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KING LEAR IN THE NEW HUNGARIAN POLITICAL CONTEXT (1989-1995)

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I. Premises and Problems

1. Art Versus Politics

My title may suggest two different realms: art and politics. Before developing my main argument perhaps it is not useless to clarify my position about the relationship of these two realms. I grew up in that part of the world which was determined by a certain kind of politics: a politics not voluntarily chosen by the people but imposed upon them by a totalitarian world power. It was this paternal, patriarchal and monolithic power that dictated what was 'correct' and 'proper': arts, as almost everything else, were controlled by Marxist ideology. Literature and the other arts were seen as 'effects' of the 'cause', i.e. 'real life', or, 'mirrors of the political, historical and economic circumstances'. The 'real thing' was the base and art was the superstructure. One could quote great many examples discussing *Lear* as the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Naturally, neither systems were to be approved, but the humanistic and realistic voices of the minor characters pointed towards socialism. It was only the theater that could preserve a very relative autonomy during the 'hard-line' (i.e. Stalinist) period, and now theater-history records productions of, for example, *Richard III* which were meant to subvert or sabotage the political conduct of the Hungarian Stalinist dictator, Mátyás Rákosi. During the early 1960s famous performances of *Hamlet* had some concrete political message.¹ However, in the second half of the post 1956 period (i.e. during the 'soft-dictatorship' of János Kádár) literary scholarship and criticism gradually also began to breathe: from the seventies onwards more and more brave

and illuminating teachers began to question or implicitly subvert the narrow-minded Marxist categories. We have been shown that the arts and literature cannot be reduced to a 'message' to be consumed. Instead of the determinative and reductive methods of Marxism we were oriented towards more formalistic, structuralistic or New Critical approaches that respected the various levels of the autonomous work of art, that let poems, dramas or narratives breathe their own lives. For this generation *Lear* was not a mirror of anything, but a sensitive, organic artifact. Interpretation is creative, it is called upon to recreate the inner power of the work of art. Marxism as a way of thinking has exhausted itself, at least in those countries where it was appointed to be the compulsory agenda.

The situation, however, is totally different, if not entirely the reverse, in the Western part of our planet where the official and compulsory dosing of Marxism, the infiltration and indoctrination of a dominant ideology was happily avoided. When an Eastern European academic enters into the 'brave new world' of the now current Western critical climate, he or she is struck or even shocked by the mixture of familiar and unfamiliar voices, colors and smells. Ideological criticism, whether in the form of cultural materialism, new historicism or feminism, is very much on the agenda. This is perfectly illustrated by Kiernen Ryan's *New Casebook on King Lear* in which the editor calls the 1980s a "ground-breaking decade" in *Lear*-criticism: "For this fresh generation of critics steeped in feminism, poststructuralism and new kinds of Marxist and historical analysis, the issue was not whether *King Lear* was Christian, absurdist, or somewhere in between, but rather how far the play could be seen as sustaining or sabotaging oppressive structures of power."² The first premise of my paper is that the current Western European or North American practice of literary criticism is seen with a touch of skepticism from the perspective of the experience we had in Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, let us hope that this tension, this 'otherness' will be thought-provoking, illuminating and hermeneutically fruitful both ways!

