

Attila Kiss. *Kettős anatómia Shakespeare színpadán. Angol reneszánsz tragédiák a kora újkorban és ma* [Double Anatomy on Shakespeare's Stage: English Renaissance Tragedies in the Early Modern Period and Today], Szeged Humanities Press, 2024, 372 pp.

A previously neglected aspect of Shakespeare's work is scrutinized via the form of revenge tragedies and the concept of *double anatomy* by Attila Kiss's *Kettős anatómia Shakespeare színpadán. Angol reneszánsz tragédiák a kora újkorban és ma* [Double Anatomy on Shakespeare's Stage: English Renaissance Tragedies in the Early Modern Period and Today], published in 2024 by the Szeged Humanities Press. The Hungarian-language volume examining English Renaissance tragedies is a significant and novel contribution to the field of Shakespeare research in Hungary, altering the canonical tradition of Hungarian drama and theater history.

Attila Kiss is a university professor and head of the Department of English Studies at the University of Szeged, and cofounder of the Research Group for Cultural Iconology and Semiography. His research interests focus primarily on the possibilities of post-semiotic interpretation of the similarities between the early modern and postmodern eras, the tragedies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and the specificities of English Renaissance theater. Attila Kiss is the author of seven books, including *Double Anatomy in Early Modern and Postmodern Drama*¹ and *Contrasting the Early Modern and the Postmodern Semiotics of Telling Stories: Why We Perform Shakespeare's Plays Differently*². The present volume results from more than twenty years of dedicated research on the topic and is the book version of Attila Kiss's dissertation for the title of doctor of the

¹ See Attila Kiss's related and earlier research on *double anatomy* in Attila Kiss, *Double Anatomy in Early Modern and Postmodern Drama*. Szeged: JATE Press, 2010. Available at <https://publicatio.bibl.u-szeged.hu/5092/>

² See Attila Kiss's related and earlier research on his interpretation of the theoretical foundations of the post-semiotics of the subject and the analysis of the early modern self in Attila Kiss, *Contrasting the Early Modern and the Postmodern Semiotics of Telling Stories: why we Perform Shakespeare's plays differently today*. Lewiston, N.Y.; Queenston, Ont.; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011. Available at <https://publicatio.bibl.u-szeged.hu/5088/>

For further elaboration on *double anatomy*, see Attila Kiss's definition from his above-mentioned book *Contrasting the Early Modern and the Postmodern Semiotics of Telling Stories*. *Double anatomy* is "a simultaneously corporeal and mental dissection [which] tests the thresholds of meaning, knowledge and identity" (128) and "a twofold expansive inwardness which connects the early modern and the postmodern on the two respective ends of the period of modernity" (184).

Hungarian Academy of Sciences. With philologically detailed methodology and extensive footnotes, the study explores the interpretive tradition of anatomical representation by creating a dialogue between the epistemological uncertainties, the intellectual traditions, and the social practice of the emblematic theater of the early modern period and the postmodern era.

The volume is the first publication in the *Litterae Humaniores* series of the Szeged Humanities Press, a scientific publishing house founded in 2024, affiliated with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Szeged. The excellent quality of the monograph worthily represents the goal of the publisher to establish a creative forum for the various research traditions and intellectual workshops at the Faculty.³

The monograph's central organizing principle, as indicated by the title, is the practice of anatomy as represented by the semiotic and cultural-historical examination of English Renaissance drama and its contemporary theatrical adaptations. The concept of *double anatomy* sutures the Renaissance and postmodern theatrical practices in the author's interpretation and provides a new perspective, examining it as a kind of social laboratory (168). As a sensitive analyst, Attila Kiss points out that anatomical depiction in early modern dramas served not only the purpose of spectacle and sensation but also to express the epistemological crisis of the age. According to the author, this pre-dramatic theater in post-Reformation England at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries acted as a kind of social laboratory to bring to the stage the epistemological and religious doubts of the era. Therefore, the questions and representational techniques of the dramas examined in the book often used anatomy as an epistemological experiment (7).

Hence, the expression *double anatomy* in the title refers to the joint analysis of the material dimensions and the mental processes of the Shakespearean tragedy of consciousness (*tudatdráma*) such as *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Titus Andronicus*, as well as their contemporary adaptations and other plays such as Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Thus, the anatomical theater also serves as the representational logic of the emblematic theater, which reflected the social and religious discourses of the period by exploring and presenting the body on stage and at the same time in the form of the tragedy of consciousness

³ In 2025, the Szeged Humanities Press transformed into the Szeged University Press, available at: <https://szup.ek.szte.hu/index.php/szeged-university-press>

(John Bayley's term, 184). Attila Kiss uses semiotic and post-semiotic approaches and the concept of *double anatomy* as a *journey under the skin* confronting the reader and the theater spectator (60) to examine how the body, the subject and social discourses appear in the Shakespearean revenge tragedies and their cinematic and stage adaptations. In the postmodern era, anatomical representation gained popularity and influenced the contemporary theatrical representation of Renaissance tragedies. The book aims to explore the role of anatomical theater in Renaissance dramas and to show how these representational practices continue to live on in contemporary theater traditions by striving to bring English Renaissance tragedies closer to the Hungarian audience and to highlight their relevance in contemporary social and cultural discourses.

