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'TRANSLATING' HISTORY FOR THE STAGE IN *HENRY VIII* AND *APUS DE SOARE [SUNSET]*

Gabriela Iuliana COLIPCĂ

Introduction

The second half of the fifteenth century seems to have finally brought, in different corners of Europe, the long waited for political stability that would engender further societal changes and cultural developments traditionally associated with the Renaissance. In England, for instance, the crisis of royal power resulting from incessant warfare involving the houses of York and Lancaster and entailing political instability at the national level was put an end to by Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor line that would successfully rule England for more than one century. At approximately the same time, in another part of Europe, in Moldavia, the same kind of civil strife turned members of the Muşatin family one against the other in a constant rush for power which occasionally led to short-lived basking in royal privileges only to be soon lost in favour of another pretender to the throne. That is why listing all the names of the Muşatin princes who ruled Moldavia over the years that followed Alexander the Good's death (1432) might not be such an easy task. The Moldavian prince had sixteen legitimate and illegitimate children, out of whom seven sons, and that made the succession issue difficult to handle in the Moldavian context of the time (Boisnard 2004: 10). Yet, the ensuing Moldavian "Wars of the Roses", constantly fuelled partly by the ambitious Moldavian aristocrats, partly by the foreign powers (Poland and Hungary, in particular) interested in maintaining control over the Romanian principalities, came to an end when Stephen III, son of Bogdan II, whom Romanian history would subsequently call "the Great", ascended to the throne. Crowned, as the legend has it, on the battlefield of "Direptate" ("Justice"), after having defeated his usurping and murderous uncle Petru Aron, Stephen embarked upon a long and difficult quest for political stability, in both foreign and home affairs, trying to change the perception of royal government in Moldavia and to strengthen the monarchy, while defending and preserving the independence and security of the country threatened by enemies from almost all sides.

But, though a contemporary of Henry VII, the Moldavian prince Stephen the Great (1457-1504) seems to have had more in common with Henry VII's son, Henry VIII (1509-1547), who was still a teenager when Stephen died. The unexpected similarities between the patterns of thought and behaviour characterising the two quasi-contemporary monarchs, as manifest in their public and private lives, have invited a more in-depth assessment of their achievements and of the roles they played in the process of national identity construction for the development of which the context of the Renaissance offered adequate circumstances. Having found in their reigns fertile ground for the exploration of diverse means of representation of history in literature as well as of the way in which historical drama could shape perceptions of historical events in the process of reception, major representatives of English and Romanian drama, namely William Shakespeare (in collaboration with John Fletcher) and Barbu Ştefănescu Delavrancea, chose, at different moments in the English and Romanian history, to

reflect in literary terms, in *Henry VIII* (1613) and *Apus de soare [Sunset]* (1909), the two monarchs' place in history, with a stress on the impact of their major political decisions on the destiny of their nations in making.

From History to the Stage

Finding inspiration in the chroniclers' recordings of and comments on major events that happened under Henry VIII's and Stephen the Great's rule, Shakespeare and Delavrancea focus on similar issues: their plays bring to the foreground the myth of the absolute ruler and discuss royal involvement in home and foreign affairs, laying stress on the king's relation with the court, the Church, and, last but not least, the royal family (queen and offspring, hence the interest in the order of succession).

Further similarities between the two plays may be accounted for by the fact that Shakespeare is known to have been one of the chief influences on Delavrancea. It is true that, as Zoe Dumitrescu Buşulenga remarks, the Shakespearean patterns identifiable in Delavrancea's plays do not particularly evoke *Henry VIII*; they rather remind of other creations of the English Bard, better known in the Romanian literary circles of the early twentieth century, like *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear* or *Richard III*. The Romanian critic emphasises, in particular, the presence in *Apus de soare [Sunset]* of traces of intertextual connections with *Julius Caesar*, such as the conspiracy, alluded to from the beginning of the play, the conspirators' planning to exploit the leader's weaknesses, or the occasional references to omens and prophecies (1962: 338-344). Nonetheless, such motifs are actually recurrent in Shakespeare's plays, so one should not wonder that they can be found in *Henry VIII* too, adding to the already mentioned elements that it shares with Delavrancea's *Apus de de soare [Sunset]*.

