SHAKESPEARE'S TERCENTENARY IN THE OLD KINGDOM OF ROMANIA: EN ROUTE TO SECULARIZATION AND MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT
It has long been suggested that Shakespeare acted as a secularizing force in Anglo-American culture. From an Arnoldian tradition that saw literary study as a substitute for religious practice; to Harold Bloom's notion of Shakespeare's universalism as the "secular Scripture" (3); and to Stephen Greenblatt's new historicist argument that the Shakespearean stage helped empty religious content from early modern culture, scholars have talked of Shakespeare and secular agency. In each of these accounts, however, the secular is more or less synonymous with the material, the immanent, the abandonment of God and religion. Recent accounts of secularization, however, link the term and the concept to a certain religious evolution. To speak of the secular, then, is not to move away from religion—and, specifically, Christianity—but to move towards it, perhaps in a fashion that embeds Christian perspectives and values into critical practices. This paper examines two critical essays about Shakespeare by Dumitru Caracostea—written on the occasion of Shakespeare's tercentenary celebration (1916), during World War I, and two years before the unification of the province of Transylvania with the Old Kingdom of Romania. The Romanian critic's stance towards the encounter with Shakespeare advocates the text's potential to act as a secularizing mediator on the reader's and audience's consciousness. The rather romantic position regarding the reception of Shakespeare in the pre-unification period in the Kingdom of Romania reflects an insightful secularization of ethos on the way to modernity, brought about by critical response to individual Shakespearean plays.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, cultural mediation, early twentieth-century culture, religion, Romanian Shakespeare criticism, secularization, national identity

In Montaigne's address to the reader at the start of his *Essays*, dated 1 March 1580, the French philosopher states that he intends to expose his inner self in a most "genuine" fashion and—had he lived among those nations that are said to dwell under the "sweet libertie" of Nature's laws—he would have willingly portrayed himself fully naked (Montaigne, sig. A6^{v}). The essays are constituted as a dialogue of the self with itself, just as our modern personal approach to religion is often an individual dialogue with one part of ourselves. In the essay "Of Friendship," Montaigne states that, in society, the points of intersection among people matter mostly; therefore, it is irrelevant of what religion his physician or his lawyer is because this consideration has nothing to do with the office of the friendship they have in relation to him. There follows a statement of individuality and self-searching: "I never meddle with saying what a man should do in the world; there are over many others that do-it; but what my selfe do in the world" (Montaigne 95).

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This declaration represents the early modern focus on individuality and creativity as becoming essentially separated from the religious and marks the radical shift in thinking on the way to modernity. Montaigne expresses the conditions of belief, experience, and search that would lead us on to our modern secular times.

Theologians and anthropologists (Eck, 2003; Amstrong, 1993) have questioned the received wisdom that there is in modernity a decisive, universal movement towards secularization as a historical event with a definite end. A non-teleological concept of modernity is advanced, according to which the secular and the religious exist in an intimately antinomian, mutually defining opposition in many aspects of cultural life, including literature. One variant of Charles Taylor's three modes of modern secularity is that it represents one option among others and it is "a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual, or religious experience and search takes place" (3). Considering T. S. Eliot's New Critical methodology as an example, even as he complained about secularism—expressing his frustration with the secularism of the modernist movement—Eliot continued to advocate a form of it as a mode of reading, understanding, and ordering literature (97–106). This is also the case of Romanian critic Dumitru Caracostea, who wrote at about the same time as T. S. Eliot. This particular critical reading illuminating Shakespeare's reception in Romanian culture shows that religious and cultural forms run through an all-inclusive continuum, even when this aspect is not clearly manifest. My reading of one instance of Shakespeare's critical reception in early twentieth-century Romania argues for a wide-ranging view of Shakespeare as a secularizing agent in this comprehensive sense, whose work was appropriated at a particular stage in the development of the emerging national culture in the Old Kingdom of Romania, for reasons that involve the search for identity and spirituality.

