

SOME ADDITIONAL NOTES ON SHAKESPEARE

His great tragedies from a Slovene perspective

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For Maja, Anja and Hana

Abstract

In the first chapter of this study the author stresses the importance of literature and Shakespeare's plays for our age. Although the enigma of Shakespeare's life still concerns many scholars it is relevant only as far as the solutions of some biographical details from Shakespeare's life influence the interpretation of his plays. In the section on feminism the focus of the author's attention is the changed role of women in the present day society as compared to previous centuries. In the final part of the article the role of the main female characters in Shakespeare's great tragedies is discussed. The author suggests that so far their importance has been underestimated and that Shakespeare left some of them open to different interpretations. *Hamlet* is definitely one of the most popular Shakespeare's plays in Slovenia and in addition to "classical" interpretations of this drama we have seen during the past two decades a number of experimental productions, done by both Slovene and foreign theatrical companies. In Appendix (1) the title of this paper is briefly discussed and the author's work on Shakespeare is sketched; Appendix (2) presents a rap song on *Hamlet* written in English by a Slovene author. The song was used in the Glej Experimental Theatre production (*Hamlet/Packard*, Ljubljana, 1992).

INTRODUCTION

In the present article I deal with some topics which have been of particular interest to me during the past few years. The subject matter of my study includes the period of the last twenty years and I have tried to see it from my own point of view (as a theatre goer and critic) as well as from that of the Slovene reading public and theatre audiences. The main issues discussed in the article are the following:

- Does literature still matter in the modern world of computer technology and globalization? Why Shakespeare?
- The enigma of Shakespeare's life - particularly with regard to his plays
- Modern feminism in theory and in artistic practice (Erica Jong, Margaret Atwood). The role of women in Elizabethan England.
- The function of female characters in Shakespeare's great tragedies:
 - *Hamlet*: - Gertrude, Ophelia

- Theatrical experiments with *Hamlet* in Slovenia (during the last two decades)
- Some recent visits of foreign companies performing *Hamlet* in Slovenia
- *Othello*: Desdemona
- *King Lear*: Goneril and Regan, Cordelia
- *Macbeth*: Lady Macbeth
- Conclusion
- Appendix 1: The explanation of the title of my paper and a brief sketch of my work on Shakespeare and on his plays
- Appendix 2: "Hamlet Rap" (taken from the performance *Hamlett/Packard*, performed by the Glej Experimental Theatre in Ljubljana, on 3 April 1992)

The sources for the accompanying notes are not mentioned again in the final bibliography, but they will hopefully also provide - besides the list of Works Used - some useful information related to problems mentioned in the text. I chose to present the innovations related to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, because it is certainly the most popular among Shakespeare's plays produced in Slovenia and because this play still catches the greatest attention of our theatre directors and theatre-public, and often of foreign producers too. The rap song on *Hamlet* shows both the limitations and novelties visible in such experimental performances. Briefly, I have tried to open in the article some questions which have bothered me, and I let readers draw their own conclusions on these issues.

DOES LITERATURE MATTER? WHY SHAKESPEARE?

In September 2004 the European Society for the Study of English organized a conference in Zaragoza, Spain, at which one of the panels was entitled "Why Shakespeare?" Although the initial statement announcing the panel ran as follows: "Whether we like it or not, Shakespeare remains an international icon,"¹ the abstract then continues with a number of questions regarding this statement which suggests that Shakespeare's importance as "the world's greatest dramatist (or psychologist, or moralist or poet) has been questioned by recent "cultural materialists" so that this concept of greatness "no longer seems explanatory".

This kind of uncertainty - not only about Shakespeare but generally about the canon of literature - is not new and similar questions have been raised before. For example, Gary Taylor in his book *Reinventing Shakespeare* (1998) asks the question whether Shakespeare should not be treated mainly as a mere technician of the English language. In addition he is sceptical about the ethical value of Shakespeare's role of an influential playwright in the Elizabethan society because the dramatist might even be seen as a real conservative, one who helped the existing regime to remain in power and who prevented the occurrence of social and political revolution in England. Taylor

¹ Catherine Belsey. »Panels. Why Shakespeare?«. *The European English Messenger* XII. 2 (2003): 14.

also suggests that since the nineteenth century Shakespeare is the author who has been most often used by the monarchy and the British government as an adjunct of empire to help it annex half of the Globe. It is understandable that such dubious statements have been met with many counter attacks not only by English critics and literary historians, but also world-wide. Most critics still believe in Shakespeare's literary greatness, which cannot be diminished by such provocative questions and statements. In the 1990s the deconstruction of literary works became fashionable and the question arises whether the attempts to demolish Shakespeare may not really expose the imaginative inadequacy of Shakespeare's critics as well as their own self conceit.²

It is well known that Shakespeare was greatly admired by many English as well as foreign writers, as e.g. Samuel Johnson, Laurence Sterne, the Early and the Late romantics, Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf, Robert Graves, W. H. Auden, Iris Murdoch, and others. On the Continent he was acclaimed as a great dramatist – among others - by J. W. Goethe, August Friedrich Schiller, Alexander S. Pushkin etc., as well as by many philosophers, e.g. by G. W. F. Hegel, F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger etc. Let me mention here that Shakespeare has also been greatly admired by many Slovene authors, among others by the greatest Slovene poet France Prešeren (1800-1849), who specifically mentions the Bard and two of his characters (Romeo and Juliet) in his poems (Moravec 43-139). Shakespeare is also "connected" with the greatest Slovene prose writer Ivan Cankar (1876-1918), who was among the first Slovene translators of Shakespeare and who translated Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into Slovene in 1899. From a historical perspective it is also interesting to note that one of the first Slovene dramatists, Anton Tomaž Linhart (1756-1795), even wrote a play following Shakespeare's concept of dramatic writing (*Miss Jenny Love*, printed in Augsburg, Germany, in 1780). It is of no less importance that Linhart strongly objected to adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (e.g. the substitution of a tragic end with a happy ending) that were quite common in that time. Prešeren and Cankar are the greatest names among Slovene authors who admired Shakespeare until the beginning of the twentieth century, but there are many other Slovene authors and critics who also wrote highly about Shakespeare's plays and/or tried their hand at translating them. Since the beginning of the twentieth century hardly a year goes by in which a new translation of one of Shakespeare's plays does not appear, not to speak about theatrical performances of his plays, which form the core programme of all Slovene professional theatres.