But what perhaps amazes the most, precisely because of the plays belonging to different cultural and aesthetic contexts, is their similar interpretation of the function of historical drama. Shakespearean scholars have repeatedly underlined the fact that, in Renaissance England, history, was, next to the Bible, a favourite subject not only of the scholarly circles but also of the public at large, as a source of instruction. That explains the abundance of "historical texts" which emerge – ranging from "poems, plays, memorials, biographies" to "narratives of current events, political narratives, annals, chronicles, surveys, antiquarian accounts" – causing the medieval chronicles to slowly fade (Kamps 2005: 8). From among them, historical plays were by far the most popular, representing for English Renaissance audiences (especially in London) the main source they "got their 'history' from" (Kamps 2005: 5). All in all, for all its instability owing to the variety of genres it encompassed, "history" aimed basically at moral instruction by teaching political lessons, and at arousing patriotic feelings, hence "tend[ing] to subordinate factual accuracy to literary and ideological concerns" (Kamps 2005: 5).

As for the Romanian case, the turn of the twentieth century witnessed an intense political effort aimed at raising awareness of the need for solidarity with and support of all action meant to eventually lead to the fulfilment of the centuries-long dream of the Romanian nation, that of the union with Transylvania. Politically and socially involved playwrights, like Barbu Ştefănescu Delavrancea, revived, under the circumstances, the genre of historical drama, preaching the return to history as an efficient means of stirring patriotic feelings. The discourses of the past would become vehicles of a militant ideology, which, following in the footsteps of the 1848 revolutionary trend, urged Romanians to overcome the political crisis and to achieve national unity.

Still, the educational mission, in the sense of putting forth a political lesson with a potentially relevant impact on national identity formation at a crisis moment, is all that Shakespeare's and Delavrancea's history plays have in common on the intentional level. Otherwise, the two playwrights perceive differently the representation of history in the literary text. On the one hand, like his contemporaries, Shakespeare seems to have been aware of the co-existence in the Renaissance historical writings and thought of three main "schools", i.e., "the providential, the humanist, and the antiquarian" (Kamps 2005: 6). Adapting for the stage their

different, and sometimes contradictory, practices, Shakespeare aims, at least in *Henry VIII*, at exploring the complexity of the historiographical discourses of the moment and the validity of their representational power in relation to political truth(s), while, at the same time, making a stand in the debate on the very nature of the theatre as a public institution that could/could not inculcate a positive sense of government in the spectators (Glimp 1999). On the other hand, Delavrancea is not concerned with the investigation of historiographical alternatives (providentialism seems to dominate his *Apus de Soare [Sunset]*), but takes more interest in the aesthetic means of representation, shifting between romanticism and symbolism in an attempt at artistically recuperating the folk elements, the sublime, the archetypal, that, in his opinion, would better stress out the national character of his drama.

A more detailed investigation of the similarities and the cultural-specific dissimilarities between the two plays will hopefully reinforce the main lines of our argumentation and provide further evidence for the better understanding of the way in which literary works have managed to influence the image of the absolute ruler as constructed and preserved in the collective memory of the nation. One important dimension of an absolute ruler's policy is defined by the decisions made and actions taken in relation to the neighbouring powers, and both plays bring that into discussion, more or less extensively. Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* opens with the colourful evocation of one of the diplomatic successes of the early years of the king's reign, i.e., the Field of the Cloth of Gold (Act I, Scene 1). There, in 1520, historians say, "Henry vied with Francis at a vast Renaissance tournament that was hailed as the eighth wonder of the world" (Guy 1992: 32). This is what Shakespeare apparently tries to convey when he has Norfolk describe the splendour of the two royal processions. Yet, little by little, he insinuates into the text doubts about the positive significance of the event as Buckingham denounces the lavishness of these celebrations ("fierce vanities" – I.1.54) that are entirely the result of Cardinal Wolsey's 'engineering'. Thus, the play reverts the meaning of a diplomatic achievement which was not of the king's doing (though, to the king's glory), and simultaneously introduces two characters, Buckingham and Wolsey, in relation to whom Henry's own character will be defined. As far as the explicit references to England's relations with other European powers are concerned, this first scene is unique in the play. Later on, as emphasis is increasingly laid on home affairs, there are only some oblique hints about England's relations with Rome, whose help is invoked by Queen Katharine and allegedly 'required' by the king himself, hence the presence of Cardinal Campeius as an arbiter and guarantor of the 'fairness' of the divorce trial. Finally, the scene of Wolsey's fall from grace (Act III, Scene 2) contains two more clues to the troubled relationship with the Holy See, in general, and to Wolsey's role as a mediator on the king's behalf in the divorce crisis, in particular: the two letters that seem to seal the cardinal's doom refer, on the one hand, to his failure in being elected pope (1521) (III.2.210-213), and on the other hand, to his attempt at negotiating another strategic marriage between Henry and the French king's sister, the Duchess of Alençon, had he obtained the annulment of the king's marriage with Katharine (III.2.85-86). Both letters are presented as evidence of the cardinal's betrayal of the king's trust which justifies his repudiation. Before, however, considering more thoroughly the way in which Wolsey's "trial" and fall obliquely cast a new light on Henry, an interesting aspect should be pointed out: while Henry's Reformation was about much more than the divorce from Katharine, building upon a new ideology of supreme monarchy that entailed radical changes at both political and religious levels (allowing for Protestantism to gradually gain ground), the play gracefully evades such sensitive issues and finds other means of undermining the pro-Tudor historical vision. The absence from the play of major events in the history of the Henrician Reformation (e.g. Anne Boleyn's execution, Elizabeth and Mary being declared bastards, the highly controversial regulation of the succession to the throne), as well as of the two short but troubled reigns of Edward VI and the Catholic Mary, could indicate that Shakespeare (and Fletcher) had indeed learned the lesson taught by the historians of the time, according to which writers should beware of "touch[ing] the credit and reputation of some men"; as Ivo Kamps