2. Interpretation Versus Rhetoric

My second premise is that my lecture, apart from my concluding lines, is not intended to offer a new interpretation of *King Lear*. Instead, its purpose is very modest: it is a self-reflection and is devoted to a simple case-study in reception aesthetics. Though I have always been interested in the hermeneutical question of meaning or meanings in Shakespeare's plays, my agenda this time is going to be different. To put it shortly: I shall not investigate what the text says but what has been said about *Lear*-performances in Hungary in the post-1989 period. My *Lear*-text or *Lear*-discourse will be an extended though undoubtedly less intensive text or discourse than the Bulls Pied Quarto of 1608 or the Folio of 1623. I realized that my methodology was, mainly unconsciously, motivated by a colleague of mine, the literary historian Péter Dávidházi, who published a monograph on the history of the 'Shakespeare-cult' in Hungary.³ He was interested in what was *said about* Shakespeare during the past two hundred years, particularly in the age of Romanticism when Shakespeare was deified as "God's second born" or "the second half of creation". According to Dávidházi one of the marks of a literary cult is a special use of language. My present paper is trying to do something similar methodologically: what I am interested in is the rhetoric of criticism and the use of language of theatrical critiques of performances of *King Lear* in Post-Communist Hungary. I shall not be concerned with the evaluation of these critical comments, whether they are true or false, wise or foolish, revelatory or ridiculous. I was simply struck by a unanimous critical discourse which holds that *King Lear* is "the drama of the change of political system" or, at least, paradigmatic of the historical transition, of the change of political conduct and the success of generation.

Without any ideological bias or commitment I wish to read various texts simultaneously: namely, the text of *King Lear*, selection from the Hungarian critical reception, and the text of history, i.e. the recent political changes. By reading different kinds of texts in terms of another, by an intertextual reading, the

distinction between literature and politics will be blurred and their difference will cease to exist.

3. Hamlet Versus Lear

My third methodological premise, at the same time an inspiration, comes from R. A. Foakes's recent book *Hamlet Versus Lear: Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (1993). Foakes points out that, with regard to the primacy of *Hamlet* or *Lear* in the Shakespearean canon, a considerable shift of interest took place around the 1960s: *Hamlet* was displaced by *King Lear* as the 'greatest play'. Simultaneously, however, this success also marked a radically different interpretation of *Lear*: "*King Lear* changed its nature also overnight: the main tradition of criticism up to the 1950s had interpreted the play as concerned with Lear's pilgrimage to redemption, as he finds himself and is 'saved' at the end, but in the 1960s the play became Shakespeare's bleakest and most despairing vision of suffering, all hints of consolation undermined and denied."⁴

This revolution in the 1960s is well-known as it has much to do with the sweeping success of Peter Brook's production of *King Lear* with the Royal Shakespeare Company. It is also well-known that Peter Brook was much motivated and inspired by the ideas of the Polish professor, Jan Kott. The tour of the Royal Shakespeare Company in the former Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was a liberating force and a tremendous success. In an interview given to the *Observer* Peter Brook said:

In countries which have known constant revolutions and *coups d'état*, the violence of *King Lear* had a more immediate meaning. In Budapest, when Lear comes on in the last scene [...] carrying Cordelia dead in his arms, and with no other form of expression but that great howl that you hear from the wings, I felt the audience was moved by something much more considerable than the sentimental image of a poor old father howling. Lear was suddenly the figure of old Europe, tired and feeling, as almost every country in Europe does, that after the events of the last fifty years people have borne enough: that some kind of respite might be due. But everyone knows that nothing is promised.⁵

The Brook-event was the first significant – what I would call – 'intertextualization' of *King Lear* in Hungary and Eastern Europe. I use the term 'intertextualization' to denote the process when a literary text merges with, and into, the larger text of history or contemporary politics. It is the process when a text stretches out to embrace reality and thereby reality will be absorbed by the text. They interpenetrate each other, the distinction between the text and world ceases to exist. Indeed, Peter Brook's production had a tremendous impact upon the revitalization of the Hungarian theater in general and upon the performances of *King Lear* in particular. While there was no performance of *King Lear* in Budapest between 1948 and 1964, a few months after Brook's production the National Theater did stage the tragedy with a prestigious casting. This performance was on for several years and was revived even ten years later. But *Lear's* significance soon faded away: apart from a minor enterprise (25. Színház) there was no new production of the drama in the capital throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

