Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov • Vol. 2 (51) - 2009
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies

THE SHAKESPEARIAN MIRACLE

Carmen ANTONARU[1]

Abstract: *"The Miracle" of Shakespeare is based on the amplitude of the creation, on its philosophical and human meanings whose "uniqueness" is acknowledged by the Anglicist Dragos Protopopescu. In the second part of the article, I presented the way in which Dragos Protopopescu traces the evolution of the perception of Hamlet, in the field of European and American literary history. Finally, the Anglicist suggests a new method of bibliographical research, that looks at both all previous interpretations and their evolution, from a play to another, form an era to another*

Key words: *Shakespeare, miracle, interpretations, Hamlet.*

1. Introduction

Dragos Protopopescu's Shakespearian studies are one of the most important contributions to the development of Romanian Anglicism. Prior to his course, 1945-1946, *The Shakespearian Miracle* is the amplest description of the Shakespearian problematic already published at that time in Romania.

Until *The English Phenomenon*, the Anglicist had published the translation of many Shakespearian plays, many staged at The National Theatre, others broadcasted on the radio. His knowledge of the Elizabethan period was extensive, particularly due to the many years of courses and seminaries he had dedicated to this period. He knew every detail of the history of Renaissance England, having pursued a very thorough bibliographic research.

Dragos Protopopescu started from his study, *Shakespeare among us*, published in the same year, 1936, in Revista Fundaţiilor Regale. Many of the ideas in this article would be found in the pages of the *The English Phenomenon*.

His study, both in its journal and its volume format, is somewhat biased, according to Dan Grigorescu: for example, the controversy on the true author of Shakespeare's plays is rather solved by the means of pamphlet. Dragos Protopopescu reveals the multitude of shapes of the Shakespearian work; he ascertains that for some, Shakespeare continues to be, in a *Voltairian* tradition, "a drunken barbarian", while for others, he is the father of European Romanticism. Some see in his work "the realistic author who stuns us with his clowns and drunkards, with his daily middle class tragedy" or "the verb magician...which compiled diabolical verse dances and casted with all the mornings of the sky the Anglo-Saxon concords ."

The research method is a synthesis in which both the Sidney Lee like biographic style and the text critics style combine, relying on various criteria, those of A.C. Bradley psycho-analysis, the historic philology column of Furness, of Rumelin sociologic approach.

[1] Dept. of Foreign Languages, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

BDD-A20241 © 2009 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:44 UTC)

Dan Grigorescu notes that the demonstration of the discrepancy between biography and creation was inspired to Dragos Protopopescu by an idea of Giovanni Papini, which he had developed in an essay about the Italian prose writer, published in Revista Fundatiilor Regale. (Protopopescu 346-355)

"Shakespeare is an exceptional human being. His life and his work, taken separately or compared, are a continuous surprise" – statement which makes us repeat the well known demonstration of the discrepancy between Shakespeare's biography and work (discrepancy the author of *The English Phenomenon* calls "a miracle"), (Protopopescu 346-355). Within the tradition of the Romanian school of Shakespeare analysis, Dragos Protopopescu is a self proclaimed advocate of the Startfordian theory, which identifies the author in the rather modest actor of The Globe.

The only anti-Stratfordian he respected was Abel Lefranc, whose erudition he is eager to acknowledge, though he cannot bear to comment on his "lack of detail" and scientific objectivity.

Dragos Protopopescu analyses Shakespearian characters in an ample perspective, focusing on three types: children, women and men.

Many other writers have depicted children in their works, but no other child, the critic points out, equates the value of the presence of those in Shakespeare's plays. Such affirmations are then exemplified by means of the translating some representative fragments from *Macbeth, Richard al III-lea* and *Winter's Tale.*

2. The Classification of Female Characters in Shakespeare's Plays

For example, he shapes female characters, according to their sinfulness. Some are incompatible with the sin (as the children were the expression of "the innocence incompatible with life"), and Miranda, Hero, Julieta, Perdita, Imogen, Ofelia, Celia and Jessica belong to this class. Their innocence cannot be tarnished but through aspersion.