remarks, "the point about the power of men of reputation was not lost on Shakespeare" (1996: 113): though Henry VIII's age was long gone, the Jacobean propaganda legitimised James I's position on the throne on the basis of his consanguineous link with Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, so, for a play which was neither entirely apolitical nor boldly politically biased, it was safer to keep off any open challenge to royal authority.

Unlike Shakespeare, Delavrancea did not have to be cautious about touching "the reputation of some men" directly related to the subject of his play: when he wrote *Apus de soare [Sunset]*, he was at a safe distance – more than 400 years – from the temporal framework of the events represented. Furthermore, the aim of his play is not "epistemological ambiguity" (Kamps 1996: 107); it does not propose any alternative interpretation to Stephen the Great's history, but clearly seeks to reinforce the 'truth' that historiography – from Neculce and Grigore Ureche to Iorga and Xenopol – advanced. And since the general tendency is to look up to Stephen's military achievements in the wars against the Turks or other enemies (e.g. the Poles), the foreign policy of the Moldavian king is repeatedly evoked in laudatory terms at numerous instances in *Apus de soare [Sunset]*. Though the time span covered by the main action of the play is rather short, i.e., 1503-1504 (the last years in Stephen's life), references to his numerous battles, whether victorious or not, analeptically extend the story time. For instance, in Act I, Scene 2, while spinning and weaving, Queen Maria's ladies-in-waiting remember their fathers who died heroically fighting against the Turks at Cetatea Albă and Războieni more than twenty years ago (1982: 33). In doing that, they evoke, like a Greek chorus, Stephen's forty-six years of reign during which, apart from the two mentioned defeats, he won thirty-one battles. The terms in which they present the sacrifice of the Moldavian élite warriors and Stephen's willingness to die by their side imply that the cause of the defeat was not some shortcoming of the Moldavian strategy or policy in relation to the Turks, but the fact that none of the Christian powers Stephen had appealed to had taken action to help him; so, in an early triumph of providentialism in the play, Stephen accepted the defeat as being God's will: "Here, I was defeated, let every soul in the country know that it was of God's will to punish me for my sins, and let His Name be praised till the end of the world!" (1992: 33, my translation) The same disappointment with the lack of reaction of the Western powers to his appeal for military support in the 'crusade' against the Ottoman Empire is then voiced by Stephen himself in Act I, Scene 7 when messengers arrive from Venice and Rome with words of encouragement but no financial aid. Stephen bitterly remarks that Christendom, that once called him 'the sword of Christ' for having won three major victories against the Turks at Baia, Podu-Înalt and Războieni, never helped him financially in his attempt to stop the infidels. The only good news is that Rome sent a doctor, Jeronimo da Cesena, to tend to his wounds.

On the other hand, a large part of the play presents another aspect of Stephen's foreign policy, namely the conflict with the Polish kings over Pokuttia: Act I, Scene 7 shows Stephen preparing the campaign against John I Albert (1992: 39-40); Act II, after presenting the tense waiting for news from the battlefield (Scenes 1-3), extols Stephen's victory over the Poles who swear him obedience and "*in eternitate fidelitas*" (1992: 43). Both major lines of Stephen's foreign policy meet in the eloquent speech he utters in the Great Hall on the occasion of the coronation of his son Bogdan-Vlad. In terms that cause the royal and the national interests to overlap, he first reminds those who attend the ceremony – soldiers, boyars, courtiers – of his long reign (47 years) during which he fought for Moldavia's integrity and welfare and succeeded in making his name known from Caffa to Rome as a defender of Christianity. He evokes the old warriors who died for their country and on whose "buried bones Moldavia lies as on the shoulders of some giants" (1992: 62, my translation). Then, he voices his regret for not having managed to unite either the West in a crusade against the Ottoman Empire, or the East, making alliances with the Poles, Hungarians, Russians and Tartars; in the end, they all betrayed the agreements and he had to fight the Turks alone:

