Shakespearean Rhapsody: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the National Theatre in Budapest (1864)[1]

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The 1864 jubilee inaugurated the first Hungarian Shakespeare Festival at the National Theatre in Budapest. The event lasted for three days, 'as ecclesiastical festivals do'.[2] *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which played on the first two nights of the jubilee (April 23 and 24 1864), was performed for the first time on the professional Hungarian stage. *King Lear*, the first Shakespeare play in the repertoire of the theatre, which was founded in 1837, was supposed to be playing on the third night (25 April).[3] The jubilee performance of *Dream* divided critical opinion and even outraged some. The reviewer at the conservative daily paper (*Pesti Hirnök*) criticised the management for misrepresenting Shakespeare by putting on a *Volkstück* which was penned in his youth:

> how could it happen that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was chosen on the occasion of commemorating Shakespeare […] we are under the impression that the great dramatist had to write a play for audiences at a Sunday performance back then, with similar tastes to the ones of today, which, of course, would not count as serious criticism. […] Shakespeare is known not as a writer of farce and fairy tale-comedy but as a wondrous investigator and sage of the depths of the heart, the master of psychological argumentation.[4]

Shakespeare at the National Theatre was all of a sudden low and middle class, a crowd-pleaser which would be more at home in the *Volkstheater* situated on the other side of the Danube.

A young liberal playwright and journalist István Toldy recorded a similar reaction among the audience. One disenchanted spectator passed his

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[2] Károly Vadnai, 'Tíz nap története. Ápril 26', *Az Ország Tükre* 3, no.13 (1 May 1864), 151.

[3] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 20 April 1864, p. 393.

[4] 'Nemzeti szinház. Shakespeare-ünnepély', *Pesti Hirnök*, 25 April 1864.

judgement on *Dream* much in Samuel Pepys's vein: 'A gentleman who sat behind me in the parquet circle grumbled every fifteen minutes: "Nonsense! tasteless burlesque! ridiculous!" I turned back and could only pity this good man […] The gentleman sitting behind me is one of those who cannot rise above the salon and industrial life of the nineteenth century, not even in their imagination'.[5] Subsequent events, however, proved the malcontents wrong. The premiere was a great success, it played to a full house.[6] So did the second night (24 April) which prompted the management to change the programme: *King Lear* was replaced by *Dream* on the third night, to satisfy the demand for tickets.[7] As József Bayer has noted, *Dream* was a hitherto unprecedented success for a Shakespearean production.[8] The Hungarian translation of the play, which had been completed by the national poet János Arany on the occasion of the tercentenary, had had an exceptionally successful first season and it became a repertory staple throughout the century.[9] When the National Theatre celebrated the centenary of its foundation, *Dream* in Arany's translation was one of twenty plays which made up the jubilee programme during the 1937/1938 season.[10]

The choice of this particular comedy, however, came as a surprise to Hungarian audiences on the occasion of the jubilee. Little attention was paid to it by Hungarian critics[11] and the only stage performance we know of is an amateur production (of at least a few scenes) directed by János Arany in his rural home town (Nagyszalonta) probably between 1838 and 1843.[12] Many still doubted whether it was a viable stage play. And there was another obstacle: at the time of the jubilee performance, the dramatist was appreciated as the author of *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and

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[5] István Toldy, 'A Shakespeare ünnepély. 1864, april 23.', *Nővilág* 8, no. 18 (1 May 1864), 280.

[6] József Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban* (Budapest: Franklin, 1909), Vol. 2, p. 100.

[7] *Magyar Sajtó*, 23 April 1864, p. 438.

[8] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*,Vol. 2, p. 101.

[9] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, pp. 101-103.

[10] The repertoire was represented by 15 plays written in Hungarian, and 5 plays in Hungarian translation (*King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Shakespeare, *Electra* by Sophocles, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* by Moliere, *L'ami des femmes* by Alexandre Dumas Fils. *A százéves Nemzeti Színház, Az 1937/38-as centenáris év emlékalbuma* (Budapest: Pallas, 1938), p. 207.

[11] The first piece of criticism is from 1817. Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, p. 92.

[12] Endre Dánielisz, *'Szülőhelyem, Szalonta', Tanulányok, esszék Arany János köréből* (Nagykőrös: Arany János Múzeum, 1992), p. 88.

Romeo and Juliet.[13] For this reason, the columnist at *Fővárosi Lapok* had to defend the choice by arguing that because 'we were already familiar with the tragedies, they [the organizers at the National Theatre] wanted to show us a new side of the celebrated poet through a poetic amusement, composed for a festivity'.[14] The increasing interest in the 'new side' of the author, as Inga-Stina Ewbank has argued, was a European phenomenon: Shakespearean comedy was being both discovered and re-invented on the Continent between the 1850s and 1860s.[15] Ewbank's observation also holds true of the National Theatre in Budapest: whereas the Shakespearean repertoire of the 1840s included only *The Taming of the Shrew*, the early 1850s saw the premières of *Comedy of Errors* (1853) and *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1854) one after another and a new *Shrew* (1855),[16] based on a new translation and adaptation.[17] The management also intended to stage *Dream* in 1852, but the attempt failed due to financial constraints.[18]

When *Dream* finally premiered at the National Theatre in Budapest on April 23, it was one among several other European performances of the play on the occasion. The contemporary Hungarian press mentioned Paris, Dresden, Munich and Vienna in defence of the jubilee programme in Budapest.[19] Theatre historian Edit Császár attributed the choice of the play on the occasion of the jubilee to Viennese influence: the director of the performance Ede Szigligeti (1814–1878) was inspired by Heinrich Laube's production (1854) at the Burgtheater.[20] This influence, however, does not prove that the main reason for performing *Dream* in Budapest for the first time would lay in imitating or emulating Laube's production. Based on the play's European popularity on the occasion of the jubilee, Péter Dávidházi has suggested a more pervasive pattern than mere influence: he has argued that the organizers at the National Theatre found the play particularly apt

[13] *Az Ország Tükre*, 3, no. 12 (April 21 1864), p. 134.
[14] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 10 May 1864, p. 457.
[15] Inga-Stina Ewbank, 'As They Liked It: Shakespearean Comedy goes Continental', in: Gail Marshall and Adrian Poole, *Victorian Shakespeare: Volume 1 Theatre, Drama and Performance* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 128-145 p. 129.
[16] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, pp. 348-349.
[17] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 1, p. 474.
[18] The purchase of the promptbook and scores was unaffordable for the National Theatre. Jolán Kádár Pukánszkyné, *A Nemzeti Színház százéves története* Vols. 1-2, (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 1940), Vol. 2, p. 250.
[19] Mór Jókai, 'Shakespeare-ünnepély. A pesti nemzeti színházban a költő 300-dos születésnapjának évfordulóján', *A Hon*, 27 April 1864.
[20] Edit Császár Mályuszné, 'A rendi nemzeti színháztól a polgári nemzet színháza felé (1849–1873)', in: Ferenc Kerényi, *A Nemzeti Színház 150 éve* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1987), pp. 37-56 p. 55.

for the ritual purposes of the celebration, along with a *tableaux vivant* on Shakespeare's apotheosis.[21] The jubilee production also prompted the most renowned literary critic of the age Pál Gyulai to write a series of theatre reviews on this 'most poetic farce'[22] which is considered to be the best piece of Shakespeare criticism in the period.