Let us ask ourselves the question referred to in the title of this chapter: should Shakespeare's plays be still read today? One must admit that the habit of reading works of fiction was on the decline already in the twentieth century and that questions regarding the importance of fiction for average readers have also been asked by many European critics and artists. Thus, for example, Rüdiger Ahrens and Laurenz Volkmann point out in the Introduction to their collection of essays *Why Literature Matters* (1996) that although the title "lacks the question mark, it does not lose its interrogative quality. It attempts to ask the reader for a justification of literature in a world of materialistic addictions" (Ahrens 1). The contributors to this collection of essays advocate the view that in modern times the importance of literature for spiritual quality

² See e.g. Peter Conrad, »Bringing down the Bard,« *The Observer* 21 Jan 1990: 25.

of man's life has not been diminished, but that the reading habits are threatened today more than ever before. Among contributors to this collection of essays who provide persuasive argumentation *for* reading literature is the literary theoretician Wolfgang Iser. He stresses in his essay that literature is cultural capital which helps to establish people their own identity; it also forms a "subversive noise" in our complacent, technologically oriented world, and it enlarges our experience (13-21). Rüdiger Ahrens asserts that literature provides "some common ground" which has to exist among individuals in all societies. Its aesthetic, intracultural as well intercultural functions are particularly valuable, because literature represents a fictional extension of reality, of the "human mind and heart" (61). Ahrens also refers in his essay to Terry Eagleton who sees the value of literature in its influence upon any human perception of reality, because its aesthetic quality makes accessible "the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarified domain of conceptual thought" (51). In the multicultural world, asserts Theo D'haen in his essay "American Identities and Postcolonial Theories" (183-96), literary authors form a dialectical relationship between the minority and the majority, not only in a particular society but also between nations and races, they create an open dialogue which transcends ethnic and national boundaries. D'haen believes that therefore nowadays "a de-essentialized canon" of literary works *can* be accepted by many readers throughout the world. As we can see these views strongly support the value of literature for our society. It is evident that Shakespeare's plays definitely embody most positive features mentioned in these essays and therefore they are still generally acceptable and recognized as ranking among the greatest artistic and spiritual achievements throughout the world, which is also due to their high communicative value. Shakespeare's plays are often said to present the universality of the Renaissance, humanistic view of truth and beauty, which many people still share today, although a number of basic, primarily artistic foundations have been changed.

On the other hand there exist today a number of external circumstances which have a negative influence on the position of "serious literature", published in a book form, in the age of electronic reproduction. Among reasons for the contemporary decline of interest in literature a well-known German critic, Sigrid Löffler, asserts, that in modern times literature has become demythologized and market oriented, and wholly dependent on media propaganda (Löffler 99-114). What used to be read and studied as "serious literature" has been replaced by fiction dealing primarily with love romances, "historical" biographies and crime fiction. The culture of reading has been in decline for decades and it has been replaced to a large extent by mass media (television, films, and internet).

The list of film directors who have successfully transplanted Shakespeare's plays on film is very long. Let me mention only some of the better-known ones: Orson Welles, Roman Polanski, Peter Brook, Franco Zeffirelli, Rodney Bennett, Akira Kurosawa, Grigori Kozintsev, John Madden, Kenneth Branagh, Michael Almereyda, Al Pacino etc. This is an excellent and still not much explored field of new interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. Nowadays "cinemas" are often our own sitting-rooms, although by not going to see a play in the theatre we are definitely robbed of a direct experience with actors as well as the communal spirit provided by the audience.

In Germany, for example, until the middle of the twentieth century the reading of fiction was an important part of man's education as well as of his free-time activities, but nowadays it has been pushed down in this scale to the tenth place. According to Löffler an average reading time of people in Germany is between 15-20 minutes daily, whereas the Germans listen to the radio for an hour and watch the television for two and a half hours daily (Löffler 108). In 1997 the magazine *Newsweek* published an article stating that Shakespeare is likely to survive in the United States only with the help of Hollywood, because Shakespeare's plays are no longer on the reading list of some American universities.³ In England teachers in secondary schools even suggested that they should boycott tests, because they discovered that pupils could get more than half of the points necessary to pass the final exam even without reading one complete work written by Shakespeare.⁴ A survey done in schools in England shows that pupils no longer read literature for enjoyment, they only read what they are obliged to read in order to get high grades.⁵ The conclusion can undoubtedly be that most damage is already done at schools where pupils should become accustomed to reading fiction and not just to read works prescribed by the syllabus. Besides, sometimes teachers use fiction simply in order to practice grammar without paying any attention to the artistic value of the the text.