However, a major change, a shift of interest was about to emerge in the second half of the 1980s. I personally remember an episode from this time. A director began to whisper his plans of hoping to put *King Lear* on stage so that the audience should associate Lear with the old party leader, János Kádár, who was unwilling to retire. As those days I was still fully steeped in studying the 'image-clusters' and the symbolic interpretation of the play, no wonder I was shocked to hear the idea of such a direct political allegorization. Then, around the political changes of 1989 *King Lear* became a very frequently performed play both in and out of Budapest. Critics were beginning to discuss it as a drama paradigmatic of the change of the political system. Well, this is the second and the more significant 'intertextualization' of the *King Lear*. *Hamlet*, of course, remained popular on stage but usually it was not directly associated with the changing of the system. The paradigm-shift Professor Foakes speaks about concerning the primacy of these

two tragedies seems to have taken place also in Hungary but thirty years later than in Western Europe or in North America

II. The Rhetoric of Reception

In the rest of my paper I shall illustrate my thesis by discussing concrete performances and the rhetoric of their critical reception. In fact, I am aware of seven productions of *King Lear* within the past seven years in and out of Budapest. Hungary is not the only former Soviet-block East-European country where Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been selected by theater directors to respond to the 'real drama' of the current political transition. Zdeněk Stříbrný informed the members of the "Renewing *King Lear*" seminar of the 1996 World Shakespeare Congress that in Prague the National Theater also put *King Lear* on stage in 1991 with Barry Kyle of the Royal Shakespeare Company as guest director. Kyle, Stříbrný says, "tried hard to adapt his production to the new situation, introducing motives of expiation for the arrogant abuses of power by the old rulers and stressing the dangers of new abuses by post-revolutionary arrivistes."⁶ Stříbrný concluded, that the artistic result was a total failure. A similar attempt was made in Germany in May 1993. Frank Castorf's *König Lear* in the Berlin Volksbühne was modeled on the German Communist party leader Ernst Honecker.⁷ It would be very interesting to learn more about productions of *Lear* where the 'division of the Kingdom' i.e. the collapse of the Communist empire has actually taken place, for example in the former Soviet Union or the former Yugoslavia. But my competence is limited and therefore I shall confine myself to reporting and commenting on the *Lear*-experiments as theatrical responses to the political changes in the 'Magyar' scene.

1. Kisfaludy Theater, Győr. Director: István Illés (April, 1989)

The first production to be mentioned was the one in Győr, Western Hungary in April 1989. We should be reminded of the political climate. Hungary is still a one-

party state, and the honorary president of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party is still János Kádár, who came to power with the support of the Soviet tanks in 1956. However, some changes were beginning to be felt after the Partycongress of May 1988: the thirty-three year-old standing water of politics was beginning to be stirred. Some impending significant changes were seismographed throughout the country. The theatrical critic of the party newspaper *Népszabadság* found the message of the play most up to date and quoted the thoughts of the designer as published in the program leaflet of the performance: "the story of *Lear* is taking place in a collapsing country, and the main question is whether the new generation following the long monolithic political power would tolerate or preserve the life of the leader ousted from power."⁸ The allusion, undoubtedly, is a hint at János Kádár. The director wanted to convey a straightforward political message but the performance was severely criticized as not being able to live up to the original plans. The play became drama only in the program magazine and not on the stage.

2. National Theater, Szeged, Director: József Ruszt (October, 1989)

The second performance is that of the National Theater of Szeged, Southern Hungary. The first night was in October 1989. It is important for us to recall the political context especially the significant changes that took place between the previous *Lear* performance and the Szeged one. In June, the Communists, though still in power, had to yield to the growing pressure of the people demanding that the disgracefully scattered bones of the executed leader of the 1956 revolution, Imre Nagy and of his fellow-martyrs should be publicly reburied. This official burial-service of Imre Nagy took place on the 16th of June 1989, thirty one years after their executions approved by Kádár. This event was a huge, nation-wide protest against János Kádár and his reign. Kádár outlived this nation-wide demonstrative re-burial only a month. His own burial took place on 14 July 1989. On 23 October (the date of the beginning of the 1956 revolution) Hungary was declared a "Republic" instead of a "People's Republic." As it is well-known, that

autumn Eastern Europe or the Soviet Block collapsed like a pack of cards, went down as ninepins.