Considering the in-depth project of self-searching and aspiration to achieve spiritual value, Christianity itself can be regarded as a secularizing agent[1] through its imposition of common standards and opposition to local superstitions and beliefs. Moreover, in modern Western societies, this role can be actively fulfilled by psychology or literature (and especially drama), because there has always been a confluence of—and correlation with—religious[2] and social, political, or literary

[1] Cobb holds a similar idea in considering the relation of ethics and subjectivity; he observes that Christianity must be understood, at least in part, as a secularizing force, as did other religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrism, and Confucianism. In order to avoid the paradoxical formulation according to which the great religions of humanity are essentially non-religious, Cobb suggests a more neutral term other than religion to denominate these great movements, namely "Way" (Cobb 303).

[2] As concerns what critics have interpreted as Shakespeare's religion, Callaghan expresses concern that recent studies of Shakespeare and religion focus on his affiliation with Catholicism or Protestantism and, as such, reflect a move away from the traditional critical paradigm, avoiding issues such as race, feminism, and sexual identity (1–4); Bell sketches the Catholic background in Shakespeare's childhood years and considers his use of religious themes ranging across the canon (25–34); while Bishop surveys recent research on

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forms of expression. In considering the relation between religion and early modern theatre, particularly the dynamic process by which early modern religious thinking is changed when it confronts the sphere of the theatre, Anthony Dawson makes the case for the theatre as an agent of secularization, but he observes that this association is "typically indirect and diffuse" (84), emphasizing the physicality of the theatre. It is difficult to explain the way in which each member of the audience—at any point in time—articulates and reconstructs the intimate relationship created when perceiving any religious allusion in the theatre. A single person's mind is mystery enough; what can we say about the early modern "mind," or what the Romanians, in general, might make of Shakespeare? I intend to elucidate here how one critic interpreted what he thought to be the potential effect of Shakespeare's reception on the minds of the Romanian youth and what effect these assumptions have on the modern educated reader of such statements. This reading of a critical reading might look rather speculative but, at the same time, it might illumine one aspect of Shakespeare's role in the process of modernization of Romanian society in the early twentieth century.

Starting with the mid-nineteenth century, Romania was moving from a pre-modern society based on Christian faith and adherence to authoritarian religious principles to the modern Western state, which was free of these notions. Paradoxically, however, the perception that Christianity was essential for shaping national identity had been prevalent in the three Romanian Principalities (Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania) ever since the early sixteenth century—a period in which the three principalities had to face the Ottoman / Islam onslaught and were in and out of Turkish occupation. After the 1877 independence from the Ottomans, however, the shaping of the modern state pushed these ideas to the background and religion—or its absence—became largely a private matter. On the way to fashioning the Romanian modern state—based on two historic points (the 1859 unification of Moldavia and Wallachia and the 1918 addition of Transylvania)—the adoption of Western cultural models was seen as a modernizing factor of progress and, implicitly, a full engagement with a secular approach to cultural issues. Translating from Shakespeare and other Western European writers was considered an action of confirming the tendency towards progress and the advancement into the contemporary world, in a clear attempt to legitimize all domestic cultural achievements through the contact with—and influence of—western European models. It is not by chance, therefore, that the first translations of Shakespeare into Romanian were published in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, a truly structured approach to translating, producing, and commenting on Shakespeare emerged in the first half of the twentieth century.

Shakespeare and religion, including its presence in the plays and Shakespeare's own religious beliefs (11–33). From the perspective of this study, however, I find Hadfield's view more helpful; Hadfield suggests that it would appear that Shakespeare was more interested in political than religious issues, and finds that Shakespeare's religious beliefs remain frustratingly elusive (161–80). Similarly, Velz argues for Shakespeare's eclecticism in religious doctrine and religious practice (87–88).