I tried to unite the West for one goal, as I knew they were Christians, and my emissaries knocked from door to door, pleading with them, more to their benefit than to ours, to leave aside their petty wars and strife and rise against the danger that threatened Christianity…Were they in need of a man to lead?...There was one…Now he is sick… When I saw they offered nothing but promises, I tried to unite the East. (Outside the lightning strikes and the rain falls heavy.) So I sent messengers to the Hungarians, to the Poles, to the Russians and the Tartars…In vain did my men travel the deserted roads... Agreements duly sealed, important signatures…And nothing came out… […] When my time comes to stand in front of Him, I shall dare say: 'My God, only You know what is in my heart, for I have believed in you and no vanity has ever lured my soul, and I have stood as a steady rock in front of the infidels…But they all deserted me…'

(1992: 62-63, my translation).

The autocrat would not separate the political from the religious in his conception of the supreme monarchy and weaves the entire history of his reign in the all-embracing rubric of God's plan for Moldavia. And if a compromising peace with the Turks was eventually signed, it was because this seemed like an ultimate solution in an attempt at saving national integrity, when, the old king bitterly remarks, the Christians turned out to be untrustworthy: "My God, punish me for my sins, but do not punish me for the peace I made with the Turks to save my poor people! (*Lightning and thunders*.) Listen to me, Bogdan, know that the Turks are more faithful to their promises than the Christians…" (1992: 63, my translation). The speech concludes with a prophetic foretelling of Moldavia's endurance in front of all dangers that breaks all concrete temporal boundaries and projects Stephen's image in a timeless realm of myth and legend as the Christian King: "Remember Stephen's words, who has been your shepherd to the very end…that Moldavia was not the land of my ancestors, nor is it mine or yours, Moldavia is the land of your descendants, and of the descendants of your descendants till the end of times…" (1992: 63, my translation). Much of the symbolism of the final act also contributes to reinforcing the Christian imagery that becomes part of the king's portrait: the stage directions describing the setting indicate that there is a cross above the bed in which the king lies consumed by fever and that his room communicates with a small chapel-like space with an iconostasis. Moreover, in the scene in which the doctors burn his wound with hot irons as an ultimate solution to stop the spreading of the infection in his wounded leg, Stephen refuses to be tied and goes through terrible pain without complaining, only praying, like a true Christian martyr. Stephen becomes a Christ-like figure that unquestionably dominates the play up to the end, which also explains that, in the scene of the treacherous boyars' 'trial', providentialism wins over human agency, for, in killing the traitors, the king actually fulfils God's will.

Yet, if in *Henry VIII*, religion and politics come together rather vaguely in the references to the Pope's involvement in the crisis caused by the royal couple's divorce and in the accusations of being a sectary that Bishop Gardiner formulates against Cranmer (V.2.104), God's providence is often invoked and its impact measured against that of human agency. As a matter of fact, Shakespeare structures his play so as to both provide different mirrors to the character of the king who comes to show, little by little, his true nature in his interactions with different members of his court, and to employ different historiographical methods to explore "the process whereby interested individuals and institutions transform the contiguous moments of the past into purposive, unified discourses, and how the construction of such discourses relates to self-legitimation" (Kamps 1996: 109).

Therefore, Buckingham's trial, the first in the series of four judicial proceedings of the play, is entirely based on eyewitness evidence and hearsay. The pre-trial scene (Act I, Scene 2) brings to the foreground the fact that aristocratic factions might still have tried to challenge royal authority – Buckingham is accused of intending to assassinate the king – and proves the devastating effect that "oral testimony can have on a person's reputation and fate" (Kamps 1996: 114). It is true that Wolsey is repeatedly pointed at in the play, both by the Queen herself and by the choric Gentlemen as the one who, out of malice, engineered the Duke's fall, but it is obvious that the trial puts, in fact, Henry himself in a bad light. The accusation relies on a single

testimony, that of the Surveyor, who claims that his former master was incited by a prophecy of the Chartreux friar Nicholas Hopkins to take action against the king in order to govern England himself. As the Duke acknowledges before being executed, the procedures of the trial are legal, but the justice of the trial is definitely doubtful. When condemning Buckingham, the king does not seem to take into account that, as suggested by the Duke, the witness might have been bribed by Cardinal Wolsey, or that, as the Queen conjectures, he might be taking his revenge against his former master. Hopelessly condemned, the Duke defends up to the end his faithfulness to the king, while trying to find an explanation for the law's failure, either in the influence the cardinal has on the king or simply in God's will. "Simultaneously, Buckingham asserts the omnipresence of providence and holds out for the efficacy of an individual's actions. […] The Duke's dilemma rests in his desire to hold out for some form of human agency while he is unwilling to assert his independence of God's way" (Kamps 1996: 116).