The situation in Slovenia and in other European countries is probably very much the same as it is in England. The education authorities (together with their advisers from the university!) practice the same policy, according to which the pragmatic approach to learning – and to literature – prevails. Therefore it is sheer pretence, if the educational advisers “naively” ask the reading public what our schools and parents (!) have done to improve the functional literacy and reading ability in Slovenia and if they complain that the motivation for reading in Slovenia has decreased.⁶ If teachers of foreign languages (and literatures) in our secondary schools are strongly advised that they should not allow pupils to read extracts (individual scenes) from longer works of fiction (e.g. novels, plays), because “such passages have no characteristics of literature and diminish the value of literature” and besides “they are harmful” (*sic!*) for readers (*ib.*), the easiest way for pupils (and teachers) is to obtain summaries of works prescribed and – as in England – obtain a high enough number of points to pass the final examination. It is the “points”, which are important and not reading habits, or a broader intellectual power or emotional experience which pupils should get at school. The greatest professional and moral responsibility for this situation obviously lies on such “advisers”!⁷ There is no professional or scholarly evidence for the above mentioned conclusions regarding read-

³ Anon. *Delo (Newsweek)* 17 Mar. 1997: 9. – (Some of the articles printed in the main Slovene newspaper *Delo* are translations - or sometimes shortened versions - of articles which had been published in foreign press, newspapers, magazines etc.).

⁴ Anon. *Delo (The Guardian)* 10 Mar. 2003: 12.

⁵ Anon. *Delo (The Independent)* 26 Oct. 2005: 15.

⁶ See e.g. Aleš Čakš, »Samo učitelji ne zmorejo vsega,« *Delo* 7 Sept. 2005: 3; Aleš Čakš, »Kako naj šola razvija širšo pismenost,« *Delo* 7 Sept. 2005: 13; Aleš Čakš, »Motivacija za branje upada,« *Delo* 19 Sept. 2005: 11 etc.

⁷ As regards the teaching of English and American literature at our secondary schools there is no doubt that this responsibility lies with the chief advisor for this subject, who is at the same time (what an irony!) the President of the Slovene Reading Society.

ing short scenes from long prose works (or drama), particularly when we speak about teaching foreign literature to pupils in secondary schools in which English is not their mother tongue but who have learned English for eight (or even more) years. It is better that pupils read extracts than if they do not read at all. For how it is then possible that leading publishing houses in England and in America still publish anthologies of English and American literature in which some selections (extracts) from novels or long epic poems are also given, even though the mother tongue of these readers is English? Our pupils, who learn English for eight (or even more years) and who master it fairly well, should be given a chance to get to know about the main cultural achievements – including literature – of English speaking nations (in English) before they finish their secondary schooling. Unfortunately now even students who decide to study English at the university begin their studies with a very small experience in reading literature.⁸ The so-called “modern” approach to teaching literature(s) in secondary schools is obviously a massive failure, something which has done serious damage in education to thousands of our secondary school graduates; the European Sycoraxes prefer to educate future Calibans rather than follow Prospero to aspire for the magic world of Ariel. Yes, our pupils may know enough English to lead them to a brave new technological, computarized world, but they are not led at school to experience and appreciate the world of imagination, higher levels of spirituality, emotional enjoyment of fiction. Our pupils are “brainwashed” by the present school programmes (including teaching of foreign literatures), they are not offered enough possibility and encouragement to be interested in reading works of art, which would also help them form their own ethical and moral principles, understand better other nations or gain empathy for emotional problems of other people. Until the moral and professional responsibility of teachers who advocate such programmes is established, and until these programmes are changed, we cannot expect young generations to improve either their functional literacy or their habits of reading. Shakespeare’s works may really become an obsolete reminiscence of past times. The introduction of new ways in teaching literatures in secondary schools should be based on aims which would include high aesthetic standards and not just an average skill in reading ability. Novelty for the sake of novelty in secondary schools is often connected with self-promotion of teachers and (university) advisers (and whatever other benefits it may bring) and not with broader humanistic education and its ideals,

⁸ On 11 October 2005, I asked our second year (sophomore) students studying English language and literature at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, to answer an anonymous questionnaire about their reading of Shakespeare’s plays in the secondary school. The total number of answers was 101 (100%). Only 11 students (10.89%) read a play in English while still attending the secondary school; 81 (81.19%) read a play in Slovene; 71 (70.29%) read some extracts from one of Shakespeare’s plays (either in Slovene or in English); 91 (90.09%) saw the production of one of Shakespeare’s plays either in the theatre, or in the cinema or on the television. The results are not good, particularly if we consider the fact that among students who decided to take English as their university study only (10.89%) had read a play in English before entering the university; secondly, that reading a play in English was not planned (or at least suggested) although pupils had learned English for 8 years (in elementary and secondary schools); thirdly, all (!) of our secondary pupils were supposed to read at least one play written by Shakespeare (in Slovene) as a part of their regular programme, but (according to their answers) only 80.19% read it. This brings us to the conclusion that our secondary school pupils can pass the final exam (like pupils in England) without reading one of Shakespeare’s plays or even without reading some scenes from them.

which should be one of the basic contents in language and literary courses during the final two years of secondary schooling.

There are, in spite of the above, also some hopeful signs for the advancement of drama and its social relevance today. We know that plays are fully realized only when they are staged (or at least filmed). This point distinguishes drama from other literary genres (although film versions of novels, which have also become popular during the past few decades, are – in my view – also the sign that there is a shortage of new, well-written plays). The presentation of a play in the theatre provides the theatre public with a direct, immediate physical and sensual experience. When seeing a play written by Shakespeare on the stage the audience is provided with an experience which is far more concrete and specific than when the play is only read. In Europe the theatre has been a popular art for centuries, and nowadays other, modern visual media, are also used for the advancement of drama. The audience is attracted to a theatrical performance not only due to its story, its character portrayals, dialogues, moral and intellectual issues raised in plays but because it is often also the result of the application of other arts used in theatrical performances (as e.g. music, choreography, mimics) and new technical means (the modern stage equipment, which makes possible new scenic designs, lighting etc.). However, in plays in which the word is still of a major importance its combination with other artistic fields is much more relevant than new technical achievements, although – generally speaking - all of these elements can provide the new totality of the audience's theatrical experience.