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For centuries, most people in the three Romanian principalities had learned to live with dissimulation and lies—political (marked by Ottoman tribute, political division, and national dissension); religious (the assault of Islam on traditional Orthodox Christianity); and linguistic (the early imposition of Cyrillic script on a romance language)[3]—but in the mid-nineteenth century people could open their eyes and see. The access to the works of universal literature and the adoption of Western models helped the literate public to see more clearly into the nature of their own selves and react as if their souls were worth saving. While the illiterate classes were still steeped in a deeply-felt matrix of Orthodox Christianity—with most of the rural population attending church and observing religious rituals and festivals—a new category of nineteenth-century thinkers, mainly educated abroad (and a number of them in England), set up to fashion the new culture based on Western intellectual models. These models drew mainly on French and German literature, yet certain scholars focused on Shakespeare as a mediating cultural agent that had the potential to produce a dramatic alteration of the world view. While the Bible connects us to the universal metaphors, Shakespeare offers a direct and pragmatic association with reality. The plays are all about the texture of modern life: new impressions, live characters and atmosphere—and Romanian intellectuals adopted the enticing prospect of approaching Shakespeare in a variety of ways, which would make the playwright accessible to the Romanian public.

The early twentieth century brought a fresh view of the importance attributed to Shakespeare in helping the fashioning of modern identity by addressing the issues of the relationship between self and others and the place of religion and literature in social life. My focus point is 1916, the year when the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death was celebrated. This event was marked by a series of lectures and publications in Romanian literary journals dedicated to the poet who had already become the object of Bardolatry and recurrent literary worship throughout the world. One particular critic in this period, Dumitru Caracostea,[4] published two essays on

[3] The Romanian Cyrillic alphabet was used to write Romanian language before 1860–62, when it was officially replaced by a Latin-based alphabet.

[4] Dumitru Caracostea was a critic and literary historian, folklore specialist, and member of the Romanian Academy. He studied at University of Bucharest, in a Francophile environment, and then in Vienna, with the language professor W. Meyer-Lübke. In Vienna, Caracostea became acquainted with German language and literature. In 1930, he became professor of history of Romanian literature at University of Bucharest and member of the Romanian Academy. In 1948, at the start of communism in Romania, the regime banned him from teaching at university and imprisoned him on political allegations. While in prison at Sighet, he converted to Roman Catholicism. Caracostea wrote critical studies on Romanian folklore: *Mioriţa în Moldova, Muntenia şi Oltenia* (The Ballad *Mioriţa* in Moldova, Muntenia, and Oltenia, 1924); and studies on Eminescu's work: *Arta cuvântului la Eminescu* (Eminescu's Art of Language, 1938); *Creativitate eminesciană* (Eminescu's Creativity, 1943); *Expresivitatea limbii române* (Expressive Potential of the Romanian Language)—an important stylistic study. Caracostea wrote for the journals *Convorbiri literare*, *Adevărul literar*, *Flacăra*, *Langue et littérature*, *Revista Fundaţiilor Regale*.

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Shakespeare in *The New Romanian Review*[5] on the occasion of the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death. Although he was not a Shakespeare scholar—such a breed had not yet emerged in Romanian culture— Caracostea's criticism was produced mainly in the inter-war period and the critic militated for the advancement of Romanian literature in European context, focusing on language studies, genetic criticism, ethnology, and cultural studies. As an additional point of interest, Caracostea suffered persecution in the early days of hard communism in Romania in the early 1950s. The matter of the critic's religious belief is not relevant for this argument, yet it might be an interesting addition to say that he converted from Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism during his years in the communist prisons, and his political and religious beliefs were the cause of this imprisonment.

The two essays on Shakespeare considered here date from the Romanian author's early period of criticism, when Caracostea seemed to be convinced that his words, thoughts, and ideas had the power to recreate, or at least redesign, the Romanian cultural landscape. In one of the essays published on the occasion of the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death (1916),[6] entitled "Shakespeare's Tercentenary," Caracostea addresses the director of the literary journal, C. Rădulescu-Motru, in a plea to help the reformation of Romanian culture and the young people's artistic taste. Published at mid-war time, Caracostea notices that all nations—whether in enmity and at war—have joined in their commemoration of Shakespeare ("Tricentenarul" 70). He gives the example of the Deutsche Theater in Berlin, which produced a Shakespeare play in 1916, under war conditions. Based on this fact, the critic remarks on the unifying power of the theatre by interpreting Shakespeare: "there is something that *can* unite us and raise us above blind rage, at a time when everything around us is dividing us and setting us one against the other, when it seems that the very foundations of culture are about to collapse" ("Tricentenarul" 70). The idea that Shakespeare's theatre has the potential of generating universal empathy and understanding in times of trouble (in an effect similar to a kind of laic ecumenism) might serve as a starting point for a new focus on developing Romanian culture through the promotion of Shakespeare's plays, among other great works of Western European literature.