What is not overtly stated in the play is that the human agency that Buckingham fears sealed his doom may not reside entirely with Wolsey, as he thinks, but also (actually mostly) with the king. That this is the case seems to be indicated by Act I, Scene 2 when Wolsey himself somehow stands on trial in front of the king. Right before Buckingham's pre-trial, the Queen informs the king of the danger of a mutiny against royal authority because of the too high taxes imposed on the people by the Cardinal. Wolsey defends himself saying that he is "traduc'd by ignorant tongues, which neither know/ My faculties nor person, yet will be/ The chronicles of my doing" (I.2.72-74). Under the circumstances, the text presents an "alternative way of handling historical evidence" (Kamps 1996: 113): the king – who must not have been so bothered by the newly-levied taxes since they were meant to cover the costs of his expensive wars with France – clings to the fact that there is no historical precedent for such taxation, so it should be revoked; still, he would not punish the cardinal on the basis of slander. The utter contrast that is thus set between two successive trial scenes – Buckingham's and Wolsey's – based on the evaluation of the same kind of evidence seems to suggest that the king is perfectly aware of the way in which the law should be applied to do justice, but "Henry's basis for justice is not truth, justice, or law – despite Henry's attempts to appear otherwise. Henry's basis is his own will" (Wegemer 2000: 5).

Wolsey will be eventually condemned and banished but on the basis of a different kind of evidence: his own letters that speak for themselves. Henry has a very interesting way of handling Wolsey's case: he does frown, but he does not accuse him directly; he asks him questions about his loyalty to the crown and, when the cardinal, unaware of the fact that the evidence he himself provided the king with is in fact against him, claims he is a devoted subject, he simply hands him the package of letters to read them and to discover that he is already doomed. As long as the king could benefit from the cardinal's actions (as it was the case with enforced taxation), the latter did not fear that he might be brought down by his enemies at the court. Yet, the king cannot forgive Wolsey's being against his choice of Anne Bullen as his new wife. So he bars the cardinal's privileged access to royal authority and leaves him an easy prey to the rival aristocratic faction (e.g. Norfolk, Suffolk and the Earl of Surrey). Wolsey's adieu speech to Cromwell reveals him grown penitent as he has come to regret having sacrificed his moral integrity and devoted himself too much to earthly matters just to retain the king's favour: "Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal/ I serv'd my king, he would not in mine age/ Have left me naked to my enemies" (III.2.455-457). Like Buckingham, he admits his mistakes, his not having governed properly his behaviour and claimed "greatness not by blood" and he asks for forgiveness – which could be said to be at least partly granted when Griffith and then the Queen acknowledge, nonetheless, that, in his case, extravagance, ambition and appetite for power were counterbalanced by "governed generation through largesse" manifest in his founding two universities (Glimp 1999: 14). The King, though guilty of malice (in Buckingham's trial) and of acting as his interest dictates him in his relation to his subjects (Wolsey), will *never* do that. His conversation with Cranmer before the latter's trial reveals him best as a shrewd and self-aware

politician: when Cranmer tells the king that he knows himself to be true and honest and that he trusts he can prove that in the trial, despite Gardiner's malicious accusations, the king, who has already made up his mind about the role Cranmer could play in the divorce crisis, puts more pressure on him and draws Cranmer's attention to the fact that justice and truth are not always essential in a trial (V.1.130-134). His political lesson on "how malicious and powerful people can easily corrupt the legal process" (Wegemer 2000: 7) culminates in his suggesting to Cranmer that "Thy truth and thy integrity is rooted/ In us, thy friend" (V.1. 114-115).