But the promotion of Shakespeare's comic genius and versatility on the tercentenary of his birth was not the original intention of the National Theatre: it was a side product of choosing János Arany's *Dream* over the translation of *Richard II* by Károly Szász (1829–1905) in the final version of the jubilee programme. In this essay, I will argue that the main reason for staging *Dream* at the National Theatre in Budapest on Shakespeare's birthday was to celebrate János Arany, who – in the eyes of his contemporaries – was the nation's greatest tribute to the universal genius of Shakespeare. The press unanimously celebrated the premiere as the triumph of Arany's poetry: the famous novelist Mór Jókai wrote that *Dream* was Shakespeare's touchstone for singling out true poets, and he called Arany 'the most victorious *viador* of Hungarian language and poetry.'[23] The first part of the essay will relate the story of a poetic rivalry during the preparations for 1864 jubilee over Shakespeare, a drama based on talent and genius, on individual aspiration and collective desire, which determined the outcome of the jubilee programme in Budapest. The second part will tackle the production. *Dream* on the boards of the National Theatre celebrated a popular artist on the occasion of the jubilee. The production (performed as part of a Shakespeare festival) relied on contemporary ideas about Elizabethan stage conventions which suspended some of the theatrical routines of contemporary theatre-goers and created a festival audience in its unconventional approach to Shakespeare and the theatre. Shakespeare was honoured as a universal genius in the apotheosis scene but Shakespeare was also celebrated as a festive playwright in C. L. Barber's sense.[24] Shakespeare was celebrated by performing his comedy, itself framed by a celebration.[25] This claim revisits Inga-Stina Ewbank's hypothesis which

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[21] Péter Dávidházi, *'Isten másodszülöttje': A magyar Shakespeare-kultusz természetrajza* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1989), p. 170.

[22] Pál Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán) A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 18 (1 May 1864), 427-429, 428.

[23] Mór Jókai, 'Shakespeare-ünnepély. A pesti nemzeti színházban a költő 300-dos születésnapjának évfordulóján', *A Hon*, 27 April 1864.

[24] C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 3.

[25] Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, p. 6.

suggests that festive aspects would be 'peculiarly English' in the 1850s and 1860s.[26]

The Rival Poet

The conflict between Arany and Szász over Shakespeare assumed the features of a sibling rivalry, a variation on the archetypal artistic contest between Mozart and Salieri. As Robert Reid remarks in his analysis of Pushkin's play on the subject, 'Two Bloomian anxieties manifest themselves in Salieri, an "orthodox" urge to emulate its predecessors, and a far more profound reaction to the threat posed by Mozart' who threatens to deprive Salieri of his influence on later generations and who is younger in years.[27] In one important respect, the analogy does not fully capture the situation of Szász in Salieri's role, since he was twelve years Arany's junior. The canonical status of Arany as the first Hungarian poet of the age was uncontested and it was Arany who posed a threat to younger generations of poets in terms of literary influence. There was only one area where Szász sought to establish and defend his aesthetic primogeniture.[28] Szász, similarly to his fellow-poets, stood no chance of winning against Arany in literary contests organized by various institutions, but he built up an unrivalled reputation as a poet-translator of European literature from the 1850s on. The conflict over the jubilee programme shows that Szász saw Arany as a usurper in the realm of Shakespeare translations.

Since 1858 both Arany and Szász had been working on their Shakespeare translations for a major literary project, the first Hungarian edition of the *Complete Works of Shakespeare* (1864–1878). A few years later, this enterprise was taken over by the leading Hungarian literary society of the age (*Kisfaludy Társaság*). The work was supported financially by a private patron Anasztáz Tomori and was supervised by the *ad hoc* Shakespeare Committee of the Society established in September 1860. Both Arany and Szász were elected members of the Society, the former since 1848, the latter since 1860; Arany served as the executive director of the *Kisfaludy Társaság* (1860–1865) and he was the *de facto* chair of the Shakespeare

[26] Ewbank, 'As They Liked It: Shakespearean Comedy goes Continental', in: Marshall and Poole, *Victorian Shakespeare: Volume 1 Theatre, Drama and Performance* , p. 141.
[27] Robert Reid, 'Pushkin: Myth and Monument', in Joe Andrew and Robert Reid, *Two Hundred Years of Pushkin, Volume 2: Alexander Pushkin: Myth and Monument* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 1-14, p. 6.
[28] I use the term in Reid's sense. Robert Reid, *Pushkin's Mozart and Salieri: Themes, Character, Sociology* (Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1995), p. 122.

Committee. Szász was a member. Unlike in the relationship of the older Salieri and the younger Mozart, the Adlerian sibling analogy fits the relationship of the Hungarian Shakespeare translators. But Arany was the first-born not only historically but also symbolically in Hungarian culture and, as Robert Reid has noted, 'in the aesthetic realm, empowerment lies with the congenital genius, the disempowerment with mere talent'.[29] If the archetypal story of Salieri and Mozart realizes a general anxiety between old and young in an artistic context[30] in which, among others, the younger artist surpasses the older, Szász's anxiety derives precisely from his own frustrating experience that genius might actually be conferred upon the eldest brother, despite the dethroning urges of the younger.[31]

At first glance, it is difficult to see traces of the rebellious Adlerian second-born in the figure of the distinguished literary poet-translator of the age, the reliable and prolific poet and critic Szász. He seems to have accepted his position as a gifted *Kleinmeister* behind Arany and was eventually praised for his own sound assessment by later critics. Szász had one part, however, in which he had come first among the half-dozen poets actively involved in the Shakespearean enterprise at the time: he was the only translator whose work had already been performed at the National Theatre (*Antony and Cleopatra,* 1858), albeit only once before 1885.[32] This was, nonetheless, a significant achievement in the preparatory stages of the *Complete Works*, since the first Hungarian Shakespeare edition was designed to serve both as a reading and a performance text.[33] When Arany presented the translation principles of the Shakespeare Committee to the Society on 25 October 1860, it was stipulated that one of the goals of rendering *Shakespeare's Complete Works* into Hungarian was to supply the stage – 'which lacks good translations' – with new texts.[34] The majority of Shakespearean texts in the repertoire had been translated for the National Theatre as acting versions and a good number of them were co-authored by the greatest tragedian of the age Gábor Egressy (1808–1866) who had played a pioneering role in the making of the Shakespeare repertoire at the

[29] Reid, *Pushkin's Mozart and Salieri: Themes, Character, Sociology*, p. 122.
[30] Reid, 'Pushkin: Myth and Monument', p. 6.
[31] Reid, *Pushkin's Mozart and Salieri: Themes, Character, Sociology*, p. 121.
[32] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, p. 90.
[33] All volumes included a disclaimer that the printed text served as a manuscript for the theatres. It was included to protect the translator's copyright.
[34] János Arany, [Report on publishing Shakespeare in Hungarian], in Endre Dánielisz, László Törös, Pál Gergely, *Arany János Hivatali Iratok* 1, Dezső Keresztury, *Arany János Összes munkái* XIII. (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1966), p. 340.

