bach regime.

[29] I.e. props like crowns, scepters, or the colours of the Hungarian banner were prohibited (Á. Deák, *Zsandáros és policzájos idők – Államrendőrség Magyarországon, 1849–1867* [Times with Gendarms and Police – State Police in Hungary, 1849–1867], Budapest 2015.

[30] All these playtexts can be found in the Stage History Repertory of the OSZK [National Széchényi Library] Budapest. The playtext under accession number NSzL103 is the first promptbook for the September 7th, 1870 premiere of *King Lear* at the National Theatre; the playtext NSzL103/1 is Ede Paulay's directorial copy, and the playtext NSzL103/2 is the second promptbook. Both promptbooks have a curious handwritten note on their front cover: "Old, bad, not good!". There is a fourth playtext with not much correction, under accession number NSzL103/3; it was copied in 1872 but served for the reading rehearsal in 1888.

of the 1838 translation. Three playtexts witness the long, gradual, careful and exciting process of accepting the new translation.[31]

Actor and director Imre Tóth took over Paulay's work at the National Theatre Budapest, and with it the *King Lear* productions. Tóth organised the first Shakepeare cycle[32] at the National Theatre between 1910 and 1912, and excelled at employing the best actors and staging outstanding productions. His printed, one-sided playtext is a remarkbale intellectual product with economical, sophisticated and sharp remarks which well testify how much directorial work had developed until this performance, December 12th, 1897.

The last promptbook this paper looks at comes from the 1922 *King Lear* production of the National Theatre, Budapest, directed by Sándor Hevesi.[33] Theatre critic, author, dramaturg, translator, stage manager, Hevesi could at long last stage a *King Lear* that was fully grounded in Vörösmarty's text. Hevesi staged Shakespeare's dramaturgy without mutilations, in its original proportions and progress. To assure the continuous change of scenes on a stage that employed more articulated set designs, Hevesi introduced two simultaneous sceneries: one unfolded in the proscenium, while another scene could follow instantly when the backdrop was lifted in front of it. Thus the tragedy did not fall apart. Critics agreed that this production (first run on December 12th, 1922) was outstanding and majestic like a gothic cathedral, with equally great actors in all the main roles.[34]

Hevesi's single playtext, handwritten and serving as both promptbook and directorial copy, contains quite many directorial notes which refer to the actors. Lear had two understudies. Imre Pethes portrayed a Lear with boiling emotions who endured suffering with discipline until yielding to madness. László Bakó's voice was stronger, he sometimes became slightly humorous, his Lear presented the unbreakable royal dignity. According to the playtext, Hevesi 'prescribed' two different text versions for these two Lears, that is he cut or did not cut the translation according to the different skills of his actors.

By this time, stage conventions, the acting style and many other factors had been massively changed. Needless to say, although the production was celebrated and much praised, 'the stage', receptive to all that was happening in society, was already looking for newer *King Lear* translations.[35]

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[31] The NSzL103/3 playtext (Stage History Repertory of National Széchényi Library Budapest) marks the beginnings of the process of rehabilitating the text which was copied, then crossed and overwritten – less and less frequently. Playtext NSzL103/4 (Stage History Repertory of National Széchényi Library Budapest) is the promptbook that was in use from August 1888 until 1922, with plenty of precious remarks and corrections. Playtext NSzL103/5 (from Stage History Repertory of National Széchényi Library Budapest) is a one-sided printed booklet, a most exciting directorial copy with notes from both Paulay and Imre Tóth.

[32] The first Hungarian Shakespeare cycle was in fact organized and staged by Mihály Wándza, a hundred years earlier, from 1811 to 1812, in Kolozsvár.

[33] This playtext can be found under the NSZL 161 accession number in the Stage History Repertory of National Széchényi Library.

[34] A. Kárpáti, *Főpróba után. Válogatott színbírálatok, 1922–1945* [After Dress-Rehearsal. Selected Theatre Reviews, 1022–1945], Budapest 1956, p. 17–19.

[35] The author, journalist, interpreter Árpád Zigány published his new translation of *King Lear* in 1899. His translation, taking after Vörösmarty's text, contains minor changes in tone and style.

4. Comparative analysis of selected passages[36]

Glimpses into Act 1 Scene 1

The opening scene of *King Lear* is essential, not only by setting the plot in motion, but by introducing the main characters and displaying themes and motives that will repeatedly come back as leitmotifs along the whole play. Investigating the early Hungarian playtexts, let us now compare how in the love auction scene Kent's unmannerly vituperation to the mad Lear sounded in successive performances.