Strangely, though Delevrancea endeavours to put forth the image of Stephen as an all-righteous king, the only trial-like scenes in *Apus de soare [Sunset]* prove that, in essence, the Moldavian monarch is not so different from the English one: like Henry, Stephen considers himself synonymous with justice and truth. The difference is that whereas Shakespeare does not seem to suggest that there is anything divine in Henry's ways, Delavrancea explicitly makes Stephen God's instrument on earth; so, if the boyars are not truthful to their king and to the vow of allegiance they pledged to him, they will be punished in the name of divine justice. At first, Ulea, Drăgan and Stavăr's treacherous plans is revealed to the king in a manner that reminds of both Buckingham's and Wolsey's trials, i.e., by oral testimony. Oana, the king's illegitimate daughter, overhears a conversation of the boyars in which they express their disagreement with the king's decision of leaving the throne to his son Bogdan, and their intention of offering the crown to Ştefăniță, the king's grand-son (Act II, Scene 6). Oana's testimony in a private discussion with Stephen is taken into account but not taken for granted. Just as Henry plays a cat-and-mouse game with Wolsey before passing his final judgment with a mere frown and gesture, Stephen too fixes his eyes upon the boyars and teases them, asking imperiously for them to attend a ceremony the purpose of which he will not disclose. Like Henry, he interrogates them about their loyalty: "Who loves me should stand by me. Isn't that so, Steward Drăgan?" (Act III, Scene 8, 1992: 61, my translation). But when the boyars defy his will openly by instigating the crowd to shout out Ştefăniță's name, in other words when evidence speaks for itself, Stephen, unlike Henry, will not waste his time with a simulacrum of justice, but takes the sword and, with one strike, he gives the sentence – "guilty" – and carries it out in defence of his will which he identifies with God's in a triumph of providentialism.

It is interesting to remark that the trial scenes, which suggest a breach in the order of things, hence a crisis situation, relate, in both plays, directly to the issue of succession. The Surveyor called to testify to Buckingham's treason says that the Duke was heard to say that if the king "should without issue die", he will "make the sceptre his" (I.2.133-134). That indicates that a keyword of the play is "issue". Henry's every action, whether lawful or unlawful, is meant to strengthen his position and to secure a Tudor heir to the throne of England. The life of his royal spouse – Katharine and, later, Anne – and of his court members – Buckingham, Wolsey, More, Cranmer – depends on that as they become pawns in Henry's ruthless but legitimate battle for power and succession. By far its most unfortunate victim is Queen Katharine, and Shakespeare takes his time to draw her portrait in different hypostases. When she first appears in the play, she assumes the role of the people's advocate to draw her royal husband's attention to the effects of the taxation policy 'his' Wolsey has been implementing. Her judgment of this matter as well as of the evidence in Buckingham's trial reveals her as the voice of reason, as she easily sees through people's actions (Wolsey's and the Surveyor's), and she diplomatically tries to influence the judicial procedures towards truth and justice. The trial in which she stands as the defendant sets her in utter contrast with the plaintiff, Henry. There are a few aspects that have to be taken into consideration in this respect. Henry does not clearly reveal his intentions from the very beginning. He tries to angrily stop the rumours about the divorce (II.1.147-153) (and lets Wolsey take the blame for it again – II.1.161-163) only to soon summon the cardinals and initiate the legal proceedings for the divorce. The fact that he had evoked in Wolsey's trial over taxation the lack of a historical and legal precedent does not seem to prevent

him, when it suits him, to try to find alternatives that would allow him to reach his goal. "In the legal procedure against Katharine (…), law, church, and history all fail the King, leaving him to his own ingenious devices. […] Therefore, what is required, if the divorce is to take place, is an act of innovation. Traditional legal avenues must be abandoned in favour of unknown territories" (Kamps 1996: 116, 117). So, even before the trial, he has Wolsey prepare his case by asking the opinions of scholars from the universities on the divorce matter ("a precedent of wisdom" – II.2.85). Moreover, for the sake of the appearance of fairness of the trial proceedings, he has Cardinal Campeius, a "just and learned priest" (II.2.96), come from Rome. All these measures are meant to convince the world and especially "the Spaniard, tied by blood and favour to [the queen]" – i.e. Emperor Charles V – that the trial is "just and noble" (II.2.91). He even speaks about the queen in the highest terms calling her "the queen of earthly queens" endowed with "rare qualities, sweet gentleness", "meekness saint-like, wife-like government, obeying in command" (II.4.137-141). But the Queen, who has "the authority of history and custom on her side" (Kamps 1996: 117), will not be deceived, and she pleads her case convincingly when summoned at the Blackfriars: not only does she defend the validity of her marriage with Henry by invoking the great historical figures who authorised it, namely Henry VII and Ferdinand of Spain, but she also proves she was "a true and humble wife/ at time to [Henry's] will conformable" (II.4.23-24). She asks for "right and justice" and she doubts the integrity of her judges, so she appeals to the judgment of the Pope himself. Though hypocritically he tries to save face by praising Katharine's dignified attitude, Henry is obviously displeased with the result of the trial, hence he urges Wolsey and Campeius to take further action to convince the queen to return to the court. That and previous experiences with Wolsey acting to the best interest of the king determine Katharine to distrust the cardinals: while claiming to be just a "housewife" of "weak wit", she actually proves the very opposite, a strong and sharp-minded queen who knows who the master-puppeteer actually is (III.1.98-101). Act IV, Scene 2 finally shows her again a noble and tragic figure who will bear her misfortune with royal dignity. She dies a virtuous wife who loved her husband dearly, a good mother concerned about the fate of her daughter Mary whom she beseeches Henry to take care of, and a good mistress providing for her "wretched women" and "men" (III.2.131-158).