National Theatre in Budapest. These acting versions had been frequently attacked by literary critics for their lack of literary value.

The first volume of the *Complete Works* was published on the occasion of the jubilee: it contained two new translations by two representative figures, a well-known tragedy *Othello* by Szász[35] and a little-known comedy by Arany. The title page of *Dream* which proudly announced that it had already been 'performed at the Shakespeare celebrations on April 23, 1864' reflects the intention of the Hungarian Shakespeare Committee to bridge the gap between the literary and theatrical Shakespeares which had characterized the history of translations in the first golden age from the late 1830s to the late 1840s. And although the plays published in the first Hungarian edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* fulfilled more the literary than the theatrical norms of the age (as full-text versions translated from English in iambic pentameter), translators were encouraged to keep the language of the theatre in mind and to rely on the older acting versions of the National Theatre in their new translations.[36] Following its publication, the first edition of the *Complete Works* was not only used as reading text but also as the base text for nineteenth-century promptbooks at the National Theatre in Budapest.

Holding a copy of the newly published first volume of the Hungarian Shakespeare edition must have been a bittersweet moment for Szász, since he had envisioned a different scenario taking place at the National Theatre on the jubilee. According to József Bayer, the original idea was to stage either *Henry VIII* or *Richard II* on the occasion.[37] Both plays had been associated with Károly Szász: he had already published Act 1 from *Richard II* in 1855[38] and had already been interested in translating *Henry VIII* in 1860, because he knew that two of the leading actors (József Tóth and the greatest female tragedian of the age Róza Laborfalvi Jókainé) had expressed some interest in it.[39] It might very well be that later on Szász would have liked to please Laborfalvi (the Lady Macbeth of her age)[40] by offering her a new translation of *Macbeth* which had been performed in the acting version translated by Egressy since 1843. In his letter to the actor,

[35] Othello had been in the repertoire since 1842, performed in the translation of the journalist and poet Péter Vajda (1808-1846).
[36] Arany, [Report on publishing Shakespeare in Hungarian], p. 341.
[37] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, p. 215.
[38] Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, p. 231.
[39] Károly Szász – József Tóth (Kiskunhalas, 3 March 1860). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest. They eventually played Wolsey and Catherine in the premiere (1867). Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, p. 215.
[40] Róza Laborfalvi played the part between 1843 and 1872. Bayer, *Shakespeare drámái hazánkban*, Vol. 2, p. 272.

Szász asked for Egressy's support: he felt that both a new production of *Macbeth* and the willingness of the actors to learn their parts in a new translation depended on him.[41]

The actor informed Szász about the opinion of the theatre's management in a letter dating 21 September. Szász was notified that the management would have liked to see a new play on the jubilee, i.e. one which had not been translated and performed on the Hungarian stage before, for example *Henry VIII* or *Richard II*, but if the translator was unwilling to translate a new one, they would still put his new translation of *Macbeth* on provided he was ready by mid-December.[42] Szász insisted on *Macbeth*,[43] whereas the theatre insisted on a new play. The debate between Szász and the theatre's management was soon settled: on 18 October the readers of *Koszorú* (edited by Arany) learnt that the management of the National Theatre called upon Szász to translate *Richard II* on the occasion of the jubilee performance.[44] The columnist added that Szász had agreed not only to complete *Richard II* by early December, but also to prepare a translation of *Henry VIII* by the end of January 1864. Arany found the debate somehow off the point: he added in his editorial remark that 'by the way, it is not a question of *what*, but of *how*'.

Despite his insistence on *Macbeth*, Szász must have been very close to the completion of *Richard II* by 18 October, since he submitted his translation of the latter to the Kisfaludy Társaság on 24 October, just before its next monthly meeting on 29 October.[45] The debate over *Macbeth* had certainly secured his position in public as a translator who was 'called upon' by the National Theatre, and he expected to achieve something similar in the Kisfaludy Society. In his letter to Arany, Szász wrote that he would like to receive comments from the reviewers[46] before submitting his translation to the theatre.[47] It seems, however, that Szász was more in need

[41] Károly Szász – Gábor Egressy (Szabadszállás, 18 September 1863). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.
[42] Gábor Egressy – Szász Károly (Pest, 21 September 1863). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.
[43] *Koszorú* 1, no. 13. (27 September 1863), 310.
[44] *Koszorú* 1, no. 16. (18 October 1863), 383.
[45] *A Kisfaludy Társaság üléseinek jegyzőkönyvei 1860–1870* [minutes of the Kisfaludy Society], Manuscript Department, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Ms 5769, p. 139.
[46] Peer-review was part of the process in the publication process of the first Complete Works.
[47] Károly Szász – János Arany (Szabadszállás, 24 October 1863), in: János Korompay, *Arany János összes művei,* XVIII, *Levelezése,* 4, *(*1862–1865) (Budapest: Universitas, MTA BTK ITI, 2014), p. 372.

of institutional recognition of having come first, than the comments themselves, since he requested his manuscript to be returned to him, if the reviews would not be available by the end of November. According to the minutes of the meeting on 29 October, the assembly charged Arany and Egressy (who was also a member of the Society since 1863) with the task of reviewing Szász's translation of *Richard II*.[48] The deadline at the theatre was in early December, therefore they were asked to submit their comments by the end of November. Neither of them handed in a review at the meeting held on 26 November but Arany announced to the assembly that he had completed his translation of *Dream*.[49] And although Szász's translation was accepted for publication at the next meeting held on 31 December 1863,[50] *Richard II* had been already ousted from the jubilee programme on the day of Arany's announcement.

Egressy claimed in a letter to Szász on 8 December that if he had known earlier that Arany had finished his translation of *Dream* or that he was close to completing it, they [at the National Theatre] would have spared Szász the trouble, but he only learnt about it during the assembly on 26 November.[51] The actor admitted that it was he who recommended *Dream* to the theatre's management for the occasion and therefore he had to apologize personally for the inconvenience they caused him. Egressy also reassured Szász that his efforts would not be wasted, since *Henry VIII* would certainly be performed and later *Richard II* too, although, as he remarked, there was more history in it, which was of no interest to Hungarians, than drama. He also argued that Szász must concur that *Dream* would be a more suitable piece for a festivity than the other plays [*Macbeth*, *Richard II*, *Henry VIII*]. According to the actor, the play's intellectual and artistic side would charm the most learned, whereas its fantastic pageantry would appeal to all classes of people, since the production would include music, song, dance, scenery, costume, magic etc. Egressy added that they would make 'an important conquest' for Shakespeare by mounting this particular play.