Caracostea's plea to further the nation's cultural responsiveness through Shakespeare can be inscribed in a broad secularizing project, in accord with the aims of liberal nation-state planners, in a period when immediate action was necessary, during a war which ended—for Romania—with the completion of the national state through the unification with Transylvania in 1918. Political and cultural minds in the country converged in their efforts to improve people's sensitivity through

[5] *Noua revistă română pentru politică, literatură, ştiinţă şi artă* was printed in Bucharest in the period 1901–1916, edited by Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, who was a Romanian philosopher, sociologist and playwright with strong pro-democratic discourse.

[6] All subsequent quotations of Caracostea's essays are from this journal and the English translations are mine. For a comprehensive overview of Romanian critical texts about Shakespeare, see the bilingual compilation *Shakespeare in Romania: Texts 1836–1916* (Matei-Chesnoiu 2009).

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Shakespeare. In the same year 1916, the politician, poet, and playwright Octavian Goga published a sonnet entitled "Shakespeare," at the request of the University of London, in which he eulogizes "the world of Shakespeare's mighty mind" in the context of imperial Britain (Goga 1, my translation). Petre Grimm, university professor of English literature at University of Cluj, in Transylvania, observes—in a 1916 essay published in the same issue of *Noua revistă română*—that Shakespeare's work mirrors nature, but in such a way as to illumine all parts of the soul—"a multi-faceted mirror that shows several sides at once and reflects all the colours of the rainbow" (Grimm 91, my translation). In the same year and in the same celebratory publication, the poet Ştefan Neniţescu discusses the Last Plays, observing the "serenity" they emanate (95, my translation). The critic considers the scene from *Cymbeline*, in which Belarius teaches Arviragus about the relativity of perception, when one is placed in a high position and, thus, has an opportunity for reflection of life at court: "When you above perceive me like a crow, / That is a place which lessens and sets off" (3.3.12–13).[7] In his comment focused on Shakespeare's spirituality, Neniţescu observes that "Shakespeare knows now that the world seems small, only to urge us to look to heaven" (95, my translation). Finally, in a 1916 essay on Shakespeare and Cervantes, published in *Drum drept*, Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga integrates the works of the two Renaissance writers in a larger vision of European history and politics. Iorga observes that Shakespeare blended the sixteenth-century spirit of adventure with cool practical sceptical[8] thought, and his development as a writer was concurrent with the emergence of the English nation (265). In Shakespeare's commemorative year 1916, leading historians, poets, and literary critics highlighted the role of the Romanian reception of Shakespeare in shaping an emerging national identity.

In attempting to define the term "modern" in literature, the critic Dumitru Caracostea rejects the restricted meaning referring to the efforts of the latest generation, or even of a certain school, which often carries the vain connotation of fashionable. He considers that such a restricted reference has led to the unproductive exaggerations of historicism, which claims that a solid culture is expected to draw only on ancient native elements. Describing Shakespeare's plays as an appropriate embodiment of local tradition and rebirth of classical ideas, stimulated by the critical spirit of the Reformation and the romance literatures of the time, Caracostea observes that the playwright was able to render the "true icon of the troubles of the human soul" ("Tricentenarul" 70) because he was writing for an audience that loved both poetry and real life. Unencumbered by artificial classical constraints, Shakespeare's supreme rule was to develop his characters' spiritual truth. After

[7] Quotations to Shakespeare's text are keyed to *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (The Oxford Shakespeare), ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (1992).