The queen's death in isolation and the masque with the six heavenly creatures who pay her homage and crown her, while drawing the attention to "the transitory character of earthly honours" (Wegemer 2000: 6), can be set in contrast with the splendour of Anne's coronation. The choric Gentlemen praise the beauty of the new queen and remark, very enthusiastically, that it attracts so many people at the ceremony that it is actually impossible to distinguish one face from another in the noisy crowd. Yet, there are hints in the coronation scene as well as earlier in the play that suggest that Anne is not "the goodliest woman/ That ever lay by man" (IV.1.72-73) and that also anticipate her fall. For instance, Act II, Scene 3 shows Anne deploring the fate of her queen whose long-standing reputation for virtue and majesty is on trial and she makes a comment that, obliquely, casts an ironic light on the king's character: "– after this process,/ To give her the avaunt! it is a pity/ Would move a monster" (II.3.9-11). And though she insists she "would not be a queen/ For all the world" (II.3.45-46), as soon as she is offered by the king the title of Marchioness of Pembroke, she accepts the "gift" and specifically asks it not to be mentioned to the queen, which justifies the Old Lady's banter focused on the issue of Anne's conscience and her accusations of hypocrisy (Wegemer 2000: 4). As for the crowd attending her coronation, one particular detail seems to arrest the attention, namely that most of the 'spectators' are "great-bellied women" – an allusion to Anne's being pregnant – whose "disruptive fecundity" (Glimp 1999: 15) generates disorder – an allusion to the national crisis the Reformation engendered. The 'theatrical show' they watch features many "stars indeed;/ and sometimes falling ones" (II.3.54), like Anne, Thomas More or Thomas Cromwell.

Delavrancea's play also introduces two of the women in Stephen's life, his wife, Maria Voichița, and his former mistress, Răreşoaia. Like Shakespeare's Katharine, Maria devotes her

time to domestic activities in which she is accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting in a setting that the playwright makes purposely rustic and idyllic: they weave, mend and wash linen stripes to be used as bandages for Stephen's wounded leg. Yet, unlike Katharine, Maria will never interfere in state affairs; though concerned about her husband's health and fearing the impact upon it of his decision of going to war, she can but beg him not to go or at least to take care of himself. And her love and care do not remain unappreciated by her royal husband who praises her (genuinely, not hypocritically, as Henry does in Katharine's case) as being very important in his life, next to his sword and his country (Act III, Scene 8). Maria has no rival among her ladies-in-waiting, as Katharine does; yet, there was a time when, like Katharine, she had to cope with her husband's infidelities and their memory is painfully revived by Stephen's affection for Oana, one of the young girls at the court who eventually turns out to be his illegitimate daughter. Furthermore, Oana appears to have a special relationship with Rareş, one of the king's bravest warriors, who is also Stephen's illegitimate son and Oana's brother, both born of a notorious relationship with a boyar's wife named Răreşoaia. Their origin is known only by the royal couple, and remains concealed from public ears. Stephen loves them both, yet he would not include Rareş in the line of succession as he does with his legitimate son, Bogdan. In the end, if there is a crisis related to the succession to the throne, that is not created by an illegitimate son's craving for power (Rareş will never think of that) or by the improperly regulated issue of succession, but by the ambitious aristocratic factions that hope to control the throne after the king's death. Yet, once this conflict is rightfully settled by the king, even though at the expense of his own life, there is a sense of optimism that breathes from the play beyond its tragic end: the vision of a united and independent land for which Stephen fought all his life will be taken over by his successors, as he announced in Act III, Scene 8.