The 1811 Kolozsvár promptbook misses the whole court scene, but opens with Gloster who asks Kent why he got exiled. Kent confesses with stoicism had he been less caring for Cordelia he would have escaped exile. The sharp repartees between Lear and Kent are missing. The motive of the king who kills his doctor and of freedom exiled versus banishment figure, while the painful contrast between old and new does not appear in this adaptation.

The 1838 promptbook faithfully translates the verbal fight between Lear and Kent, on top of which 'Vassal! Miscreant!' (without the Folio's 'O' interjection) is followed by the stage instruction that comes from Rowe's edition, namely that Lear 'lays his hand on his sword'.[37] This (in the Folio) is followed by Albany's and Cornwall's simultaneous 'Dear sir, forberar' intervention; Egressy's translators have translated this half-line, too. As for Kent's last farewell line, here we find it in prose. The contrast between old and new is missing from the sentence: 'Kent is going to start a new career abroad'.

What happened with this particular dramatic moment in Vörösmarty's translation, when Ede Paulay staged it in 1870? After 'O, vassal, miscreant!' (Folio 'O' has been translated by Vörösmarty and it appears in the playtext, too) the 1870 Hungarian promptbook introduces a meticulous stage instruction: 'the attendants all make a step toward Lear'. In Vörösmarty's translation it is Cordelia who intervenes for Kent with Albany. Actually, here the Folio is not clear enough, having 'Alb' and 'Cor' for the speaking persons. However, the 1870 Hungarian prompt copy and the four more or less identical, cleaner copies of it all go back to the stage tradition established earlier: not Cordelia, but Cornwall joins Albany in uttering this line. Kent's last words in Vörösmarty's translation and its playtexts nicely reproduce the disparity between old and new: [and Kent] 'on old feet goes to a new country'.

In December 1897, The National Theatre Budapest presented Vörösmarty's *King Lear* in a new stage version. Director Imre Tóth's directorial copy is the

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Zigány's *King Lear* edition, although allowing theatres to use it without copyright, has never been performed. The next modern translation was completed before 1936, and another one in 1955; but the survey of all this lies outside the focus of the present study.

[36] The orginal quotes come from the New Cambridge edition of *King Lear* (W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, J.L. Halio (ed.), The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge 1992). The English approximations to the Hungarian versions, based on the already documented sources, are meant only to suggest the distance or closeness between the successive playtexts.

[37] W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, J.L. Halio (ed.), The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge 1992.

first printed and bound one-sided playtext among Hungarian *King Lear* copies. According to Tóth's conception, the dispute between Kent and Lear is, as well as the whole court scene, watched and evaluated by the Fool's mimics and gestures. The 1897 directorial copy abounds in precise stage instructions. It is indicated that Albany and Cornwall kneel before Lear when Kent tries to stop the second mad division of his kingdom (the addition of Cordelia's portion to the two elder sisters' dowry). Another instruction indicates that Lear rises from his throne as he calls Kent vassal and miscreant, and all the attendants make a step towards Lear. Moreover, the director indicates that Lear turns away from Kent when he finishes shouting at him, meanwhile Kent goes to Cordelia and kisses her hand.

According to its playtext, the first 20th century new staging of Vörösmarty's *King Lear* followed the previously established practice, but at the same time managed to finally adjust the text to the Shakespearean dramaturgy. In regard with the so far inspected opening scene, the playtext contains one slight difference from the poet's translation, namely a paradox: Kent announces that 'he is leaving on old feet for a foreign home country'.[38] The clue to this oxymoron ('foreign home') in the staged text may belong to the historical moment. Making distinction between mother country and home country for the inhabitants of former Hungary after the 1920 Trianon treaty was vital and painful.[39] Needless to say, Kent's character renders a political dimension to Shakespeare's play. Director Hevesi knew it and found it plausible to put on a performance that might mediate just so well between Shakespeare's text and contemporary Hungarian audiences.

Kent's monologue in the stocks (Act 2 Scene 2)

For having insulted Oswald, Kent is punished by Regan and Cornwall who have just visited Gloucester. The time is night, as Regan (following her father) expresses, dark night that suits dark purposes: 'Thus out of season, threading dark-eyed night'. Kent is exhausted with indignation and fatigue; his speech is not an easy text. Most of directors shorten it. However, this speech well prepares the ground for Edgar's arrival in disguise as Poor Tom. In the stocks, Kent would haste the sunrise in order to see more clearly Cordelia's letter, saying: 'Approach, thou beacon to this under-globe'. Certainly, for the London theatre-goers, 'Globe' was a self-referential word, by which Kent was supposed to hold the attention of the audience in a quite inactive moment, between two dynamic scenes. Kent voices here a most enigmatic a wrathful night, out of time'. Kent appeals to the moon and conveys a sense of isolation phrase: 'Nothing almost sees miracles/But misery' (12 syllables).