Plays treating serious subject are also staged in order to fulfil their socio-cultural function: "good" plays are not only pure entertainment but they also provide information, a kind of documentation of man's personal and social life, through which theatre-goers as individuals try to establish their own personal identity. Plays – or rather their theatrical productions - are often emotionally and philosophically disturbing, particularly when they aim to produce references to a contemporary situation, contemporary themes and problems, or are even adapted to them. In order to "provide something new" theatre and film directors sometimes reduce (or change) Shakespeare's text to such the extent that it is hardly recognizable. In such cases the production should be clearly announced as an adaptation of a play written by Shakespeare. Nevertheless, performances of Shakespeare's plays, in which the text is not essentially altered, are in Slovenia still very well attended and they prove that his plays as well as the dramatic genre are still relevant today.

THE ENIGMA OF SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE - PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO HIS PLAYS

Shakespeare's great tragedies were written between 1600 and 1606. They include his most famous plays: *Hamlet* (1600-01), *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1605), and *Macbeth* (1606). The dramatist created these plays between 1596 and 1606, when he also wrote *Romeo and Juliet* (1595-96) and *Julius Caesar* (1598-1600). This was a rather turbulent period, not only in Shakespeare's private life but also in English society as a whole. Among Shakespeare's personal tragic events, which happened to him during these years,

are often mentioned the death of his son Hamnet (in 1596) and that of his father John (in 1601). In the Elizabethan society this was the time of great political unrest: these were the final years of the reign of powerful and whimsical Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603). The unsuccessful attempt to shorten her rule which was prepared by her former lover, the Earl of Essex, ended with his surrender and his execution in 1601.

A new interpretation about Shakespeare's life in this decade was recently provided by two works written by Hildegard Hammerschmidt – Hummel, *Die verborgene Existenz des William Shakespeare* (2001), and by her study *William Shakespeare: Seine Zeit – Sein Leben – Sein Werk* (2003). She argues that the Earl of Essex was a close friend of Shakespeare and that his death must have deeply influenced Shakespeare. Hummel also assumes that the Earl of Essex was a prototype for Shakespeare's creation of Hamlet. The role of the Earl of Southampton, who also joined Essex's unsuccessful rebellion of February 1601, should also be mentioned here. He was condemned to death by "the Virgin Queen" but the sentence was later changed to life imprisonment. Southampton, who was most probably Shakespeare's literary patron and to whom Shakespeare is alleged to have dedicated his poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Lucrece* (1594), was released from prison after Queen Elizabeth's death, on the accession of King James I, in 1603. Shakespeare may himself have played a minor role in the above mentioned political uprising for his company produced on the day before the rising his play *Richard II*, possibly with the intention to influence the people of London to join the Earl of Essex.

Queen Elizabeth I ordered in her proclamation (16 May 1559) that licensers of plays should not allow plays with religious matter to be performed. Criticism of the existing (Protestant) religion was forbidden throughout Shakespeare's life, whereas criticism of the Catholicism, was allowed. Hildegard Hammerschmidt - Hummel tries to prove in her studies that Shakespeare was influenced in his religious views by his father's forbidden "old (Catholic) faith".⁹ She argues that the Catholic religion also prevailed in teaching at the Grammar School in Stratford, which Shakespeare attended. His father apparently objected to dogmatic Protestantism and as a result of his opposition to the new religion he was fined several times.

Another researcher, Clare Asquith (*Shadowplay*, 2005), also believes that Catholicism played an important role in Elizabethan England when royal subjects had to make a choice, "to follow their monarch or their God". Asquith thinks that due to its authoritarian rule England became a police state fearing threats from abroad and plotters at home. This seems to the author a good enough reason for Shakespeare - who loved his country and who was supported by dissident Catholic aristocrats - to react upon this political situation by a "coded" manner of writing, in which the plots of his plays, his characters and themes could be interpreted on different levels. "The coded layer" of topicality in his plays would be understood by the audiences, but it could be deniable by the playwright, due to his use of linguistic subtlety and complexity of discourse.

⁹ See also: David N. Beauregard and Dennis Taylor, *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004). - We should not forget Guy Fawkes, who led the Gunpowder Plot of Nov. 5, 1605, the conspiracy to assassinate King James I and the members of Parliament in retaliation for the increased severity of personal laws against Roman Catholics. These circumstances are possibly referred to by Gloucester in *King Lear* (1.2) and the Porter in *Macbeth* (2.3).