As for Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, it ends in a definitely positive tone, as if ignoring the crisis-engendering controversies about the succession to the throne. Whether Henry is a good father or not does not seem to be much of a concern in the play. The reference to Mary, Henry's daughter by Queen Katharine, remains marginal in the text. As for Elizabeth, the Old Lady's words which announce her birth voice certain worries about the fact that the child is not the male heir the king expected: "And of a lovely boy: the God of Heaven/ Both now and ever bless her! – 'tis a girl,/ Promises boys hereafter" (V.1.165-167). But all fears are soon dissipated by Cranmer's prophecy at the christening ceremony. An expression of Shakespeare's nostalgia for that golden age that is Elizabeth I's reign, Cranmer's divinely inspired set speech is written in imitation of an ancient historian's practice by means of which fiction is passed for historical representation through rhetorical manipulation aimed at conveying a certain moral and political message (Kamps, 1996: 135). Insisting particularly on Elizabeth's linkage to her father, as she will show the same "princely graces" and "virtues that attend the good" (V.4.25; 27), the speaker presents the queen as a second Saba, placing her "within a biblical genealogy of nonpareil women" (Glimp 1999: 11), and foretells her becoming "a pattern to all princes living with her" (V.4.22). By the power of her personal example, she will manage to successfully govern her nation, which makes an ideal of economic and social harmony not so difficult to achieve. The references to the heir later on rising from the ashes of the "maiden phoenix" might be interpreted as an allusion to James I, thus fulfilling the function of legitimation of a monarch who did not come to the throne by birthright or by any legally-valid will of the queen. Nonetheless, as Ivo Kamps demonstrates, the image of the phoenix, otherwise "a common image of royal succession", when not accompanied by the identification of the monarch, remains just an abstraction: "its use may well flatter the king [i.e. James I], but it does not serve as a particularly powerful image of royal *legitimation* in either the prophetic (Henrician) or the historical (Jacobean) context" (1996: 132-133). So, without making a very specific ideological stand, the text perhaps aims at raising questions concerning the "cultural anxieties about gender" and authority in the patriarchal nation according to which crisis can be best avoided and government may be best handled by a male heir. (Aware of such prejudices, Elizabeth herself occasionally posed as the "androgynous martial maiden", Kamps 1996: 131).

Conclusion

The late fifteenth century and the early sixteenth century were troubled times during which the construction of national identity – whether in the Western or Eastern Europe – seemed to be indissolubly interwoven with the rise of absolute monarchy. The ways in which such kings as Henry VIII and Stephen the Great governed their own selves, their families, courts, and countries left major traces in the collective memory of their nations and acquired concrete expression in the literary works of writers who, irrespective of the age they belonged to, looked upon the theatre as being a cultural institution created for the entertainment, but, above all, for the education of the masses. Thus, plays like Shakespeare's (and Fletcher's) *Henry VIII* and Delavrancea's *Apus de soare [Sunset]*, dwelling on the assumption that crises bring out the best or the worst of people's character, hold up their fictitious mirrors to reflect more or less faithfully the image of two kings whose policies changed the destiny of their nations forever. Written at different times – the early seventeenth century and the early twentieth century, respectively, – in different corners of Europe and in different cultural contexts – the end of an age of prosperity and stability for the English and the beginning of a new troublesome one, marked by conflict between royalty and the Parliament, and the militant movement of Romanian intelligentsia for a united Romania –, these 'histories' rhetorically manipulate historical material to more or less explicit ideological and aesthetic ends. In *Henry VIII*, the representation of history with the methods of historiographical research ends up in political and aesthetic ambiguity that "stem[s] directly from the playwrights' refusal to mould their materials into a dramatically and ideologically coherent (Tudor) version of the reign of Henry VIII" (Kamps, 1996: 108). Historigraphical pluralism and polyphony eventually leave the play "without a clear protagonist or 'great man', and without the presence of a stabilizing concept of providence" (Kamps 1996: 103). In *Apus de soare [Sunset]*, there is no room for ambiguity in ideological terms: aimed at arousing national pride and, with it, the awareness of belonging to a strong Christian nation, the play subtly advances the idea of unity by having all its characters spin around one central figure, that of the patriot and fervently Orthodox king, Stephen of Moldavia. And if there is a certain sense of aesthetic ambiguity in Delavrancea's play resulting from the combination of realist, romantic and symbolist elements, this is also eventually dissolved in the forging of a new type of historical drama on the Romanian stage (the poetic/symbolist type). For all these differences, however, going beyond the peculiarities of the historical figures taken as sources of inspiration, Shakespeare's and Delavrancea's plays belong in the same framework: the lore of the absolute king, the Renaissance monarch who would have no limits imposed to his power, whether by his noblemen or by the church, who lives life to the full by his own rules and proves his strength in causing or solving crisis situations that shape up national consciousness.

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