The second class belongs to the sinners: Gertrude, Lady Macbeth, Hyppolita and Cleopatra. "The first, by its incompatibility with the sin, remained in a perpetual heavenly purity; the other, through the presence of the sin, become, on the contrary, exceptionally mature." (Protopopescu, 323).

The third category is that of Beatrice, Portia, Rosalinda, Viola: all women "flirting with sin".

3. The Classification of Male Characters in Shakespeare's Plays

Men all aspire to achieve greatness; they all are subdued to it, with no exception. All the male types are individualised by a dominant character trait: Hamlet symbolizes intellectual greatness, Macbeth, ambition, Othello, passion, Richard the third, cruelty, Shylock, revenge, Lear, majesty of suffering, Coriolan, contempt.

The characters are analysed according to the fictional universe sphere. Dragos Protopopescu emphasizes the different psychological values of the human character types created and decodes the significance of the action taken, highlighting generally human value.

"The Miracle" of Shakespeare is based on the amplitude of the creation, on its philosophical and human meanings whose "uniqueness" is acknowledged by Dragos Protopopescu. While Racine, Dante, Goethe, Dostoievschi are perfectly explicable", Shakespeare is not; but "the unexplained Shakespearian paradox is a part of the inexplicable and paradox of the English man."(Protopopescu, 323)

BDD-A20241 © 2009 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:44 UTC)

4. Post-Scriptum Hamlet

The Shakespearian miracle was followed by another study, *Post-Scriptum Hamlet* which Dragos Protopopescu uses to adequately illustrate the "miracle" of Shakespearian creation.

The essay was initially published in January, 1926, entitled *Hamlet or Between Literary and Aesthetic History,* in two consecutive issues of the weekly Literary Universe magazine and was later integrated in the volume with minor stylistic changes.

Dragos Protopopescu returns to Hamlet, completely reviews the opinions he had expressed in 1926 and 1936. In October 1941, the National Theatre in Bucharest restarted using his translation of the play, under the directions of Soare Z. Soare. In the evening of the premiere, following a tradition set by Liviu Rebreanu, he presented the topic of the play to the audience.

He first dealt with the tragedy: the masterpiece of "Shakespearian superlatives" for 340 years: "it is the longest, most popular, more profound and fascinating of the creations of the English genius (...) everything that intelligence was able to formulate has been said about it". He refers to two opposing characterizations of it: Herman Grimm's calling it "a supplement of divine creation", while for Voltaire it is "a vulgar and barbaric creation, written by a drunkard" invited the audience to re-read Shakespeare. Or to see his play the way they must have been seen on the stage of the Globe Theatre in July 1602. (Protopopescu 1-2)

Dragos Protopopescu recreates the unfolding of the play by means of an epic episode he would later introduce in his course on in the spring of 1946. The first sentence uttered by the actor reveals Shakespeare' technique: "just by a word, Shakespeare introduces us in the atmosphere of the beginning of one of his best plays, beginning haunted by a ghost". It can be said that the play writer depicts a "human comedy" (in the Balzacian meaning of the phrase): the comedy of the human soul, its fascinating, mysterious and above all tragic encrypted nature". (Protopopescu 324).

In Hamlet there are more characters living than the history of literature has perceived. Hamlet is neither a "madman or the pretence of one; not a coward, or a man of action; not a noble man nor trivial; neither a thinker, nor a court man, neither an impeccable knight, nor a simple person, as we see him in his second stage, the stage of his recovery, when the sea voyage seems to have made him a different person" (Protopopescu 332).

All of these are inside Hamlet. It is the book of human soul depicted in its infinite and contradictory variety; watched as it gazes at itself in the tragic mirror of death – that mirror that seems to reveal more of us, since Shakespeare so often has his hero look into it. This is how the play writer created "the complex of man himself".