The director of the Szeged *Lear* has always been famous for politically colored productions. A critic published an article with the title: "The Tragedy of the Changing of the Era", writing as follows: "It should not be difficult for us to notice in this play the drama of the changing of a political era, the collapse of the old system and the birth-pains of a new one. This is probably the key for the understanding of the Szeged production."⁹ Another critic wrote that the drama emphasizes the conflicts of the transition. Lear was thinking in a different way, he died because he collapsed seeing the changes happening in front of his eyes."¹⁰ This last sentence can be interpreted as a direct allusion to Kádár.

A peculiar feature of the Szeged performance was that the role of Lear was played by an actor who was himself a member of the Communist Parliament. "I am an MP committed to the reforms but I know that this role of mine is soon about to cease. To a certain extent I am also Lear. But I am not afraid of this thought, I know that this is the natural course of events. However, there are several Lears sitting in Parliament who fear not to be able to do the same next year."¹¹

3. Renaissance Theater Company, Director: Kenneth Branagh (May, 1990)

I mention the third performance only in passing. It was the production of the touring Renaissance Theater Company with Kenneth Branagh. The performance coincided with the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Hungary. The production was anti-intellectual and anti-Brookian on purpose. The Hungarian audience that had been electrified by Brook's performance thirty years before could not tolerate Branagh's alternative way of playing. Critics were unanimous in saying that the production was complete failure. The Renaissance Theater Company's production was the only one that was not associated by critics with the current political changes.

4. Madách Theater, Budapest, Director: Imre Kerényi (November, 1991)

The next performance was the first production in Budapest after the political changes. It was the performance of the Madách Theater in the center of Budapest. The director was Imre Kerényi, who was also fairly active in the political arena following 1989. He made his name famous with his direction of a sequence of Shakespeare's history plays in the mid-1980. Those productions were consciously meant to be political. With productions of *King John*, *Richard II* and *Henry V* he wanted to provide some alternative political models in the last years of totalitarianism. But, as he said in a television-interview,¹² after the changing of the system there was no need for such models. Instead he is now interested to know what is happening to the people themselves *after* the changing of the system. People might get distorted or ennobled after the shocking changes. They might end up in a nervous break-down, they might go mad or simply die. What is interesting now, therefore, is not the 'kingdom' but the family, the smallest unit of society. Political changes are also well reflected in splitting up of families. Thus the artistic focus of the director is not upon politics *per se*, but upon the *effects* that political changes exert on the lives of the individuals, members of the family.

Lear was acted by the well known Hungarian actor and director Péter Huszti, who is also Professor of the Actor Training College of Budapest. Some years earlier he had a very famous and successful Iago role and a less successful Hamlet in the same theater. The audience and the critics were surprised, if not disturbed, by such an unusually young and handsome Lear.

The critical reception of the performance was, however, very negative. One of the critics wrote:

I have long suspected that the general features of our minute political transition in Hungary was most precisely depicted by a certain playwright from England – some four hundred years ago. When the papers reported that Imre Kerényi is about to direct *King Lear* I thought he would provide the model of the collapse of the former power-structure and the idea of structuring a new system encoding his own political experience, success

and disappointments and the opinion he formed about the process." [But,] Kerényi could not find proper partners to implement his conception."¹³

Other critics were even more negative, saying: "for the time being Madách Theater has no proper company for a *Lear* performance,"¹⁴ and "the madness of the performance ends up in sentimental gush"¹⁵

5. Arany János Theater, Director: János Ács (February 1993)

Hardly a year passed after the first night of *Lear* in the Madách Theater, another Budapest theater undertook to perform *King Lear*. However, the reception of the production at the less well-known, less prestigious Arany János Theater was much better than the reception of the Madách performance. A critic wrote: "We seem to have an overproduction of *Lear* but this should not be a problem, this inspires varieties, many-folded ideas [...] The throne made of a stump is the symbol of the changing of power."¹⁶