[8] As concerns Shakespeare's skepticism and its critical interpretations, Cox argues that Shakespeare explores the complex and complementary relationship between Christian suspicion and faith, rather than scepticism and knowledge (39–66); while Battenhouse responds to current criticism which, in his view, calls for delegitimizing of religion and substituting for piety a rhetoric of scepticism (7–22).

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contrasting Shakespeare's plays and Greek drama—particularly Aeschylus's *Orestes* and *Hamlet*—Caracostea concludes that Shakespeare shows not only what the characters are at the moment of climax but how they have developed. As distinguished from Greek tragedy, fate is not manifested as an unseen power hovering over the tragic heroes' process of maturity, but as part of their nature, as they develop in certain circumstances. Thus, Shakespeare's plays display an "essential feature of the modern mind" ("Tricentenarul" 70), namely that of looking at the self as undergoing certain development. In the same way, the systematic self-interrogation provoked by the encounter with Shakespeare is, I believe, similar to the reflectivity mood created by the double-mirroring interaction existing in Christian Orthodox and Catholic practice of confession. An analogous dialogical process is unfolded and the introspective individuals are faced with the bare bones of their own selves.

In a rather long digression deploring the spiritually empty world of his day's youth—who are lured by the ideal of easy living and consumption imposed by a frivolous and aimless society—Caracostea emphasizes the need for the "civilizing power" of poetry ("Tricentenarul" 70).[9] In the "dust" raised by blatant luxury cars and the "noise" of cheap applause, Romanian youth are not able to search into themselves and see the higher needs in this world. In the absence of a higher moral life supported by faith, Caracostea proposes the "soul-changing power" of poetry and the "true" literary life derived from worthy examples of western literature, which is seen as "God's magnificent forest, containing vivid life sources" ("Tricentenarul" 70). Since science and philosophy cannot provide a suitable mode of self-scrutiny for the masses (the former addresses but a few specialists and, in the case of the latter, there are but few people who can raise their minds to the higher consciousness of the times), Caracostea argues, it is left to "poetry," and art in general, to provide the method for reaching a higher quality of life. However, even understanding the value of literature and art is limited to a number of people who are prepared to receive it. On the other hand, connecting to Shakespeare—"worshiping heroes such as Shakespeare" ("Tricentenarul" 70)[10]—represents the immediate action one must take in order to fashion people's consciousness in a direct and physical manner; this can be achieved by creating a robust impact on the devitalized world that produces only "noise of wagons and myopic businesses" ("Tricentenarul" 71). Caracostea's appeal is to find "ten free and resolute people" (the biblical allusion is submerged) that can undertake this task ("Tricentenarul" 71)—a number of Shakespeare scholars whom Romanian culture, sadly, lacked at that time.

This is as much as can be said about Caracostea's defence of integrating Shakespeare into Romanian culture as a form of actively acting upon individual

[9] This term refers, in general, to all literary achievements of value.

[10] The echoes of Carlyle's essay "The Hero as Poet: Dante, Shakespeare" (1888), existing in Caracostea's work, are easy to explain; in the same 1916 jubilee issue of the Romanian journal *Noua revistă română* 5 (1916) we find a review of Carlyle's essay by Romanian critic Constantin Antoniade, entitled "Carlyle about Shakespeare" (90–91).

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consciousness. This essay was published at a time when the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death (1916) was celebrated during the Great War, when death was everywhere. In the middle of this destruction in Europe, Caracostea idealistically finds spiritual unification in the name of Shakespeare. His rather romantic view of understanding and regulating literary life, however, would clash with the pragmatism of hard-fact reality, just as Brutus's and Don Quijote's, or Hamlet's did, but in a different manner. These literary heroes are the subject of Caracostea's next essay, published in the same 1916 issue of *The New Romanian Review*, entitled "Three Idealists: Hamlet, Brutus, and Don Quijote." Shakespeare and Cervantes are considered the initiators of "modern" poetry. The critic ascribes a profound and broader sense to the notion of "modern:" to approach the potential of achieving a depth of meaning that is expected to enrich and strengthen Romanian literature. These authors are seen as "close to our heart; they have modern-day powers" ("Trei idealişti" 92). In the case of Shakespeare, Hamlet is revealed as the emblematic hero responding to a "deeply felt spiritual reality," which acts upon our understanding, not in a contemplative manner, but in accordance with life and its struggles. Caracostea observes a certain "evolution" within the framework of the Shakespearean canon, from the conqueror Henry V—"the noble and harmoniously developed character" ("Trei idealişti" 92)—to the problematic figures depicted in the tragedies (*Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*). In Brutus, the critic sees the tragic disparity between the idealistic person, who considers life from great moral heights, and the practical demands of the surrounding world; the character is compared to Don Quijote and Ibsen's Brand or Julian the Apostate ("Trei idealişti" 93).