The notion *double anatomy* in the title also refers to the two main objectives of the volume. First, Attila Kiss highlights that the complex layers of meaning of English Renaissance tragedies can only be understood if we try to interpret the dramatic texts in the theatrical semiotic environment for which they were intended. Hence, the author proves that those early modern tragedies which are still marginalized, labelled as decadent, impression-seeking, incomprehensible by the literary canon, or obscured by Shakespeare, not simply satisfy the sensation-hungry needs of the audience of Shakespeare's time but also coherently address crucial philosophical-theological, and political dilemmas of the contemporary age (7). The volume highlights to what extent Hungarian theater practice has shown sensitivity to the strategies of the emblematic theater and the *double anatomy* appearing in tragedies since the 1990s. In the author's interpretation, the postmodern era has shown a renewed interest in experiments, performances, and exhibitions to examine the delicate boundary between life and death. The postmodern visitor penetrates the investigation of the "floating between life and death" via Gunther von Hagens's *Body Worlds* exhibitions, which attracted tens of millions and aimed to "democratize" anatomy again—that is, to turn it into a popular spectacle, with the same epistemological curiosity that fueled the interest that penetrated beneath the surfaces in early modern anatomical theaters and dramatic works (9).

Therefore, the other aim of the work is to demonstrate the presence of anatomy as a social practice in the analyzed plays, persistent in both the early modern and postmodern eras. The book reveals the contemporary processes, changes, beliefs, and traumas that led to the fact that, in addition to penetrating the mind, English Renaissance tragedy persistently brings to the stage the dis-

section of the body, the gaze penetrating under the skin, the all-encompassing presence of inward attention. The mighty power of this theatrical practice lies precisely in the fact that it crosses and makes permeable one of the most fundamental boundaries of culture, the boundary between the living and the dead. Many characters in English Renaissance tragedies appear in this liminal state, floating between life and death. The key concepts of the analyses are epistemological crisis, the emblematic density of meaning, floating of meaning and demetaphorization, Shakespeare and his contemporaries, English Renaissance drama, revenge tragedies, early modern and postmodern theater, adaptation, corporeal semiotics, post-semiotics, performance-centered drama interpretation, pre-dramatic theater, Renaissance emblematic theater, emblematic way of thinking, Reformation, epistemological and thanatological crisis, anatomy, and anatomical theater (8).

The cover of the monograph also follows the clear concept of the title, vividly presenting the dissection that regularly appears in the imagery of early modern tragedies, the depiction that penetrates under the skin and the surface of things, which was fueled by the epistemological curiosity to learn what lies deep within the physical structure, what separates the living from the dead, what gives the body's structure its harmony and what takes it away (8). The volume cover shows one of the stations of the self-skinning corpus from the work of Juan Valverde de Amusco (*Historia de la Composición del Cuerpo Humano*, Rome, 1556, 169). Following Attila Kiss's argument, this image is a reference to the tendency that, after the anatomical discourses of the Renaissance era had penetrated beneath the surface of the human body with ceaseless effort, likewise the human corpus had to be covered entirely with a new ideological skin, that is, with the newly formed discourses of rationalism and the Cartesian ego at the beginning of modernity. Accordingly, with the crisis of modernity, revenge dramas may have come to the fore again due to the similarity of the interpretive crises of the early modern and the contemporary postmodern era. The volume highlights the similarity between the early modern and postmodern eras affected by the struggle with a transitional epistemological crisis (325). The cover image metaphorically also illustrates how we perceive the author's world of thought and the development of his research agenda. After the thorough theoretical introduction, Attila Kiss guides the reader through the six chapters along the intellectual arc of *double anatomy*. The author's impressive scientific workshop-creating activity in the field of theater semiotics and iconology results from two decades of dedicated research that unfold before the reader's eyes through the act of reading.

Structurally, the volume is characterized by faultless logical conclusions. The author presents correlations extremely lucidly with an apparatus of abundant footnotes helping the understanding. Perfect precision and flow of expression in style are valid for the book. The connections among the eight chapters including the Introduction and the Conclusions are logically impeccable. In addition, the illustrations and photographs included in the volume also aid visual understanding and add to the image-text readings and interpretations. The Works-Cited literature at the end of the volume can serve as an excellent source for later research.