In an interview János Ács said that he did not wish to produce a political play about the changing of the system, but that his main concern was to show that humankind does not change, in the play one can recognize the real, animal nature of the human being which is always covered by various veils like culture, civilization and so on. Nevertheless he acknowledges that Shakespeare's London is similar to the contemporary wild capitalism in Hungary.¹⁷

Some critics called it "undoubtedly post-Brookian" and praised the victory of aesthetics and morality over the business-oriented view of the theater.¹⁸ The critical reception of the performance was justified in June 1993 when the National Theater Festival awarded the Director the main prize for his direction of *King Lear*.

6. Petöfi Theater, Veszprém, Director: László Vándorfi (November 1993)

This production in the provincial town Veszprém was based on a new translation. One of the critics wrote: "the situation of the drama would tempt us associating it

with the collapse of the Eastern block but the director cautiously avoids making Gorbachov out of Lear. For him Shakespeare's tragedy is less political than a general human drama."¹⁹ Vándorfi wanted to direct the drama of Apocalypse, therefore he emphasized the archetypical, mythical, parabolic or symbolic aspects of the play.²⁰ The play also toured in Budapest but the reception was as unnoticeable as in Veszprém.

7. National Theater, Budapest, Director: Ferenc Sik (October 1994)

We have arrived at the seventh, and last performance of *Lear* in our survey of productions in Post-Communist Hungary. This is the performance of the company of the National Theater of Budapest. However, it was first produced for the summer festival in Gyula, a provincial town on the Romanian border. Again, it is necessary to bear in mind the political context. March 1994 marked the second free elections in Post-Communist Hungary. The first elections in 1990 were won by the Hungarian Democrats, a conservative party that had emerged when Communism was about to collapse. However, the conservative-patriotic coalition lost much of its popularity between 1990-1994. Though predictable, it was nevertheless a shock for the intelligentsia that the elections of March 1994 were won by the former Communists, now rebaptized as Socialists. Though they won an absolute majority they formed a coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats, a liberal party. While the previous government gave full support to institutions promoting national culture, the new government's preferences lay elsewhere.

The Director, Ferenc Sik, said in an interview that one of the reasons he chose *King Lear* was the outcome of the recent elections because "the present period of the transition of power make the tragedy even more up-to-date, though it is true that *King Lear* has also impact if there is no passing over or division of power, or, if there is another vacuum in four years' time."²¹ And he added: "The play contains many allusions to the political situation of the first half of the 1990s in Hungary."²²

As three famous and excellent actors played the roles of Lear, Gloucester and Kent, the performance was a relative success both in and out of Budapest. I should like to concentrate on a peculiar aspect of the play. It was still on the program of the National Theater when, on 16th January 1995, Ferenc Sik suddenly died of a heart-attack. The rumor was that he was taken to hospital the day after he negotiated with the Cultural Minister of the new socialist-liberal government. The issue at stake was the survival and the future of the National Theater, and the new minister was far from being supportive of this old institution. One could read obituaries of the deceased Director in which he was said to be a victim of the recent political changes. The famous Hungarian actor Imre Sinkovits, who played the role of Kent (both now and thirty years earlier) began to anatomize the Hungarian equivalent of the idiom "to break one's heart". The Folio gives Kent the line "Break heart: I prithee, break!" (5.3.312), while in the 1608 Quarto these words are given to the dying Lear. The expressions "cracked heart", "blurred heart", "broken heart" are conspicuously frequently recurring images in the play. Moreover, the breaking of heart, or, heart-attack is the *morbus hungaricus* in our century, the most frequent cause of death among Hungarian middle-aged males. Though Sinkovits, the actor playing the role of Kent, did not make any direct reference to *Lear*, it is not by coincidence that in his mind, consciously or unconsciously, the dying Lear and the dying director merged into one person.