Szász, however, seems to have come to a similar conclusion to that of Arany – the question is not what to translate, but how to translate it, or rather who the translator should be. In his response to Egressy, Szász acknowledged Arany's artistic supremacy, but the metaphoric language of

[48] *A Kisfaludy Társaság üléseinek jegyzőkönyvei 1860–1870*, p. 139.
[49] *A Kisfaludy Társaság üléseinek jegyzőkönyvei 1860–1870*, p. 142.
[50] *A Kisfaludy Társaság üléseinek jegyzőkönyvei 1860–1870*, p. 144.
[51] Gábor Egressy – Szász Károly (Pest, 8 December 1863). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.

his letter suggests that what dismayed the translator of *Richard II* was Arany's disregard for his primacy in the context of the jubilee programme:

> That I would have withdrawn without any pressure, of my own volition, and out of respect for Arany, I should not need to mention to you, who know how much I respect, admire and, above all, love Arany. This is why it hurts me so much that even he found it so natural to lend a helping hand, and that I, having laboured for three months day and night – have been intrigued against behind my back. My literary talent measured against his deserves his scorn, but our friendship merited something better: namely, that he should have *first* asked for my declaration [of withdrawal], which would have been a cordial withdrawal anyhow, and *only then* should he have agreed to scrap my translation, which had been announced in all the official organs, in favour of his translation which was completed *afterwards*! [my italics J. P.][52]

But whereas Szász sought to derive legitimacy from his symbolic primogeniture, and therefore put the blame on Arany, Egressy's argument had recourse to a different source of legitimacy. Egressy took the blame in person, but his fault was backed by several other fellows of the Society. Set against the individual claims of Szász arguing on his own behalf, Egressy, in a subsequent letter, told a story based on popular consensus in favour of Arany's translation.[53]

> I have to reiterate that *I* am the sole reason for the change of programme on the occasion of the Shakespeare celebration, so I am the sole person who deserves your justified resentment, no one else. Arany, when I asked for the piece for this purpose, was embarrassed; he wavered and made all sorts of excuses. Greguss who was also there can testify to this.[54] But I nailed my colours to the mast. A few days later, when I went to see him because of the manuscript, I saw again that it took him a lot of effort to hand it over to me. Gyulai, who was also at his place, gave me his support, just like Greguss before. You were mentioned on both occasions. They said that you might resent this. I reassured them that the theatre would pay your honorarium for *Henry VIII*, since it had been commissioned, after you submitted it and it was accepted by the committee. […] I also told them that the question is not about the difference between the

[52] Károly Szász – Gábor Egressy (Szabadszállás, 11 December 1863). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.
[53] Gábor Egressy – Szász Károly (Pest, 18 December 1863). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.
[54] Egressy must have approached Arany right after the meeting. The writer and critic Ágost Greguss was the secretary of the Kisfaludy Társaság.

> two translations, but which seems, also in terms of performance, to be more interesting, exciting to a *festive* audience.[55]

Although Szász complained to Gyulai, too, about Arany's belittling attitude, we have no evidence that he ever confronted Arany directly about it. In his letter to Arany, Szász actually depreciated the importance of the theatrical performance of his translations:

> You are probably aware that, commissioned by the National Theatre, I had translated first *Richard II* and then *Henry VIII* in almost three months. But since my goal was not only theatrical performance, indeed, mostly not that, but publication by the Kisfaludy Society, and since the performance of both my translations was postponed, I wish that my three months of hurried work, because of which I had to set aside other work, would at least appear under the auspices of the Kisfaludy Society.[56]

Richard II and then *Henry VIII* were accepted for publication with revision in December 1863 and January 1864 and were issued in 1867 and 1868 respectively. Szász's Shakespeare translations, originally published in the first full edition of the complete works, outlived him, but have been gradually replaced in later editions. And although *Dream* has been translated by a number of poets after the 1980s (before which no one had attempted to follow suit) Arany's translation is still the canonized piece in collected editions, and is often performed on Hungarian stages to this day. János Arany's translation, first shown on Shakespeare's 300th birthday, continues to arouse diffidence in later generations of poet-translators as we approach his 450th.

The Festive Play

Although *Dream* attracted little critical attention and had no professional stage history in Hungary before 1864, as Egressy's letter attests, he knew right away what the play would mean for the National Theatre. Contemporary Hungarian critics also knew what to expect; a number of them must have seen the play in European theatres. Around the 1864 jubilee all the major theatrical conventions were in place which would define the play for the rest of the century. As Gary Jay Williams writes,

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[55]. Gábor Egressy – Szász Károly (Pest, 18 December 1863). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.

[56] Károly Szász – János Arany (Szabadszállás, 26 April 1864), in: János Korompay, *Arany János összes művei,* XVIII, *Levelezése*, p. 4, p. 433.

'By the 1850s, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had become a major Shakespearean vehicle for inspiring spectacle, as the Victorian pictorial stage elaborated on the visions of stalwart Greeks and benevolent fairies. […] Silent armies of stagehands coordinated carefully painted canvases, diaphanous gauzes, and gaslight to unfold picture-perfect moonlit fairy forests in lavenders and greens'.[57] Mendelssohn's overture and incidental music (1843) became an indispensible part of productions of the play for almost a hundred years.[58] As Trevor Griffths has noted, this choice presupposed other kinds of decisions about the nature of the production: 'The musical treatment of the fairies allied them with the supernatural characters of Romantic ballet, the musical evocation of woodland scenery and the need to accommodate nearly an hour of Mendelssohn's music (including the overture) inevitably led to textual cuts to make room for it'.[59]

The National Theatre in Budapest followed an international template – with local variations. Director of the play Ede Szigligeti and superintendent Sámuel Radnótfáy had travelled to Vienna in March 1864 to study Heinrich Laube's production of the play.[60] The costumes and scenery were modelled after the production at the Burgtheater.[61] Critics found Mendelssohn's music sweet and charming and were delighted by the 'sumptuous' costumes.[62] The actors were adorned with flowers, cloths of silver, glittery robes and silk ribbons[63] – the theatre had spent a large sum of money on the production, comparable only to the best opera productions under the same roof.[64] The same critic who praised the costumes, however, was rather disappointed with the scenery.[65] He found that Theseus's palace was a familiar scene, the 'old hall with green columns'. The woodland scenery also fell short of his expectation: instead of a forest, the scene turned out to be the 'plain of a garden' with 'a faint-coloured shrubbery' in the background. He noted that Titania was not hidden away from the sight of

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[57] Gary Jay Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1997), p. 110.
[58] Trevor R. Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare in Production), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 24.
[59] Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* p. 24.
[60] *Magyar Sajtó*, 30 March 1864, p. 345.
[61] *Pesti Napló*, 29 April 1864.
[62] 'Nemzeti Színház. April 23. Shakespeare-ünnep', *Fővárosi Lapok,* 26 April 1864, p. 414.
[63] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 26 April 1864, p. 414.
[64] *Pesti Napló*, 23 April 1864.
[65] 'Nemzeti Színház. April 23. Shakespeare-ünnep', *Fővárosi Lapok,* 26 April 1864, p. 414.

the mechanicals while she slept in a green papier mâché cage (3.1.).[66] According to the critic at *Pesti Napló* she did not need to be hidden away, since Bottom sees Titania only with the ass head on.[67] He claimed that the critic at *Fővárosi Lapok* looked for illusion in all the wrong places and ridiculed the hyperillusionistic expectations, especially with regard to the fairies.[68]

