

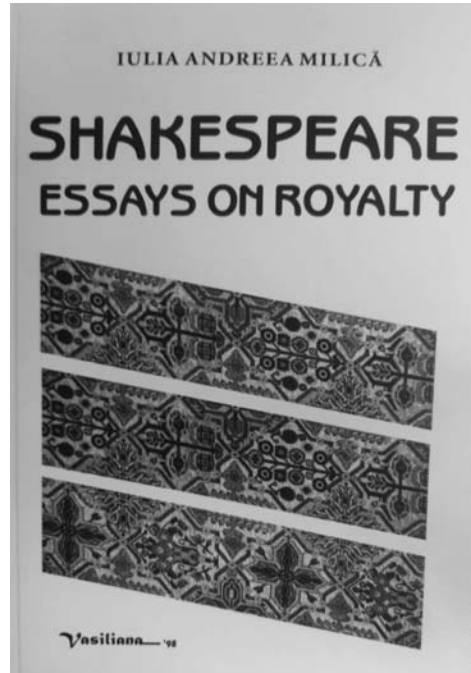
Iulia Andreea Milică (2014). *Shakespeare. Essays on Royalty*. Iași: Vasiliana, 200 p.

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The Romanian scholarship on Shakespeare has been recently enriched with Iulia Andreea Milică's collection on kingship, power and authority in Shakespeare's plays. The Bard has been one of the main preoccupations of the Iași school of English Studies since the 1920's when Ioan Botez, the founder of the English Department at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania, published two studies on Shakespeare: *Hamlet in the Shakespearean Tragedy* and *King Lear and the Dramatic Conception of Shakespearean Drama*. After World War II, the work of Botez was continued by other scholars such as Odette Blumenfeld, Ștefan Avădanei, or Dumitru Dorobăț who contributed to the development of the Romanian *Shakespeareana* by publishing studies on Shakespeare's reception in Europe¹, prefaced translations from Shakespeare's work², and studied the Shakespearian intertext in the work of Mihail Eminescu, the greatest Romanian poet³. Inspired by the work of her predecessors and professors from the University of Iași, Iulia Andreea Milică continues the exploration of Shakespeare's work under the post-1990 political and intellectual circumstances. I am referring, in this respect to freedom of speech, free contacts with international scholars, democracy, free uninhabited discussion of royalty.

The collection *Shakespeare. Essays on Royalty* starts from the minute analysis of the historical context in which Shakespeare wrote plays with and about kings (*King John*, *Richard II*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*). The Hundred Years' War, the War of the Roses led to instability and several political crises. For the Tudor sovereigns, the only way to solve this problem and prevent the destruction of the texture of society was to cultivate and encourage the myth of divine appointment. What differentiates Shakespeare from his less canonized contemporaries was his



interest in the way people made history, and not in the way divinity operates. Milică's essays approach the Shakespearean kings from various perspectives. For instance, the Romanian scholar investigates the blurring boundary between "the king" and "the fool" as well as the Romanian translations of the lexeme "fool" which affect the understanding of the tragedy. Interesting parallels are constructed between Lear's Fool set in correlation with Old Hamlet's court jester. I have particularly appreciated the genderization of the discussion about royalties, power, and authority. The king is the male authority; the fool is the "feminized other, lacking control and authority and connected to the loss of reason" (114). The roles change after Lear's fall. The Fool becomes the voice of reason, common sense, and balance. On the other hand, power and authority get feminine as Goneril and Reagan take the power and Lear foolishly abandons it. This process of gender-

¹ Odette Blumenfeld.

² Odette Blumenfeld and Dumitru Dorobăț.

³ Ștefan Avădanei.

ization is an idea worth developing in a separate essay.

King Lear is also submitted to a stylistic analysis. The increased use of negative words and structures accompanies and reinforces the loss of Lear's kingly authority and his identity reconstruction in the absence of the prerogatives of power. *Hamlet* is read by Milică as a sample of the fight for power, whereas *King John* and *Richard II* talk about the ways in which power can be legitimated. In *King John* the Bard discusses "the conflict between the succession law and the tradition of naming an heir" (32), a problem most topical during the Tudors' reign. Unlike John Bale, for instance, Shakespeare does not turn King John into a predecessor of the champions of Protestantism but depicts him as a politician who knows his interests. Milică notices that Shakespeare's plays do not put forward a theory of kingship. On the contrary, the playwright "was concerned only with specific manifestations of the issue" (23). In *Richard II* Shakespeare deals with the tension between the public and the private image of the king. The two "histories", *King John* and *Richard II*, can also be contrasted in terms of the kingship's evolution. In *King John* the conflict arises from questioning the king's legitimacy to the throne, in *Richard II* the conflict arises from the king's behaviour while his legitimacy as a sovereign is not an issue. But we must emphasize that historical truth is not one of Shakespeare's main concerns. Historical truth is often sacrificed for the dramatic effect. For instance, in *King John* Eleanor of Aquitaine is given a role more prominent than she had in reality, in the negotiations between Philip of France and King John.

Milică's studies rely on some subtle observations which she explores very deftly in the interpretation of the plays. For instance, Hamlet is both son and nephew to Claudius, son and nephew to Gertrude. Claudius is the new type of ruler, a diplomat and a good administrator, he announces a new type of leadership different from the medieval ruler, a warrior who used to fight in the first row, together with his soldiers. Why is Claudius successful in getting power? Because it is a new age, heroism is no longer decisive. Intelligence, which sometimes also means duplicity, is the determining factor.

Milică also offers a careful analysis of the scene when Claudius meets Hamlet upon the latter's return from Wittenberg. Claudius calls Hamlet "cousin" and "son," which points to the fact that power belongs to Claudius now. A thought-provoking application of Bakhtin's notion of the carnival (181-182) leads to interesting considerations about the transition from the "ear culture" to the "eye culture" and the way in which this cultural evolution is represented, in *Hamlet*, through the metaphorical use of "ear" and "eye."

Milică also notices the symmetries that sustain the plot in *Hamlet*: Ophelia's real madness vs. Hamlet's feigned madness, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Cornelius and Voltmand, Hamlet and Laertes, Claudius and Old Hamlet. The instructions given by Claudius to Denmark's ambassadors to Norway are carefully examined. Fortinbras is deprived of his right to the throne by his uncle. Claudius warns the King of Norway about the intentions of his "impetuous" nephew. The close reading of his passage reveals another interesting symmetry: Hamlet and Fortinbras. And last but certainly not least, as already mentioned above, Lear's Fool is set in correlation with Old Hamlet's court jester.

The study of Iulia Andreea Milică is certainly worth a second edition where some minor typos should be eliminated⁴ and the assessment of Old Hamlet's reign should be clearer. At page 151 Milică says that "secrecy, plotting and murder were not part of the values of the old world", which can be understood as a valorisation of Old Hamlet's reign. But on page 181 she mentions that Old Hamlet is in Purgatory because of the crimes he committed in his "days of nature" (*Hamlet* 1.5.12 and 14), which proves a very careful reading of the play but is in contradiction with the statement from page 151.

Beyond these minor points I want to make it very clear that this suggestion and the second-string observation do not diminish the value of this Romanian contribution to the Shakespearian scholarship. Iulia Andreea Milică is a very gifted representative of the post-1989 generation of Shakespearian scholars in Romania. The future of Shakespearian studies in Romanian academia is in good hands.

⁴ One example: "the Pope's legate mediated the negotiations between the Pope and John only in 1211 and 1213" (31).