Dragos Protopopescu ends his speech by commenting on Horatiu's line: "When it dies – a great soul shatters to pieces. Everything else is silence. Covering a crime, covering rebellion? No, its silence covers the mystery within us, the mystery of man in which one has descended to shed light for a short while as the unhappy Danish prince" (Protopopescu 334).

The analyst is convinced that Hamlet is where the most enduring modern elements gather, and tragedy itself yields a multitude of meanings, that open the text to the most diverse interpretations.

From Goethe to Sigmund Freud, two centuries of critics struggled to understand the "inner enigma" of young Hamlet, whose tragic destiny is to clash with a shallow world.

BDD-A20241 © 2009 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:44 UTC)

It is a researched essay rejecting any pathological explanations of Hamlet's case, declaring him the most modern of Shakespeare's characters. "All over the world, and especially in England, Germany and in our country, this masterpiece is closest to the modern soul".

The Romanian researcher notices that generally speaking, Romanian actors and critics saw in Hamlet the symbol of thoughts restlessness and not a troubled mind. Hamlet is a whole person "not lacking memory or will, healthy and normal", an authentic Prometheus.

Dragoş Protopopescu traces the evolution of the perception of Hamlet, in the field of European and American literary history, beginning by English and German critics' opinions in the 17th century, referring to E.A.Poe and finishing with the detailed analysis of two most important studies of the modern era: *The Problem of Hamlet*, 1919, J.M. Robertson, and *Shakespeare Tragedy*, 1924, by A.C. Bradley.

The first one, revolutionary and researched at the same time, allows Dragos Protopopescu to grasp the "modern phase of Hamlet's problem" and formulate several conclusions that appear relevant upon reading it: Robertson has a "modern" textual critical approach focusing on sources and variants.

Dragos Protopopescu analysed the sources and models used by Shakespeare. In the 'quarto' version, 1603, as well as in the Danish tradition, Hamlet was an 'amloda' (Danish noun and adjective meaning 'lunatic'). Shakespeare intended to give that barbaric play a shade of nobility. He thoroughly explored the theme of madness, turning a tragedy of revenge into a tragedy of the soul: "there were times in the history of this tragedy when the audience would laugh at Hamlet's madness, when this character seemed funny. Even today, honest people may admit that they feel like smiling at such moments as these in the play".

If Shakespeare was wrong, concludes I.M.Robertson, "he was wrong in a genial way, achieving more than any other human being". Dragos Protopopescu subscribes: "we have the same opinion. Hamlet is in a genial manner, but (...) it lacks art".

The Romanian researcher traces the evolution of an idea: Hamlet is Shakespeare himself and his lack of consistency is actually that of his creator.

This is why Dragoş Protopopescu suggests a new method of bibliographical research, that looks at both all previous interpretations and their evolution, from a play to another, form an era to another. Commenting on the Shakespeare's destiny, he highlights the extra bibliographical factors (the local landscape).

References

1. Dragomirescu, Mihail. "Hamlet şi eruditii noştri". *Viitorul*, XIX, no. 5378, 1926.
2. Grigorescu, Dan. "Introducere" la *Fenomenul englez*. Bucureşti: Editura Grai şi Suflet – Cultura Națională, 1996.
3. Protopopescu, Dragoş. *Fenomenul englez.* Bucureşti: Fundația pentru literatură şi artă "Regele Carol II", 1936.
4. Protopopescu, Dragoş. "Hamlet şi critica ventrilocă"*, Universul literar,* XLII, no. 9, 1926.
5. Protopopescu, Dragoş. *Shakespeare printre noi.* Bucureşti: Fundațiile Regale, II, no, 8, 1936.
6. Protopopescu, Dragoş. "Probleme şi enigme în Hamlet." I, *Acțiunea,* II, no. 349, 352, 1941.

BDD-A20241 © 2009 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 21:59:44 UTC)