An astounding surmise in Hammerschmidt - Hummel's studies is her suggestion that Shakespeare spent his "lost seven youthful years" (usually referred to the period between 1584, when Shakespeare left Stratford, and 1592, when he reappears in London as a rising actor and about which very little has been known until now) at Collegium Anglicum at Reims, where he got his theological, historical and legal education. Besides, she assumes, during this period Shakespeare must have travelled widely in France and in Italy. The journeys could have provided him with knowledge about these countries as well as with fictional material about them, which he then so vividly presented in his plays. Even in 1964 the question about Shakespeare's "lost years" was still open to rather vague suggestions, for example, "During these lost years of Shakespeare's life he may have been an usher at a country school, a tutor in a noble household, a soldier in the Low Countries or a strolling player, learning his craft."¹⁰ Such speculations do not answer the question how Shakespeare obtained his wide knowledge, not to speak about the implications regarding the philosophical or religious interpretations of his plays. On the other hand, this new biographical investigation proves that it is still possible that this kind of research can yield new biographical and historical knowledge about Shakespeare and about his work. It is also interesting to note that these two authors completely disagree with the suggestion made by some historians, namely that the playwright might be regarded as a strong supporter of reactionary tendencies of English government. Such views, which have been briefly mentioned above, if they are generally accepted, will bring about new possibilities of interpretations regarding Shakespeare's plays, but the surmise regarding Shakespeare's religious views and their influence on his plays undoubtedly requires additional investigations.

The authorship of Shakespeare's plays is a topic, which is nowadays only seldom dealt with by serious scholars, but which is particularly liked by journalists who are less concerned about the historical truthfulness of their information than about the shock such a "discovery" might bring to the reading public. Doubts about Shakespeare's authorship of his plays are generally profitably used by newspapers and magazines with a wide circulation. It is true that during the past few centuries different names have been suggested as possible authors of Shakespeare's plays: as for example, Christopher Marlowe, sir Walter Raleigh, Robert Cecil Burgley, the earl of Derby, Edward de Vere, the earl of Oxford, Francis Bacon, Roger Manners, Henry Neville and even Queen Elizabeth.¹¹ Scepticism

¹⁰ J. L. Lyons and the Earl of Harewood, »Introduction« (Stratford-upon-Avon: n.p., 1964: 62).

¹¹ See, for example: Michael Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Brenda James and William Rubinstein, *The Truth Will Out* (Harlow: Longman, 2005).

- Sir Derek Jacobi, who also performed in the film version of *Hamlet* in the main role, presented the question surrounding the authorship of Shakespeare's plays on a video recording (*The Shakespeare Conspiracy*, Insight Media, New York, 2000), in which Edward de Vere is the frontman for W. Shakespeare. (Derek Jacobi performed in the role of Hamlet at the Ljubljana Summer Festival, 18 July 1973, when the Prospect Theatre (London) visited Ljubljana. The play was directed by T. Robertson, who changed the order of scenes and also omitted some scenes in the play.

- Among a number of articles published on Shakespeare's life in various newspapers and magazines in Slovenia let me mention only a few, e.g.: Radovan Kozmos, »Je bil Shakespeare krinka,« *Delo* 29 Aug. 1989: 9; Lindsay Griffiths, »Je bil Shakespeare le književni prevarant,« *Republika* 23 Aug. 1995: 12; Elvira Miše, »Biti ali ne biti William,« *Mag* 12 Oct. 2005:66-7, etc.

about Shakespeare's authorship of his plays has also been supported by some artists (who themselves did not do any research either on Shakespeare's biography, or on his works, or on the Elizabethan times). Their main argument for their doubt is usually a large number and thematic variety of Shakespeare's plays, which – according to their opinion – could not have been written by a little known actor, who left school at the age of thirteen, who apparently never left England and about whose private life very little is known. Among these sceptics were also Mark Twain, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, L. N. Tolstoy, and some other authors. Even if these speculations were to prove true we should not forget that we admire Shakespeare because of his works and that they should be our greatest concern, whereas biographical, social, historical and other data are of secondary importance, they are relevant only as much as we can thus obtain a more reliable explanation of his texts.

Doubts about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays often appear in yellow press during the summer time when other social and cultural activities are not as vivid as during the rest of the year. Nowadays when all kinds of media are widely available, this kind of "alarming news" (which mostly originates in England and sometimes in America), soon appears in mass media throughout the world. Such speculations are made easier when we take into account that Shakespeare saw none of his plays through the press and that those plays printed during his lifetime often appeared in different versions in quarto editions. Besides, we do not know for sure how Shakespeare's text was actually spoken on the stage when the play was produced, although we do know that the stress, the rhythm of the sentence and other phonetic elements greatly contribute to our understanding of the play. Each new edition of a play written by Shakespeare therefore creates difficult problems for editors and also for scholars. During the past few decades a number of publishing houses have published their own editions of Shakespeare's plays (e.g. the Oxford, the New Arden, the Tudor, the Signet, the Penguin, the Riverside, the Cambridge edition etc.).¹² If Shakespeare himself altered the text of the play (e.g. it has been suggested that the 1604 Quarto edition of *Hamlet* represents the play as it was first composed and that the 1623 Folio edition offers a theatrical version of the text), should the editors then choose the latter version? In 1986 even Shakespeare's bust in the church at Stratford was x-rayed owing to reports that it may contain some of Shakespeare's manuscripts, although the rumour proved false.¹³ If we compare the text in the above mentioned editions we see that individual passages in them vary and that the interpretations of plays depend to a large extent on the editor's interpretation of individual sintagms or sentences. Therefore it is the reader (or the theatre director) who must decide which edition he finds more reliable and more persuasive.

Sometimes Shakespeare's fame is even used for other, non-artistic purposes. In an article published in a popular magazine in Slovenia the journalist discussed the authorship of Shakespeare's plays; however, he concluded the article with a polemical view about the statement, which had been made by the then arch-bishop of Slovenia, Franc Rode.¹⁴ The archbishop mentioned in passing in one of his interviews his opin-

¹² See e.g.: Peter Ackroyd, »New Road to the Globe by Way of Bodley,« (Book review. *The Complete Works by William Shakespeare*. Ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Oxford: OUP, 1986), *The Times* 30 Oct. 1986: 45.