And one more observation. When I was preparing the present paper I was eager to learn how long the play was on in the National Theater. When I called the Theater to inquire about the last day of performance, I was told that it was 15 March 1995. One should know that 15 March is a National Holiday in Hungary. That was the day when the revolution and war for independence broke out in 1848. Throughout the past decades 15 March has been associated with protests against the ruling government whether Communist, conservative Post-Communist or Social-Liberal Post-Communist. The Hungarian National Theater usually produces *Bánk bán*, the famous nineteenth century patriotic drama on this day. But

this year the choice of the National Theater was different. They chose to perform Sik's *King Lear*, and I find this highly symbolic. The performance of this *Lear* was probably both the National Theater's commemoration to its tragically deceased director and the manifestation of a protest against a government disfavoring patriotic feelings and traditions as well as institutions of national culture.

As we can see art, once again, merges into reality, reality is caught up in art. Drama and politics interpenetrate one-another. Not only kingdoms but boundaries collapse. And we, the audience become also absorbed into this intertextual reality, in which the dying Lear and the dying Director are one.

III. Conclusion

Though in my presentation I have tried to give an objective, 'disinterested' picture of the Hungarian theatrical reception of *King Lear* in the past seven years, in my conclusion I wish to reverse my tone and to explain why I find that *King Lear* has had a special appeal to my own generation. *King Lear* is a drama about filial relationship, about the conflict of the old and the new generation: "the oldest hath borne most: we that are young \ Shall never see so much, nor live so long." (5.3.325-7) One might say that the generation conflict is an old pattern, so there is nothing peculiar about it in Shakespeare's tragedy. Shakespeare is usually on the party of the younger generation, and the innocent young people frequently fall victim to their parents' sins. But it is important to bear in mind that *The Tragedy of King Lear* is not *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*. In this tragedy Shakespeare dramatizes a conflict not simply between parents and children but about "blinded parents and seeing children",²³ children who come into conflict with their parents because they passionately love them. But here a significant question arises. Why do they love their mistaken, senile, hysterical parents? The only explanation I can find is that they recognize that their parents were different when they were young. But they have conformed to the world and have therefore become insensitive and blind to real values. Cordelia or Edgar are convinced that it was through a long process

that their parents have become like that. They can perhaps still remember them as young parents and they know that their minds, hearts and souls were different. It is painful for them to see that their parents are no longer what they used to be. They are not identical with themselves, with their earlier selves because something has slowly distorted their characters, something has gradually distorted their faces into masks, something has hardened their hearts, and, unnoticeable, confused their minds.

In Hungary the post-1956 period was not only of a political but also of a moral compromise. A generation ago the only alternative for our parents was to withdraw into a ghetto or to accept the compromise. Each choice could result in the deformation of the personality: you could preserve your integrity by withdrawing into a ghetto but then you got psychologically wounded: frustrated ambitions could not but end in nervous breakdown, alcoholism or sectarian self-righteousness. If you chose the compromise you were necessarily morally ruined after a while. The majority of the previous generation chose the road of compromise. Therefore we are sometimes ashamed of their decisions and we blame them for losing their integrity and identity. But do we have the right to blame them now when the years of hard and soft totalitarianism are over?

In a way our situation is very much reminiscent of the conversation between Henry IV and his son in *2 Henry IV*. The once ambitious, careerist usurper, the Father, instructs his son the Prince, by confessing:

God knows, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect, crook'd ways
I met this crown, and I myself know well
How troublesome it sat upon my head:
To thee it shall descend with better quiet,
Better opinion, better confirmation. (4.5.182-6)

In a parliamentary democracy, "we that are young", thank God, are not exposed to the pressure of the only alternative imposed upon by the totalitarian state. What we can learn from Cordelia or Edgar is understanding and compassion, the

compassionate love for tragically fallen parents. It is their consequent sense of justice and this compassionate love that can heal the division of the family, and of the kingdom.