Given the exceptionally high budget of the production, the presence of non-illusionistic elements in the scenery were not discussed in terms of poor conditions at the theatre or insufficient funds but as an interpretive choice which appealed to the imagination of the audience. The combination of gaudy costumes and modest scenery on the one hand, and the ascension of the fairies, the *tableaux* and the spectacular sight of some 60 fairies on stage, in a production dominated by backdrops and flats, on the other hand seem to suggest an eclectic approach. The most notable source of inspiration for an Elizabethan-type staging in Europe was the production of Ludwig Tieck at the time. It was originally produced in Dresden (1843), was moved to Berlin, and was performed until 1885.[69] When the management of the National Theatre in Budapest had intended to stage *Dream* in 1852, they were interested in Ludwig Tieck's Berlin version.[70] As Gary Jay Williams has noted, Tieck's staging of the play was itself 'a compromise between his Elizabethan project and the nineteenth-century pictorial stage.'[71] Surviving records do not suggest that the National Theatre in Budapest would have comprehensively adapted Tieck's staging; there is no mention, for example, of the single architectural unit of three levels that had been fundamental to Tieck's production.[72] But Tieck's work cast a long shadow in the century: the National Theatre had expressed interest in his work in 1852 and Laube's production may have been influenced by it. The modest scenery and the all too human look of the fairies provoked a discussion whether the changes of perspective were achieved by the more extensive use of stage machinery or in the spectator's imagination, a debate which was probably itself a product of the Elizabethan model on proscenium stages.

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[66] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 26 April 1864, p. 414.
[67] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May, 1864.
[68] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May, 1864.
[69] Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre,* p. 109.
[70] Pukánszkyné, *A Nemzeti Színház százéves története*, Vol. 1 p. 250.
[71] Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre,* p. 104.
[72] Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre,* p. 105.

The fairies clearly mattered more than any other group of characters to contemporary Hungarian critics, not least because of the non-illusionistic casting decision of Oberon and Puck in Budapest on the 1864 jubilee. But before returning to the fairies onstage, I propose to look at how the moral threat posed by the sensuous fairy world was kept under control in Pál Gyulai's interpretation of the wedding play theory. The idea was first proposed by Ludwig Tieck in the late bloom of German romanticism: 'In his notes to Schlegel's translation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1830, Tieck proposed that "the germ or first sketch" of Shakespeare's play was a "felicitation [*Glückwunsch*] … in the shape of a mask" for the wedding of Shakespeare's patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to Elizabeth Vernon in 1598, the year of Francis Meres's mention of the play'.[73] As Gary Jay Williams has noted the wedding play myth was also almost certainly bound up with Tieck's highly influential staging of the play in 1843 at the court theatre in Dresden: his production conferred upon its patron Friedrich Wilhelm IV the status of a modern Theseus/Elizabeth which 'abetted the construction of a spiritual national identity bound up with art-loving rulers.'[74]

The National Theatre (the foundation of which was legislated for by the Hungarian parliament) catered for the general public, thus the aristocratic circumstances of the production was only one element in the socially polymorphic genre Shakespeare worked with, in Pál Gyulai's theory. The Hungarian critic reworked the concept of the masque (taken from his main source Gervinus) into the genre of the occasional play (*alkalmi színmű*)[75] that allowed him to place Shakespeare in a culture which shared a passion for drama across different social groups: 'Thus Shakespeare had to write an occasional play, to enhance the pomp of an aristocratic festivity, to entertain a merry and witty wedding party. This was rather fashionable back then in England, they could not have done without a dramatic performance on such an occasion, aye, even the artisans acted for their own and for others' entertainment. […].'[76] This concept also allowed Gyulai to represent the playwright as an ingenious producer of a highly adaptable form of

[73] Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre*, p. 4.
[74] Williams, *Our Moonlight Revels: A Midsummer Night's Dream in the Theatre*, p. 4.
[75] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Judith M. Kennedy and Richard F. Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, (London, New Brunswick: The Athlone Press, 1999), pp. 206-213, p. 207. Gervinus's monumental work on Shakespeare was originally published in 1849-50.
[76] Pál Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán) A Szent-Iván éji álom'. Koszorú 2, no. 18 (1 May 1864), 427-429, 429.

dramatic entertainment rather than a client constrained by the demands of aristocratic patronage:

> even a full-bloodied democrat should admit that Shakespeare would not humiliate himself, not even by today's standards, when he honoured the wedding of a good English lord with the light of his genius. We should rejoice in that he did not despise the genre of the occasional play, because he had made it as poetic as no one ever before or after him.[77]

Gyulai endorsed the historical allegory of the wedding myth for the same reason as many before him: since *Dream* seemed to lack 'any deeper significance, any rational meaning […] upon a first impression',[78] the historical allegory would add weight to it. But whereas his main source Gervinus sees historical allegory as an example 'which demonstrates to us that from this poet everything can be expected, that even in the highest flight of his imagination, he never leaves the ground of reality',[79] the Hungarian critic argues that unless one attributes a unifying significance to historical allegory, one might just as well forget about the figures of Theseus and Hippolyta.[80] According to Gervinus, since the play 'appears designed to be a dream' and dream-life in turn is compared with the sensuous life of love in an allegory, no one is exempt from the actions instigated by Cupid (behind the scenes) and the fairies (who occupy the main place on the stage).[81] Theseus is no exception to this; although he is depicted as a man of intellect distancing himself from both extremes (lovers, mechanics),[82] his multiple affairs 'which we, according to the ancient myth, would ascribe to Cupid, to the intoxication of sensuous love, are imputed in *A*

[77] Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán) A Szent-Iván éji álom'. *Koszorú* 2, no. 18 (1 May 1864), 429.
[78] 'Hermann Ulrici, the theme of self-parody', in: Kennedy and Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, pp. 153-156, p. 154. The first edition of *Shakespeares dramatische Kunst…* was published in 1839, the second edition in 1847.
[79] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy and Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, p. 208. His reference is to Oberon's Mermaid speech in 2.1.
[80] Pál Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán) A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 19 (8 May 1864), 451-53, 452.
[81] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy, Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, p. 208.
[82] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy, Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, p. 211.

Midsummer Night's Dream to the elfin king […] The workings of each upon the passions of men are the same'.[83]

Gyulai, however, argues that Theseus is already through with the caprices of superficial love and thus implicitly denies the continuity between the activities of Cupid and the fairies.[84] In his reading, Theseus and Hippolyta, the allegorical representations of the historical groom and bride, are outsiders in contrast to the characters caught up in the wood. Therefore, while Gyulai shares Gervinus's view that Shakespeare roots the fantastical in the real,[85] the Hungarian critic finds it doubtful whether the play could ever have been performed before a historical groom and bride, had sensuous love been associated with dream-life. As Gyulai observes, Gervinus treats the wedding theory as merely a piece of historical evidence and it does not play a part in his interpretation. In order to address the problem arising from the acceptance of both the occasional play theory and Gervinus's idea of the play as fantastical and real at the same time, Gyulai reworks the idea of another influential German critic. According to Ulrici, Shakespeare employs a frame structure in *Dream*: 'The marriage festival of Theseus and Hippolyta forms, so to say, a splendid golden frame to the whole picture, with which all the several scenes stand in some sort of connection'.[86]

Gyulai thus combines the allegorical wedding play theory bearing on historical evidence, at least for the contemporaries, with Ulrici's idea of a double structure. This leads the Hungarian critic to identify the historical allegory of an aristocratic wedding as the unifying frame and what he finds within are fragments of folktales:

> Thesesus, Hippolyta and their train form a bright frame to the whole, they are the wedding feast itself, the wedding guests before whom the poet holds up his magic mirror. And what else would have fitted that mirror better than these groups of dream-images, these lovely sports of fantastic and real, caprice and emotions, folly and wisdom dominated by mirth? The poet designed a whole from a few fragments of folk tales

[83] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy, Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, p. 208.
[84] Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán) A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 19 (8 May 1864), 452.
[85] 'Introduction', in: Kennedy and Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, pp. 1-58, p. 20.
[86] 'Hermann Ulrici, the theme of self-parody', in: Kennedy and Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, p. 156.