¹³ John Bayley, »Shakespeare in the Head,« *The Guardian* 31 Oct. 1986: 35.

¹⁴ Marcel Štefančič, jr., »Zakaj Rode ne mara Cankarja,« *Mladina* 7 Oct. 1997: 54-7.

ion that the work of one of the greatest Slovene prose writers and dramatists, Ivan Cankar (who was politically left-wing oriented) could not be compared with that of Shakespeare. Although Rode probably had in mind only the literary value of both authors his statement was described by a number of journalists as extremely conservative, and inappropriate. We can thus see that Shakespeare sometimes enters our daily life through the back door, by way of cultural and national politics or other fields of social life.

In England the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century was "the period of transition" in which new ideas about man and his role in society began to be spread. There were a number of changes in philosophical, political and religious views on life in the country: the importance of an individual was hailed, and a new view regarding man's position in society and in the universe began to be spread. The "new sciences", which were no longer based on medieval scholasticism but on ratio and scientific argumentation, were the result of the Baconian and Cartesian philosophical systems. These changes were not only noted and referred to in Shakespeare's plays, but they were also mentioned by other important men of letters. So, for example, the best Metaphysical poet, John Donne (1571-1631), stresses in his poems the idea that every individual is of equal worth and that the position of each human being is the only relevant thing in life. He says, "Princes do but play us" ("The Sunne Rising"), and "The new philosophy calls all in doubt"; "Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone" ("Anatomie of the World"). These views had to spread widely before a new social and political system was established with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

The rise of Puritanism, which appeared already around 1564, the year of Shakespeare's birth, was founded on the idea that the Reformation in England was too weak. In London, where the first regular theatres had been in existence since 1576 (the Theatre, the Curtain, the Blackfriars etc.), the Puritan opposition was the strongest and the Puritans even objected to performances of plays at universities. They believed that only such plays should be performed which have an educational value. The Puritans (as e.g. the clergymen John Northbrooke, Phillip Stubbes and minor playwrights like Stephen Gosson, Anthony Munday) attacked in their pamphlets playwrights and actors, blaming them for immorality of plays they produced. Although in this initial period, the theatres were defended by the Queen, by the court and by the dramatists, these attacks were only subdued for a period of time, until 1642, when the new Republican government under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell was formed, and the theatres were closed. In this period the established moral and social values were questioned, old beliefs and accepted ethical norms were rejected, but new ethical principles were not yet formed.

MODERN FEMINISM IN THEORY AND IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE (ERICA JONG AND MARGARET ATWOOD). THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

This first mentioned topic has been dealt with in the second half of the twentieth century more often than ever before. The number of "female studies" is long, not to

speak about individual articles which regularly appear in periodicals devoted to this question. This paper only intends to point out some of the new approaches which may shed light on the specific issues of human relations and which will express my point regarding these relations in Shakespeare's great tragedies.

Through the centuries the relationship between men and women in everyday life – but also in the works of art – has mostly been in favour of men. This is well exemplified in a statement by Françoise Thébaud, who writes in the "Introduction" to the collection of essays entitled *A History of Women in the West* (1994) that "history was for a long time the history of men, presented as typical of human race" (Thébaud 4). Writers also mainly saw the world from the male perspective whereas female writers were often neglected and they were a priori thought to be of lesser artistic importance than men. This opinion was definitely changed during the second half of the twentieth century when the works of female authors began to be studied more thoroughly and the female voice has been more clearly heard. Thébaud believes that women and their contribution to the arts and life generally should not be studied in isolation, but together with men, in the actual context in which it appears. She stresses:

Relations between men and women are an important dimension of history. These relations are not a natural fact but a social construct, and they are constantly being redefined. This redefinition is at once an effect and a cause of the social dynamic. Hence relations between the sexes are a useful category of analysis, on a par with other categories more familiar to historians, such as relations between classes, races, nations, and generations. Like any new way of looking at the past, this change of perspective yields new knowledge. It may even lead to rewriting history in such a way as to take account of a wider range of human experience than earlier approaches allowed for. (Thébaud 4)

Another modern critic who had discussed the consequences of the fact that women were for hundreds of years denied an equal position with men, is Nancy Huston, whose article "The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes" appeared in a collection of essays *The Female Body in Western Culture* (1985). According to Huston, women have never been allowed to preside in matters which are considered "sacred" by society (e.g. religion, war etc.). Both in real life and in literature women were not considered equal partners to men, because, as she asserts, the contact of women with the male body was for them

a source of permanent defeat, by virtue of the metaphor which likens the penis to a deadly weapon. Virginity is seen as an invisible armor, and the hymen as the shield designed to protect both the body and the soul of the young girl. Once it has been pierced, once she has succumbed to this first paradigmatic wound, all other wounds become possible. (Huston 129)

This thesis regarding the denial of equal status of men and women is supported by the physical difference between male and female body. In human history men were considered as fighters to whom women were subdued. Men became heroes (kings, princes, warriors) whereas women were supposed to be at home and their main duty

was to bear children. But recent history shows that this is no longer true. For example, during the Second World War women also joined the partisans and their reputation as warriors was very much in high esteem (however, some of them have been known as rather cruel, too). But generally speaking, women are still mostly victims of war, they are raped, tortured and killed. During the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s such cruelties happened on all sides, but when a Croatian journalist and writer, Slavenka Drakulić, openly expressed this thought, she was labelled by some journalists as “the witch of the year”.¹⁵ How long will it take for men, in battle, to treat women and children with respect, as human beings who bear the greatest responsibility for the continuation of the human race; or will they still be treated – as in Shakespeare’s tragedies – as innocent victims? But should we nevertheless make a distinction also among the females with regard to their morality?