Notes

1. Mihályi Gábor, *Hamletekre emlékezve* [Remembering Hamlets] Kézirat gyanánt. (Budapest: Magyar Színházi Intézet, 1976), pp. 16-17.
2. Kiernan Ryan, ed., *King Lear. New Casebooks* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 3.
3. Péter Dávidházi, "Isten másodszületje: A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza" [God's Second Born, The Nature of the Hungarian Shakespeare Cult] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989).
4. R. A. Foakes, *Hamlet Versus Lear: Politics and Shakespeares Art* (Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 3-4.
5. Peter Brook (in conversation with Sheila More) "The Lessons of Lear", *The Observer*, April 5, 1964, p. 23.
6. Zdeněk Sifbrný, "Hamlet versus Lear in Eastern Europe" Manuscript ("Renewing King Lear" Seminar, World Shakespeare Congress, Los Angeles, 7-14 April, 1996).
7. *30 Jahre Theatertreffen Berlin 1-20. Mai 93. Magazin*, pp. 28-9. I am grateful for Géza Bodolay for this piece of information.
8. Designer Judit Gombár quoted by Tamás Tarján, "Dráma a műsorfüzetben" [Drama in the Program Magazine], *Népszabadság*, May, 25, 1989.
9. István Takács, "A korszakváltás tragédiája" [The Tragedy of the Change of Era], *Népszava*, September 28, 1989.
10. I. CS., *Új Tákor*, October 15, 1989.
11. László Darvasi, "Fől uralkodott-e Lear király?" [Was Lear a just Ruler?] *Délmagyarország*, September 28, 1989.
12. Interview on the Hungarian Television, Channel 2, Program: Studio 91, 4 November 1991.
13. Dezső Kovács, "Semleges" [Neutral], *Színház*, January, 1992.
14. Tamás Mészáros, "No színház" [No Theater], *Magyar Hírlap*, 23 November, 1991.
15. László Zappe, "Lear király vokálra, üstöbtra és szemétdombra," *Népszabadság*, 12 November, 1991.
16. Tamás Tarján, "Az uszadéka szépsége", *Színház*, May 1993.
17. Interview with János Ács, Hungarian Television, Channel 2. 16 February 1993.
18. Tamás Koltai, "L'art pour Lear", *Élet és Irodalom*, 5 March 1993.
19. Gabriella Bartuc, "Káosz a lelkekben" [Chaos in the Souls], *Veszprémi Napló*, 22 November 1993.
20. Gabriella Bartuc, "Apokalipszis most" [Apocalypse Now], *Veszprémi Napló*, 5 November 1993.

21. Mahir, Hungarian News Observer, 21 August 1994.
22. Gabriella Lőcsei, "Korunk csapása, hogy bolond vezet vakot" ['Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind], *Magyar Nemzet*, 6 August 1994.
23. Tibor Fabiny, "'The Eye' as a Metaphor in Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Cordelia and Edgar: Blinded Parents' Seeing Children", in *Celebrating Comparativism: Papers offered for György M. Vajda and István Fried. Eds. Katalin Kürtösi and József Pál (Szeged: The University, 1994)*, pp. 461-78.

**WHOSE IMMORTALITY IS IT ANYWAY?
THE HUNGARIAN TRANSLATIONS OF
SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET 18**

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Text and translation mutually function as one another's context both in terms of style and cultural history. None of Shakespeare's sonnets is easy to translate, but Sonnet 18 would seem to be especially difficult to render. The turns of its intellectual-emotional structure, the dramatic changes of its poetic message, the verse music of its rhyme scheme, the referential ambiguities of the sonnet, the relationship between sense and sound, metre and rhythm, the intricacies of imagery and the daringly innovative treatment of tradition present and represent complexities that test the translator, try the adventurer, and challenge the challenger.

1. The Challenge

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd:
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

(Shakespeare, p. 1108)