> based on a concept which befitted the occasion, but which, like any poetic fancy, lasts eternally.[87]

By singling out Theseus and Hippolyta as observers of the celebration, unaffected by the fairies' doings, the association of sensuous love and dreaming is safely contained within the scenes in the forest associated with folktales: 'Aren't youthful fancy and sensuality […] like fabled spells? And while we are still held captive by them, isn't our life a dream, in which we are driven by sickly imagination and burning desires and, if necessary, we fly in the face of any physical and moral impossibility'.[88]

The unifying concept was thus a reflection on the form: sensuous love is likened to a folk tale in which the complication is triggered by 'the clown of English folk tales', by 'a peasant fairy with a sunburnt face'. Folk tale for Gyulai 'mixes the fantastic with the everyday which goes beyond the laws of nature but not beyond the intellect and which conceals great wisdom in a naïve shell', much like a dream.[89] The folkloric form also exempted Shakespeare from following any normative rule on dramatic genres:

> The illustration of everyday life, whether serious, comic or farcical, would have been either too serious or too cheerful to befit the serenity and the dignity of the occasion, and it still would have not expressed what he wanted. What was needed was a combination of these, the airy plays of fantasy, a certain type of the poetry of caprice and change of fancy, in which much can be fused together without any harm.[90]

At the time of writing his piece, interest was rousing again in collecting and publishing folk tales (Arany's son László published his influential collection in 1862), and by drawing on a popular form, Shakespeare was allowed to go beyond the customary bounds of moral strictures.

Things were less under control onstage, al least in Gyulai's sense. At a first glance, there was enough material to enact an allegorical groom and bride at the National Theatre. The reviewer at *Pesti Napló* found the couple the least dramatic compared to all the other characters,[91] and by calling

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[87] Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán). A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 19 (8 May 1864), 452.
[88] Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán). A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 19 (8 May 1864), 452.
[89] Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán). A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 19 (8 May 1864), 452.
[90] Gyulai, 'Nemzeti Színház (April 23-kán). A Szent-Iván éji álom', *Koszorú* 2, no. 19 (8 May 1864), 452.
[91] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May, 1864.

Theseus the play's *raisonneur,* Ágost Greguss also drew attention to the primarily narrative function of the role.[92] In a star-studded performance, Róza Laborfalvi played Hippolyta and a well-built, athletic actor with a sonorous voice Miklós Feleki, one of the leading prose actors at the theatre, played Theseus. According to the critic of *Fővárosi Lapok*, Feleki looked good,[93] which was generally expected of actors playing the role.[94] The reviewer at *Pesti Napló* also noted that he had the dignity and grace required by the part and exhibited expressions of tender love towards his queen.[95] But Hippolyta was not reconciled at the beginning of the action. According to some, Laborfalvi gave a listless performance in the part.[96] The critic at *Pesti Napló*, however, argued that this attitude was precisely the key to her performance: 'the stern, masculine amazon queen is not as much in love as Theseus who wooed her with his sword; but she gets quite excited when she talks about the bear-hunt of Hercules and Cadmus. She finds the very tragical mirth tasteless and boring during the performance. That's how Mrs. Jókai interpreted and acted the part'.[97] Laborfalvi's listless amazon was not the kind of material which was befitting Gyulai's frame theory and the critic had not a word to say on the performance of Theseus and Hippolyta.

But whereas Gyulai's critical strategy was to safeguard the play's moral philosophy by exerting control over the fairy world in the figure of Theseus, most critics were engaged in nineteenth-century debates about the play's stage representation. Some rehearsed a post-Hazlitt critical orthodoxy,[98] a banalized version of his criticism on *Dream*.[99] The reviewer at *Fővárosi Lapok*, for example, wrote that it was nigh impossible to produce a perfectly good performance of *Dream*, and considered any production of the play inferior to the reading experience.[100] Even those critics who believed that *Dream* was a viable stage play had to concede that the representation of the fairies was the weak link in any production. A literary gentleman had warned about the dangers in advance in one of the

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[92] Ágost Greguss, 'Shakspeare-ünnepély a nemzeti szinházban. 'Szentiványéji álom'', *Magyar Sajtó*, 25 April 1864, 443.
[93] *Fővárosi Lapok,* 26 April, 1864, p. 414.
[94] Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* p. 86.
[95] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May, 1864.
[96] *Fővárosi Lapok,* 26 April, 1864, p. 414.
[97] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May, 1864.
[98] Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 27.
[99] His dismissal of the theatrical was essentially targeted at contemporary stage practices. Edward Pechter, *Shakespeare Studies Today, Romaticism Lost* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 155-172.
[100] *Fővárosi Lapok,* 26 April, 1864, p. 413, p. 414.

illustrated magazines and after the premiere he admitted that his fears about the disillusioning representation of the fairies were justified.[101] Reviewers reveled in sarcastic descriptions of the heavy-weight fairies. Gyulai attributed the failure of the illusion to contemporary stage practices and, following Gervinus, he recalled the allegedly old English practice that boys had been early trained to play the parts.[102] But, as the Hungarian critic asserted, if not boys, then actresses were better suited to play the fairies.

The critique was leveled at the casting decision of Oberon and Puck and was shared by almost all Hungarian critics. The Fairy King was played by Egressy, the mastermind behind the production, and the iconic impersonator of Lear, Coriolanus and Hamlet in the period between 1837 and 1866 at the National Theatre in Budapest. Puck was Kálmán Szerdahelyi's part; he was the renowned *bon vivant* of contemporary well-made French plays, requiring a conversational style of speaking. The casting was highly unconventional: both Oberon and Puck were traditionally female parts, the latter often played by a child.[103] Following Egressy's illness, and probably influenced by the unfavourable critical reception, both actors were replaced by actresses in the course of 1864 and the parts remained in the hands of actresses for the rest of the century. But on the jubilee things were different. The male casting could have even found some theoretical foundation in Gervinus's writing on the play, familiar to Hungarian literati, which gave a description of an ideal stage performance of *Dream*.[104] The critic describes the ideal Puck as a 'rude goblin' and the ideal Oberon as a bearded patriarch, characterized by 'the dignity of a calm ruler of this hovering world'.[105]

The leading fairies (Oberon, Puck and Titania) were not received favourably. The interpretation of these parts seems to have differed from the more balletic treatment of the fairy world by employing Mendelson's incidental music, a lullaby song, dances and tableaux. Gervinus despised the ballet-fashion in which the play was acted and advocated a dramatic approach to it:

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[101] Károly Vadnai, 'Tíz nap története. Ápril 17', *Az Ország Tükre* 3, no. 12 (21 April 1864), 140.