In the character of Hamlet, Caracostea sees "the embodiment of inner turmoil generated by the philosophy of the uselessness of being and struggling" ("Trei idealişti" 93). As different from the source story, Shakespeare's tragedy dramatizes the essential transformation of Hamlet from a power and revenge-seeking young man to a tragic figure in whom "thought and scruple paralyze revenge, analysis, and doubt" ("Trei idealişti" 93). In this way, as Caracostea observes, "Hamlet becomes a martyr of his own mind" ("Three Idealists" 93). Hamlet's character is different from the idealists Brutus and Don Quijote. Whereas the self-deceiving stoic hero and the *caballero de la triste figura* could not see through the veil of their own illusions, Hamlet can see clearly owing to the "overwhelming power of intellect" ("Trei idealişti" 93). Of all the soliloquies spoken by Hamlet, Caracostea focuses on the central question in which the hero ponders on the mystery of his being and his place in the world: "What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth?" (3.1.129–31). Caracostea interprets this essential question as unveiling the "modern" trait of the fictional character, to which we often feel so close, displaying the "conflict of the modern soul" ("Trei idealişti" 94). In today's world, as Caracostea observes, "we have lost our old faiths and are seeking for a formula that would reconcile us with the earth we come from" ("Trei idealişti" 94). Looked at from the heights of this Shakespearean hero's search for identity, understanding Shakespeare is "not only a form of aesthetic illumination, but also a means of soul-

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clearing" and Romanian literary consciousness needs to breathe the "crisp air of the summits" ("Trei idealişti" 94) provided by the searching insight through Shakespeare.

This spiritualized view regarding the potential impact of Shakespeare's theatre on Romanian audiences and readers corresponds, in part, to Wilson Knight's tentative alignment of Shakespeare with Christianity. According to Knight, Shakespeare's "earthy, humanly warm, approach to spiritualistic truths" (11) can be interpreted as a point of intersection between religious ethics and drama. However, Knight sees the presence of "religion" (referring to a world that is different from our ordinary psychology and everyday affairs) as a "comprehensive" matter, addressing general human concerns (227). On the other hand, Peter Milward disagrees with Knight, contending that Christian religion in Shakespeare's moral vision is found not in the possession of psychic power or the attainment of eternal insight, but in the simple repentance for sin and consequent practice of charity (75). These contending views, implying a moral vision induced by the essentially Christian background (whether Anglican, Catholic, or Protestant)[11] informing Elizabethan and Jacobean England, are counteracted by the more widespread perspective of a stage emptied of specific and explicit religious content[12] and Shakespeare's ambivalent dramatization of religious issues. Returning to the Romanian critic's general comment that all great literature—including Shakespeare—is saturated with and emanates a spiritual energy that invites to introspection ("Trei idealişti" 94), this view ante-paraphrases Knight's observations—a quite explicable approach considering the period when the Romanian critical text was written. At that time, in 1916, the Old Kingdom of Romania was on the road to modernization and Europeanization, while internally the country aspired to unification with the province of Transylvania, still in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Nor was the Romanian critic singular in the European context of national voices invoking and relying upon the reception of Shakespeare as a cultural mediator that induced a specific form of spiritual and national revival. A similar effect of contextualizing Shakespeare and Cervantes in 1916 in Spain, on the

[11] As for the contending critical views concerning Shakespeare's religion, Alves argues that Shakespeare's plays are essentially Catholic (43–64); Chandler assesses the validity of critical claims throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, referring to the importance of Shakespeare's religion as possibly Catholic (29–41); on the other hand, Marotti suggests that the categories of Protestant and Catholic are too rough when it comes to discussing Shakespeare's religious affiliations and observes that Shakespeare was alert to the ambiguities of his world and accepted Protestantism while accepting ties with traditional Catholicism (218–41). Diehl provides a critical commentary concerning Reformation echoes in Shakespeare's tragedies (86–102).