Sigmund Freud interpreted male – female relations on the basis of sexuality: according to him the sexuality of men is shown in their aggression, in their tendency to dominate, so that the aggressive side of man’s libido – his biological significance – and not his emotional side (as e.g. in courtship, love) is shown (Freud 38-39). In Freud’s view man’s knowledge that the woman does not have penis, can often cause his permanent underestimation of the other sex (Freud 74).

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, expresses in his lectures on *Hamlet* (1959) his view that in male – female relations women were also forced into their submissive role by men because men controlled the language and culture. Lacan believes that in history men denied females their desires and when men got tired of their “female mirror” they began to look for another “object” instead of examining their own misreading of human beings. Lacan points out that most of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes feel at ease in the combat (even Hamlet, who is essentially a thinker, a man of meditation, enjoys his duel with Laertes). Since ancient times, when the Greek philosopher Heraclitus stated “War is the mother of all things”, man’s substitution for motherhood was fighting, war, wounds, bloodshed. Violence was a matrix of societies in which men had a decisive role. Females were considered as human beings who are not equal to men and – according to Lacan – such division is still present in Shakespeare’s plays.

Until the Renaissance period the Biblical story of how God first created man after his own image and only later on made Eve out of one of Adam’s ribs, supported the supposed “religious” point of view of life according to which women were given a secondary place when compared with men. In Elizabethan England the power and the authority of father (man) was still recognized as a part of the social order. Women, on the other hand, had powerful roles within their families, especially with regard to the upbringing of children, but the power they had outside the family was rather limited by the rules of inheritance and social tradition, as well as by the laws of the state and the church. Women did not have many rights on their own, and even when they got married the husband took over his wife’s possession unless some special arrangement was made. However, as regards their behaviour

¹⁵ Patricija Maličev, interview with Slavenka Drakulić, »Slovenci še vedno mislijo, da je Balkan nekje daleč«, *Delo*, sobotna priloga, 31 July 2004. 34.

and their character, something worse happened: when they realized their subservient position some of them tried to make it more bearable by becoming (at least apparently) more servile, cloying, sweet (e.g. Goneril and Regan behave at first in such a manner towards their father), and this was sometimes then taken for granted as the best kind of women's behaviour, as a sign of their femininity, whereas in reality they did not wish to be dominated either by their father, husband or lover. Even if they showed true love to their male partners (as e.g. Desdemona's love of Othello), such emotions could have been misinterpreted and degraded as is the case with Iago in *Othello*.

For centuries the social duality resulted in subservient position of women in society and the idea of equal rights was only begun to be seriously dealt with women's movement, although some female writers have rejected its political or even their one-sided approach. One of the possible solutions to the complicated nature of this relationship is implied in a linguistic solution made by Jane Gallop (5). She points out in her study that the difference between genders has often been reduced in society to the question of equal rights and/or of equal power. Gallop suggests that a strict distinction should be made between the penis and the phallos, which erases such preconceived ideas of man as a master, winner in the battle of sexes, according to which women were automatically degraded. Gallop says: "The penis is what men have and women do not; the phalus is the attribute of power which never men or women have" (*ibid.*).

Let us also have a brief look at the male-female relations from the point of view of two modern, well known female prose writers (so far, there are no great female dramatists), Erica Jong and Margaret Atwood. They frequently refer to these relations, both directly, in their works, and indirectly, as critics or authors expressing their views. In Erica Jong's most known and best-selling novel *Fear of Flying* (1973) her heroine, Isadora Wing, who symbolically represents the author, thinks, that the phallic syndrom is the ultimate and most unjust sexist weapon, which can in real life be easily discarded, because it may be questioned by men's sexual potency. However, if women begin to believe that they should start playing masculine role (which they rightly condemn), they soon realize that "There is something very sad about this" (Jong 108-09).

When Erica Jong wrote this novel she believed that "the word could change the world", as she writes a quarter of a century later in her forward to the 1989 edition of the novel. But now she also realizes that this is a very long and uneasy process. "When outspoken women are no longer silenced with ridicule, we will know we have achieved something like equality" (Jong X). At the age of twenty-three her heroine, Isadora Wing, tries together with her friend Pia to assume the supposedly male's role of a conqueror in sexual battles, "principally to boast to each other about the number of scalps on our belts" (Jong 108-09), they find such life disappointing, full of disillusionment and they realize that their decision was mistake. The author's obvious conclusion is that the same moral rules apply to men and women, and if women transgress basic ethical norms they are punished just as men would be. If we read Shakespeare's plays closely, we realize that the "feminist" criticism of this playwright does not profit anything if Shakespeare is presented either as a protofeminist, when critics try to assert that he presents in his works the Renaissance cultural emancipation of

women, or if he is considered as a patriarchal bard, who cannot subvert patriarchal structures and spreads cultural ideology through the submission of women (Vendramin 75-91). What is more, such criticism seems to be particularly one-sided, extreme, and – in my view – it does not reflect the true nature of Shakespeare's plays.