The 1811 Hungarian prompt copy cannot convey the plasticity of Regan's words, untranslated by Schröder in the first place; Regan simply says: 'at such an

[38] Home: 'haza' in Hungarian means one's homeland, but for one's house or dwelling place there is another word: 'otthon'. Nevertheless, 'home' functions both as noun and adverb; as adverb it defines the direction towards both one's homeland and one's dwelling place.

[39] Many people chose to leave their 'new' homes and emigrate to the remaining territory of the 'old' Hungarian state, while many more, like Kent, were forced to leave; the hardest perhaps it was to 'fall out of favour' and stay, like Kent does, under disguise.

unsuited time'. The first Hungarian Kent invokes the moon, not the sun, for some light. The under-globe translates quite well: 'Now come, you lantern of this world below'. The mention of miracles and the wretched here cannot be found.

The 1838 prompt copy gives a more suggestive translation for Regan's line: 'in such a disarray, at dark night'. Kent's monologue is translated in iambic pentameters. The enigmatic final line is successfully conveyed: 'None sees miracles but the unhappy'.

Ede Paulay in 1870 partly prefers the new translation of Vörösmarty's, but cuts it severely. Regan's mention of the unfit time for their visit to Gloster is marvellous both by a suggestive imagery and by its iambic beat: 'At such and descent from the (free) world: 'Approach, you guardian light of underworld'. The maxim-like sentence on misery versus miracle is masterfully translated. Vörösmarty, like Shakespeare, makes use of enjambment: 'Now only misery/Can see more wonders' (only 9 syllables). Yet the prompt copy cuts the end of the speech.

Imre Tóth's playtext from 1897 is remarkable for several reasons; in the passage under our present scrutiny Kent's punishment takes place in front of Gloster's palace in the yard, but this Hungarian scenario includes an additional prop, a well, placed in the yard. According to the stage instruction, Kent's stocked feet were supposed to reach to the edge of this well. And, as carped by a theatre critic, the water-source placed on stage turned to be a specific Hungarian sweep-pole well, a pole with some weight in a bucket to counterbalance the water-gaining bucket at the other end.[40] Imre Tóth's directorial copy indicates some more particular details: when Kent is stocked and the key of the stocks is given to Cornwall, the moon emerges in the sky. The final two half-lines concerning the wretched and their ability to see miracles are again cut.

The 1922 playtext does not include any innovation at this passage.

Edgar enters in disguise (Act 2 Scene 2)

Edgar's first monologue as Poor Tom (2.2) got misplaced in the early Hungarian staged translations. Edgar enters the scene when Kent finishes reading Cordelia's letter and falls asleep in the stocks. Originally no scene break was indicated here. It is late night or early dawn, both Kent and Regan say so. Edgar represents the most deprived and hopeless human state so far met in the tragedy. The monologue during which he undresses, injures himself, deliberately makes himself appear dirty and lunatic, has always proven hard to accept by the audience. The early Hungarian texts contain the more or less accurate translation of these lines, but they all cut it heavily. The greatest difficulty with Poor Tom's entrance, for early stages in general was where this monologue ought to be set.

The Kolozsvár copy follows the Schröderian model, locating Edgar's first Poor Tom monologue (in prose) at the beginning of the storm scenes. Egressy's two translators put Edgar's monologue in suggestive verse form as fit. First they placed it after the Fool's prophecy (in Merlin's name, end of 3.2. in the English text). But then Edgar's monologue was crossed out from there. It was copied onto

[40] P. Rakodczay, *Shakespeare* Lear királya, op. cit.

a separate piece of paper, this time in prose. That additional page was stuck onto Act 3 Scene 1, covering Kent's and the Knight's dialogue, which was thus ignored. No doubt Egressy decided to turn back to the Viennese and Transylvanian tradition and have Edgar open Act 3.

The playtexts from 1870 testify that Ede Paulay set Edgar's monologue at the beginning ot Act 3, although Vörösmarty was faithful to Shakespeare's dramaturgy. The monologue in the poet's translation consists of 25 lines; it is somewhat longer than the original 21 lines. Eventually, nothing from the original is missing here. The rhythm of the blank verse is perfectly revived. The sentences burst with tension, the imagery is precise and compelling. Knowing suffering from close, Vörösmarty was able to express universal grief in his poetry, and translating *King Lear* suited him all too well.[41]

Imre Tóth's printed copy from 1897 has this monologue set at its original location, however, the monologue again has been crossed out and copied back to the beginning of the storm scenes of Act 3.

