

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

Monica Matei-Chesnoiu  
Ovidius University of Constanta

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