

DISSERTATION STATEMENTS

Postmodern Paradigm Shift in the Theatrical Handling of *Hamlet*

A Comparative Analysis of Hungarian Hamlet-Playscripts from the 1980s Onward

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In Hungary there were altogether twenty-seven *Hamlet*-productions between 1981 and 2007, and twenty-one are available for research. A playscript can be defined as the modified version of the dramatic text in order to suit the purposes of a certain theatrical performance. So while it retains its literary qualities, it also carries the director's own creative (or not so creative) ideas. This means that my study is partly literature- and partly theatre-related, so my research is twofold: it has a theoretical side, the analysis of the so-called "postmodern paradigm shift" regarding the textual handling of a canonical work, and a pragmatic side: the enumeration and analysis of the different dramaturgical devices and their impact on the interpretation.

My central thesis is that social, cultural, literary as well as theatrical trends have all shaped the text of *Hamlet* in the last three decades, and in this context the study of playscripts contributes to our understanding of the postmodern textual turn in many ways.

First of all, the shift in editorial practice from the modernist belief in the objective reconstructability of the literary text to the more self-critical and pluralistic editorial attitude, the growing number of the different Hungarian translations – István Eörsi's (1983/1988), Dezső Mészöly's (1996) and Ádám Nádasdy's (1999) –, and their ever-changing theatrical application can provide us with an insight into our changing attitude to a classic literary text and the textuality of this text in general. The total reverence for János Arany's classic translation has gone, and it seems that the playtext has become an ingredient for creative work.

Secondly, in a broader perspective, the analysis of the playscripts of *Hamlet*, a canonical masterpiece, also raises the question of canonicity; of what it implies, and whether textual sanctity and constancy constitute the definition of a canonical work of art, or not.

Finally, the analysis of the textual aspect of a theatrical production can reveal the director's ideas of the play, and this way it adds to the interpretation. In most cases it says "Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" on the playbill, but if we look at the wide variety of playscripts, the elusive nature of the Shakespearean text becomes obvious raising the problem of adaptation.

Playscripts have a special place in the textology of *Hamlet* because they are situated halfway between the printed and the acted versions of the play. Depending on whether it is the director's first version, or it shows a textual condition in the middle of the rehearsal period (it is very rare to obtain a playscript showing the final textual state as it was acted on stage); or whether it is the director's, the dramaturge's, the prompter's, the technician's, or the stage manager's copy, they all show different states and conditions of the same playtext, and the researcher has to accept this manifold nature. But, on the other hand, this is exactly what makes working with them exciting. They are typically "postmodern" texts: transitory and multi-authored – paradoxically, in quite a similar way to Shakespeare's plays. Not a closed system like the traditional notion of a literary work, but an open one. Open to interpretation, open to change.