It was Sándor Hevesi in 1922 who, handling a more developed stage machinery (but using handwritten playtexts), did not hesitate to place Edgar's monologue where Shakespeare originally designed it to be. According to Hevesi's directorial copy, after Kent's monologue there is a short open scene-change, and then Edgar appears alone. With this, the last dislocated scene from *King Lear* has at last found its right place in the Hungarian theatrical practice.

5. Conclusion

In the beginning, translating Shakespeare for the Hungarian stages was both a cultural-spiritual and a moral and patriotic endeavour. The translation and the staging of *King Lear* were the result of some remarkable collaboration of cultured, enthusiastic and devoted people who were bound by ties of professionalism, by common fate and cultural identity.

The first extant *King Lear* adaptation was created before the end of the 18th century at the urging of Transylvanian actors who were devoted to Shakespeare and found generous patronage and learned audiences. Authorised official censorship is not noticeable on the title page or other pages of the first promptbook, but there are many cuts and alterations, and we should speak of a self-censoring attitude towards the grave matters of the tragedy.

Two and a half decades later, a similarly urgent need empowered artists and intellectuals of modest status, but of talent and devotion, as well as influential patron figures and lay people (tailors, technical persons around the theatre, etc.) to urge a more accomplished, modern, and fully authentic translation of the tragedy for the Hungarian audience, this time in the capital. The second extant translation

[41] Personally involved with the 1848–1849 Hungarian Revolution and War for Independence (as he compiled the 12 points of the nation's claim to the Austrian court), Vörösmarty followed the fleeing government to Debrecen, spent long weeks hiding in cellars close to Arad where the leaders of the Hungarian army and masses of men were martyred in autumn 1849.

of *King Lear* outlived the heavy Austrian censorship, the stormy years of Revolution, the War of Independence and following repressions.

While the third translation was created and several times published in Pest--Buda, actors and audiences kept going back to the old text which existed in the memory of actors and audiences. Promptbooks and directorial playtexts show how the successive Hungarian performances of *King Lear* grew more and more articulated, congruent, plastic and clear. There was a curious, peaceful, parallel existence of old and new translations, and this continued in the light of rising worries about the decay of stage conventions, of translations and of culture in general. The meandering line of the Hungarian *King Lears* from the wandering troupes to the National Theatre of modern Budapest exemplifies how the transition from neo-classicist sentimentalism to romanticism, to realism and naturalism depended on the intricate human networks and social affairs.

The third translation of *King Lear* as a coherent play faced 'resistance' for half a century. It raised overall success, standing ovation in 1922, somewhat after Hungarians suffered a new, even greater political defeat at Trianon.

The translations and the performances of *King Lear* have each contributed to the way how Hungarian culture envisages Shakespeare's darkest tragedy and tragedy as such. Some texts and performances failed to create enough coherence and catharsis, but more often page and stage functioned well enough together and provided means of communication between Shakespeare and his Hungarian reception, actors and audience, ideals and reality, the personal and the public spheres. *King Lear* became popular and has been almost continually present on Hungarian stages since it was appropriated. This tragedy proved enriching to the Hungarian national culture in many ways. The comparative analysis of the early playtexts reveals how gradually and organically Shakespeare's theatre developed on Hungarian stages. Hungarians desperately needed their own *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo*[42]. There were moments when authors, actors and simple people from the audience alike felt identical with the character of King Lear. As the anecdote of the "Lear from Enrőd" says, in 1881, after having watched the tragedy a middle aged man asked the guest actor whether he knew how he had been mistreated by his three daughters.[43]

Shakespeare's Lear, like most of us, can never fully comprehend or express either his own "darker intentions", or the "mystery of things". The history of *King Lear*'s Hungarian translations and performances unfolds in modern times and our present as well. Oscillating between copying, playing handy-dandy or being genuine, this tragedy continues to vex, inspire, enlighten, shock and inflame Hungarian audiences.

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[42] Mihály Vörösmarty argued about the need for new translations in his *Dramaturgai lapok* (*Elméleti töredékek színbírálatok*) [Dramaturgical Pages (Theoretical Pieces, Theatre Reviews)], Pest 1837, p. 398.

[43] Actors György Molnár and Pál Rakodczay recounted two different occasions in two different regions of Hungary before 1900, when, after the performance of the tragedy, men from the audience confessed that they felt the play was just about them and their family matters. See P. Rakodczay, *Egressy Gábor és kora* [Gábor Egressy and His Age], 1–2, Budapest 1911.

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