After the theoretical and historical overviews of Chapter Two, “Anatómia és identitás: a kora újkori szubjektivitás kialakulásának nyomai” [“Anatomy and Identity: Traces of the Formation of Early Modern Subjectivity”], and Chapter Three, “Látványosságok a társadalom interaktív mezsgyéin” [“Spectacles at the Interactive Margins of Society”], Chapter Four, “Az emblematikus gondolkodásmód és az emblematikus színház,” introduces the issue of “The Emblematic Way of Thinking and the Emblematic Theater.” This part focuses on the inter-related development of the English Renaissance emblematic and anatomical theater and the reasons for their popularity. According to Attila Kiss, the revenge tragedy was the most sensitive to the changes and traumas caused by the Reformation. In Chapter Five, “Élet és halál között a kora modern tragédiákban” [“Between Life and Death in Early Modern Tragedies”], dealing with the semiotics of the Reformation, the author analyzes how English Renaissance tragedies apply the technique of demetaphorization of the body images on stage to enhance a peculiar stage effect and focus on the *Titus-phenomenon*. The *Titus-phenomenon* covers the new, corporeal semiotics introduced by the Reformation. Hence, the representations of the epistemological and thanatological crisis organize the emblematic image system of *Titus Andronicus* (9). As a pragmatic example for the *Titus-phenomenon*, the author’s interpretation gives a new meaning to Lavinia’s shocking and incomprehensible tragedy. According to Attila Kiss, via demetaphorization, Lavinia’s body, following the emblematic theater representations, becomes a *manicula*-like guide signpost that helps the father, Titus, to seek revenge by offering direction in every sense. Hence, the volume provides a new interpretation of the famous Peacham drawing from the Longleat manuscript (204-206) by arguing that the postmodern era has also shown a renewed and growing interest in experiments, performances and exhibitions to examine the boundary separating life and death. Postmodern sub-

jectivity theory is scrutinized via the works of three contemporary playwrights: Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964), Heiner Müller's *Hamletmaschine* (1977) and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* (1979).

In addition to scrutinizing *Titus Andronicus*, the author offers a comparative analysis of four Stuart-era tragedies to demonstrate traces of this anatomizing interest in Chapter Six, "Szenvedélyek anatómiája: végletes kísérletek és újítások a Stuart-drámában" ["The Anatomy of the Passions: Extreme Experiments and Innovations in the Stuart Drama"]. The final chapter, "Kettős anatómia: a tudat boncolásától a testanatómiájáig a *Macbeth*ben" ["Double Anatomy: From the Dissection of Consciousness to the Anatomy of the Body in *Macbeth*"], tests and concludes the theories mentioned above in a detailed analysis of six Hungarian stage productions of *Macbeth* to demonstrate the development of the drama of consciousness from the change of communist regime in the 1990s to the millennium through the plays staged in the following Hungarian theaters: (1) Szegedi Nemzeti Színház 1994, (2) Vígszínház 1995, (3) Győri Nemzeti Színház 1996, (4) Katona József Színház 2008, (5) Vörösmarty Mihály Színház 2011, and (6) Maladype Színház 2013 (291). These Hungarian stagings symbolize the spatial management, pictorial complexity, and emblematic representational logic of the early modern English theater and test the perspective of the drama of consciousness, which focuses on mental processes, to a corporeal, skin-penetrating double anatomy, also evoking the imagery and technique of autopsy theaters and modern anatomical exhibitions. The volume concludes with an analysis of the Maladype Theater's production *Macbeth/Anatomy* as a perfect example of the *double anatomy* perspective logic, which is the foundational organizing principle of the volume (8–10). In the conclusion part, Attila Kiss promises to open the perspectives of his research agenda towards critical posthumanism with ecocritical sensitivity, which he could not undertake due to the limits of the present book, as the author explains the problems of defining the boundaries of postmodernity in footnote 81 (44).

Kettős anatómia Shakespeare színpadán. Angol reneszánsz tragédiák a kora újkorban és ma [*Double Anatomy on Shakespeare's Stage: English Renaissance Tragedies in the Early Modern Period and Today*] is a significant and high-quality contribution to the critical reception of revenge dramas which occupy a neglected place in the tradition of English Renaissance drama and rethinks the canon of Hungarian theater semiotics and history. As a result of two decades of dedicated research, an outstandingly high-quality volume has been written by

Attila Kiss, which can be of interest to researchers of Shakespeare and English Renaissance tragedy in particular and interested readers in general.

Lívía Klára SZÉLPÁL

Works Cited

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