[102] Pál Gyulai: 'Nemzeti Szinház. Május 16-án. Szent-Iván éji álom. Irta Shakespeare, forditotta Arany János', *Koszorú* 2, no. 22 (29 May 1864), 526.

[103] Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* p. 122, p. 115.

[104] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy and Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition),* pp. 212-213.

[105] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy and Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition),* p. 212.

> when the rude goblin Puck is performed by an affected actress, when Titania and her suit appear in ball-costume without beauty and dignity, for ever moving about in the hopping motion of a dancing chorus [...] what then becomes of the sweet charm of these scenes and of these figures, which should appear in pure aerial drapery, which in their sport should retain a certain elevated simplicity.[106]

Following mainstream conventions, several Hungarian critics, however, complained about the use of adequate stage machinery in order to create more illusion in the supernatural representation of the fairies.[107]

Both Egressy and Szerdahelyi seem to have opted for the dramatic rather than the operatic tradition to the disappointment of most critics. According to one reviewer, Egressy played the part of Julius Caesar under his flowery silver robe.[108] Another critic also noted that he walked with the difficulty of mortals clad in a silvery robe and forgot that his sceptre is not a heavy sword but a fresh flower.[109] Since Egressy played Antony's part at the National Theatre in the course of his career (Julius Caesar was actually Feleki's part in the 1850s), the comments were to mock Egressy's mortal body in the image of Caesar as it ambitiously, albeit vainly, aspired to an immortal status. The reviewer at *Fővárosi Lapok* claimed along similar lines that Szerdahelyi's Puck could have come across as a vivacious and lithesome figure, had it been a human being.[110] Egressy's biographer attributed Oberon's fast speech as a reflection on the evanescent quality of the part[111] which indicates that the tragedian relied primarily on his experience of performing Shakespeare at the National Theatre and did not succumb to the more stylized acting conventions of the opera and ballet.

If Egressy was criticized for being too prosaic, then Anna Szigligeti's Titania was compromised for taking part in a burlesque. When the reviewer at *Pesti Hirnök* compared *Dream* to the popular genres of the local farce (Wiener Posse) and fairy tale-comedies[112] and claimed that the audience could recognize the stage effects of French vaudevilles and operettas in the production of *Dream,*[113] it was to depreciate the choice of the National

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[106] 'Georg Gottfried Gervinus, genre and inner purpose 1863', in: Kennedy, Kennedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition)*, p. 212

[107] Vadnai, 'Tíz nap története. Április 26', *Az Ország Tükre* 3, no.13 (1 May 1864), 152.

[108] Vadnai, 'Tíz nap története. Április 26', Az *Ország Tükre,* 3, no.13 (1 May 1864), 152.

[109] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 26 April 1864, p. 414.

[110] *Fővárosi Lapok*, 26 April 1864, p. 414.

[111] Pál Rakodczay, *Egressy Gábor és kora* (Budapest: Singer és Wolfner, 1911), Vols. I–II, p. 125.

[112] *Pesti Hirnök*, 25 April 1864.

[113] *Pesti Hirnök,* 25 April 1864.

Theatre by comparing it to the repertoire in the only other Hungarian language theatre in town, at the *Volkstheatre* in Buda (*Budai Népszínház* since 1861). Shakespeare was thus in the company of Offenbach during those years when cancanomania swept Budapest. The critic also noted the unusual behaviour of the audience at the National Theatre: despite all the laughter the play provoked, there was no 'scene-applause'.[114] Thus the audience did not stop the action to honour the individual achievement or fame of the actors; it was convivial laughter which brought about a greater appreciation of the integrity of the scenes. The critic noted that greatest laughter was provoked by the action between Titania and Bottom (József Szigeti) with the ass-head (3.1., 4.1.): it 'was quintessential vulgar comedy really'. The sexual implication is preserved in a rare record of stage business in 3.1. According to the critic in *Pesti Napló*, the scene ended with a procession of the fairies and Titania has Bottom exit in a wagon decorated with flowers on the way to Titania's bower.[115] According to another critic 'she marches off with him triumphantly in a shell wagon'.[116] Whether the wagon reminded one of a wedding ceremony or a liaison, both critics remarked on the sexual intimacy implied in the stage business as the two made their exit in the procession of fairies. The other source of burlesque in the production was, of course, the performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' which parodied bad acting (probably amateur acting) to great success.[117] The little comment on the lovers shows that their treatment was serious, typical for the age.[118]

The last words in the production were Puck's in the epilogue which is a key speech in the interpretation of any performance of the play ('If we shadows have offended, / Think but this, and all is mended: / That you have but slumbered here, / While these visions did appear; /And this weak and idle theme, / No more yielding, but a dream,')[119] As Peter Holland remarks on the speech, 'If we wish to dismiss the play, we can choose to treat it as a "weak and idle theme / No more yielding, but a dream" […] This is the final, largest-scale version of this recurrent device in the play, reducing vision to dream or reaccommodating an accurate perception of

[114] Spectators of the age would honour the actors with instant applause in the middle or at the end of a scene. Willmar Sauter, 'The audience', in: David Wiles and Christine Dymkowski, *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 163-183, p. 170.
[115] *Pesti Napló*, 29 April 1864.
[116] Vadnai, 'Tíz nap története. Április 26', Az *Ország Tükre*, 3, no.13 (1 May 1864), 152.
[117] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May 1864.
[118] *Pesti Napló*, 4 May 1864.
[119] Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 212. (5.1.401-406).

experienced reality into the more comfortable framework provided by dream'.[120] Robin offers to the audience to consider the whole play as something that has taken place while they have been asleep,[121] and the offer was accepted by many in the nineteenth century-audience. József Tóth (playing Quince's part) found the epilogue superfluous, since according to him, the play was a dream from the beginning.[122] Charles Kean, whose work was a model example to Tóth, cut the epilogue, ending with Oberon's glimmering light speech (5.1. 369-74) and 'Trip away' (399-400).[123] The critic at *Hölgyfutár* also suggested in his review that the production should cut the epilogue by Puck.[124] The jubilee performance, however, included Robin's offer. By doing so, members of the audience, if they felt no offence, could think of this: if it was not a dream, what was it all about?