[12] In his chapter entitled "The absence of Religion in Shakespeare," Santayana argues that the references to religious beliefs and ideas in Shakespeare's works are largely conventional, drawn from the society around him. There are scarcely any expressions of genuine spiritual passion and, where they do appear, they are not accompanied by any religious images, as one might expect in an ostensibly Christian milieu (147–65).

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occasion of the tercentenary of the two writers' deaths, as documented by Clara Calvo,[13] links the biographical representation of Shakespeare's marriage, religion, his will, and death to the ideological divide existing in the country at the time (58–76). In an accolade of intercultural transmission and innovation through Shakespeare in Germany, Wolfgang Weiss emphasizes the shift in German culture from the eighteenth-century Romantic perception to a nineteenth-century moralist understanding, which focused on the religious aspects of Shakespeare's life and work, and which led to the extreme assertion of claiming Shakespeare as a "classic German poet" (87). As regards production history, Boika Sokolova illustrates the manner in which *Hamlet* was appropriated in early twentieth-century Russia to reflect changes in Russian aesthetic and religious ideology (140–51).[14] All these disparate examples seem to be loosely related—apart from their main concern—but they configure a European perspective that speaks through Shakespeare in different voices and at different levels of interpretation. In early twentieth-century Europe, national and cultural coordinates were redesigned under the auspices of Shakespeare's version of imagined cultural communities, which figured highly in times of the formation of national identity in many countries of Europe.

Romanian critic Dumitru Caracostea is not inscribed in the array of writers who have publicly affirmed a secularist perspective, seen in the sense of destroying religious belief and replacing it with other values. However, he is an expressly earnest critic, who identifies the reception of good literature—and of Shakespeare—with the effects that religious tradition would have upon the self-searching soul devoid of spirituality. Does Shakespeare really work that way upon audiences and readers? Through close, careful reading and a respect for historical context, there is as much potential to find a complex truth in relating to Shakespeare as there is in the convoluted and often conflicting ways of religious introspection, albeit devoid of the ideological trappings often connected with denomination concerns. The literary secularism emerging from the reception of Shakespeare's works that Caracostea advocates is a phenomenon crossing national as well as religious boundaries, but it is not as stable as a political or critical platform. If anything, the secularism achieved through the reception of Shakespeare in modern Romanian literature is a nuanced, complex phenomenon that is part of a continuum. The critic proposing this idea is deeply haunted by the fabric of religious upbringing he has never disowned. It is more accurate to say that the Romanian critic's position occupies the in-between space of Matthew Arnold's "religion of culture" (81)—neither openly religious nor openly atheist. Caracostea advocates a more nuanced

[13] Calvo examines the surge of biographies of Shakespeare published in Spain in 1916—in the context of the cancellation of the planned celebrations of the tercentenary of the deaths of Miguel de Cervantes and Shakespeare due to Spain's neutrality during World War I—and attributes the differing treatment of various topics, such as Shakespeare's marriage, religion, or his death, to conflicting ideologies in the Spain of that time (58–76).

[14] Boika Sokolova examines various productions of *Hamlet* by Edward Gordon Craig and K. S. Stanislavsky (1911), V. Smyshlyaev, V. Tatarinov, and A. Cheban (1924), and N. P. Akimov (1932).

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relationship with the Shakespeare text, which is expected to shape consciousness in a different—less corrosive—manner than religion does. Caracostea's view of the impact of Shakespeare on the self-searching capabilities is rather romantic and reflects a profound secularization of ethos through literature, even while retaining a specific prophetic sensibility deeply connected with Christianity.

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