The choice of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the occasion of the tercentenary came as a surprise: the main event at the National Theatre celebrated Shakespeare's *oeuvre* by putting a comedy on in an era when Shakespeare was appreciated as a writer of great tragedies. The choice was only redeemed for some because the play had been translated by the greatest living Hungarian author who himself was the subject of a literary cult. The production was unconventional for a Shakespearean production, but it turned out to be an unprecedented success on the Hungarian stage. It played before full houses in an era when Shakespeare performances were notorious for bad houses. The play was performed as part of a three-day Shakespeare festival which suspended the usual behaviour of the audience: there was no 'scene-applause' on the jubilee but there was laughter which created a unity in the flow of the scene or scenes and a unity of collective experience in a public theatre. If the production was serving ritualistic purposes across Europe, as it has been suggested by Péter Dávidházi, then the production of the play showed an affinity with those festive aspects of the play which Inga Stina Ewbank believed was peculiarly English in the 1850s and 1860s. The production was already tamed during 1864 after the jubilee had passed (as the female casting of Oberon and Puck indicate), but the Shakespeare festival was a special occasion for experimentation, for making Shakespeare accessible and enjoyable for a festive audience.

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[120] Peter Holland, *The Oxford Shakespeare. A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 5.
[121] Holland, *The Oxford Shakespeare. A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 17.
[122] József Tóth, 'A Szent-Iván-éji álom az angol irodalomban és a színpadon', *Fővárosi Lapok*, 24 April 1864, p. 408.
[123] Griffiths, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, p. 213.
[124] *Hölgyfutár* 15, no. 49 (26 April 1864), p. 395.

At the end of the first performance, just like in the case of successful premieres of new Hungarian drama, the translator was called on stage in the midst of thunderous applause. Since it did not cease, Ede Szigligeti came to announce to the audience that János Arany had already left the theatre.[125] It was Shakespeare's night, after all. Szász was unable to attend the jubilee programme at the National Theatre due to some nervous condition related to travelling.[126] Egressy's Oberon was not favourably received by critics, but his brainchild was an unprecedented success for a Shakespearean production at the National Theatre. The actor personally thought they ravished the text so much that it must have left Arany 'in despair'.[127] Maybe the production was not the way Arany had imagined it. Or maybe he was pleased to take part in the making of a festive audience. But whatever János Arany thought of the production, the collective experience in the theatre was not only his vision anymore.

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[125] *Hölgyfutár* 15, no. 49 (26 April 1864), p. 395.

[126] Károly Szász – János Arany, Szabadszállás, 26 April, 1864, in Korompay, *Arany János összes művei,* XVIII, *Levelezése*, 4, *(*1862-1865), p. 433.

[127] Gábor Egressy – Szász Károly (Pest, 25 April 1864). Manuscript Department, National Széchenyi Library, Budapest.

Szász Károly: Shakespeare[128]

Gentle Avon, how you roll your foam with pride today!
And whose walls you mirror in glory:
Ancient Stratford stands rejuvenated, beaming!
– Because although it is small among towns,
Like Ephrata's little Bethlehem
But the eyes of the world are upon it today.

Why is there world-weary old Europe
This enthusiastic noise on your shores today?
And maybe all balances and numbers are to her "credit"
That mercantile Albion is so much rejoicing?
And her sword, red with brother's blood,
America put into a scabbard.

Today rosy dawn and evening's blush, crimson flamed
Greet him only, rest on him,
On a star named Shakspere
Which does not disappear during daytime either,
It whizzed by in space
And burn out together or never!

Thrice a hundred years have rolled since
Celestial light entered into the earthly body
But the flame of his star has not been extinguished
Now it shines on the arch of eternal heaven
And millions on earth beneath
Warm themselves by his flame without an end.

Since that which ignites life, flame into the heart
Art was lame until then,
Then since, — and failed; then was hid away,
Drew, whittled, or scanned words,
But having no divine power
Could not create a living thing.

This one picked up a heavy chisel,
The other a canvas, and paint and brush,
The artist of words lulls and leaps on mellifluous rhymes
– But the stone was cold, the word dumb, the colour dark.
All crumbling fragments only,
Not one, not whole, just dead *succession*.

[128] Translation:

Then came you – and what was scattered
All those members lying lifeless:
Now healed and the corpse has come to life,
Received a soul and swiftly spoke;
And all of a sudden he was not
Pale, silent, dead
He had a shape, colour and voice.

Shaped like a bulging sculpture
And his colour – the one on canvas is not as real!
And as a string on which songs brew buzzing
So lips are set, such speaking likeness,
And rising from the depth of imagination,
They will be real creatures that live and breathe.

They all live and breathe, come and go, each acts
They turn the wheel of life:
One to his benefit, the other authors his downfall;
One, a bright soul, the other dark;
    One, king of the world, the other at the mercy of fate,
    One, a dwarf, the other great; – but each one a *Character*.

Here is Caesar, Brutus and Octavius, in a heroic tableux,
Yellow Cassius and grim Coriolanus;
Here are their women with shared fates:
Glorious and wretched, in pomp or sloppiness;
    Here the wanton fairy with her snakes
    And the ferocious mother who thunders like a storm.

Here is another tableaux, the moor with an angry heart
Sweet Romeo with his fancies,
Macbeth who nurses a bloody deed without a name,
And Hamlet, who fearing a terrible secret O;
    A blood stained ermine on Richard's shoulder –
    But more wretched is insipid Cymbeline.

Good old fool Lear with his raging mind,
With three broken arrows in his heart,
One: that he shunned his good daughter,
The other two… Hah, Regan, Goneril!
    Around him Gloucester, Kent and Poor Tom,
    And dreadful plague, thunder and lighting! …

Make room, make room, angels are approaching!
Not angels, no! More: real women,
Wistful, offering salvation and love,
Sublime and frail … Just as they are!

Our hearts burn, cry and laugh:
Oh frailty, thy name is woman!

Whereas fair Miranda does not succumb to temptation –
There stands Juliet burning and languishing.
– And if there are guardian angels: Yours,
Chaste Desdemona, to blush
Need not to, I Know; while at Lady Macbeth
the devils laugh at.

For wise Portia and three locked caskets
Treasure, power and loyalty fight over.
Fair Jessisca, on moonlit night,
Song, love and hot desire seduced her.
A flirtatious rose you are, Viola!
Little Imogen, a meek violet!

Perdita's charm is her chaste innocence;
There is a mischievous smile on the lips of Mrs Page.
A deep slow sorrow Cordelia
Whereas pain made Ophelia mad.
In memory of a heart sunk in suspicion:
Sits sentient statue, loyal Hermione.

And all these great, glorious – and all these frail
And those burdened by misery, those by bloody deed,
Ask for immortality, wait for it,
Expect it and take it from his hands:
Because he has been granted such a power, infinite,
That what he created was to be immortal!

Centuries follow centuries;
His characters are not diluted by Time;
That carry traces of celestial fire,
Those foreheads are not wrinkled.
They remain so, untouched by death ,
As he created them, as he thought of them.

Because he, whatever the heart feels and the mind awes,
Felt out its pulse;
The ancient mysteries of existence opened up,
He looked into the origins of fermentation .
And where other threads of measure falter :
Before him the heart's depth is open!

Poet, artist forever look to him
To learn, to live

His name is surrounded by a bead garland ,
Where each bead stand for a star.
    His place is among the stars, that's where lives:
    That is the source of his word in the world !

Swan of Avon! By the breeze created by your wings
Air, sea, heart moved and trembled.
From high up where even an eagle would plummet,
You look on quietly into the depth,
    Seeing the whirling torrents of Time:
    Fame and Eternity are your wings!