There is no doubt that women, including female artists, have been neglected equal rights in social and cultural spheres of life for many centuries. Erica Jong's narrator finds the reason for it in ancient history when – with the exception of Sappho – most women writers were too timid and not free enough to succeed in writing. Some of them felt "incomplete" without a man, as e.g. Simone de Beauvoir (without Jean Paul Sartre), Lillian Hellman (without Dashiell Hammett). Others, like Emily Dickinson, the Brontës, Virginia Woolf, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Sylvia Plath etc., were shy, timid and schizoid; although they were good novelists they had much less success than their contemporary male authors (Jong 109-110). Jong's advice to women novelists if they wish to be successful, is concerned primarily with their personality. But she also admits that there are some functions which have been "reserved" for women (as e.g. to bear children), and that these functions have a strong impact on women's psyche. It does seem to be important that females preserve characteristics which make them individuals, and which are often referred to in everyday speech as signs of "femininity". Even if we agree upon some "common female features or values", like a mother's emotional care for children, we need not accept the supposition that these features already represent a part of an exclusivist ideology, as suggested by Vendramin (42). Accepting "femininity" does not imply the inequality of genders in social, cultural, political and other spheres of life, it does not mean that different norms, values should be formed, depending on whether it is a matter of being male or female. The ethical standards for women cannot be different from those applied for men. Shakespeare's greatness lies in the fact that he presented both his male and female characters as equal: morally corrupt, evil female characters (like Lady Macbeth, Goneril and Regan etc.) face the same kind of fate as their male partners.

Another great modern writer, Margaret Atwood, has stated a number of times that she does not consider herself as an advocate of feminism, but that she wishes to be treated simply as "a writer". It is true that the heroines of her novels are mainly women, but male readers of her works nevertheless also experience identification with the world she presents, because her novels are written with the artistic completeness of all her characters. She stressed in a recently given interview to a Slovene journalist that she wished to discover in her works "the roots of evil", regardless of the fact whether it is caused by men or women.¹⁶ In her most recently published novel, *Penelopiad. The Myth of Penelope and Odysseus* (2005), the historical and social difference between genders is an important element of the story. As in a number of her previously published novels Margaret Atwood also uses in this novel the female narrator, Penelope (and not Odysseus like Homer), so that her heroine can express her experiences of time and feelings con-

¹⁶ Igor Bratož, interview with Margaret Atwood, »Mit je načrt za akcijo, ni zgolj zgodba«, *Delo*, 26 Oct. 2005. 9. - In June 1984 I met Margaret Atwood at a conference on Canadian literature at Tulbingerkogel nr. Vienna. Her high opinion of Canadian female authors can be seen in the fact that out of ten writers of fiction whom she had recommended to be included in the syllabus for our students, four of them were female authors.

nected with her loneliness caused by her waiting. Atwood's story is full of women characters that are an essential part of the novel (this is unlike most stories Shakespeare used in his plays). Her women often embody human beings who have been unjustly treated; this results in the disharmony of society, which is the main mover of Atwood's story and, generally, in life too. What used to be a myth about a hero is now treated as a reinterpretation of this myth from a female point of view.

Some words should also be said about the legal side of women's rights. It was only in 1948 that women were "officially" recognized as man's equals and that discrimination of women was forbidden by the declaration of human rights accepted by the United Nations. But nothing much had happened immediately after this date so that in 1966 the United Nations were obliged to accept another declaration in which it was clearly stated that any kind of discrimination of women was unlawful. Almost three decades later, in 1993, this question was once again on the agenda of discussions organized by the United Nations in Vienna. A document was then passed in which the rights of women are simply included in the human rights. According to this resolution men and women are to be considered equal and therefore no special legal provisions for women were any longer thought to be necessary.

Different generations of theatre-goers have experienced different approaches regarding main existential questions, which are dealt with in Shakespeare's plays. However, the role of female characters as presented in Shakespeare's plays has often been noticeably neglected by critics and literary historians. This is particularly true of his great tragedies, which are extremely well written from a dramaturgic, theatrical point of view, and which deal with human nature, both male and female, which has changed very little – if at all – during the past few centuries. Shakespeare's great tragedies are all named after male heroes who bear – or at least seem to bear – the main dramatic function provided by the plot, the dialogues and the theme of the play. Nevertheless we surmise that his female characters are just as important as his male characters. Shakespeare created them in such a way that even minor characters are round and persuasive as human beings (a good example is, e.g. the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*). I shall try to prove in my article that the portrayal of women in his mature tragedies ranges between the playwright's idealization and his demonization of women.

During the past few decades many articles have been written in which the authors give explanations concerning the role of women in society from historical perspective. Some of these studies try to explain the reasons why women in the past – generally speaking – did not occupy the same social position as men; others deal with this topic theoretically, regarding the difference between the genders, as well as consequences which inequality between men and women had in life and in the mimesis of life, in the arts. It has been stated that the nature of man has not really changed much in the history of modern civilization, but on the other hand it is a truism that male-female *social relations* have changed a lot since Shakespeare's time, particularly during the twentieth century. There is no doubt that the cleft between the sexes has become (at least in Europe) much smaller than it used to be in the past when the role of women in society was less important, less apparent and less obvious than that of men. Their role in society and in private life was much underestimated and therefore it is not surprising that they were paid less attention also in the arts (there are a number

of exceptions, particularly in poetry). Not only in Elizabethan England but also later on women were not expected to travel as much as men, or to receive the same kind of education and employment. In works of art, which were mainly written by men, the authors generally allotted to female characters much less opportunity for discourse than to male characters, although some of Shakespeare's plays, particularly his comedies, prove an exception to this rule. Nevertheless, during the past three centuries, many excellent portraits of women have been drawn in English literature, particularly in the English novel, by both, male and female writers. In the Elizabethan period William Shakespeare created some profoundly delineated female characters (particularly in his great tragedies). They show us that ethical and moral norms of women characters in his plays have a great influence not only on men in these plays, as individuals, but also on society as a whole.

In British history of the second half of the sixteenth century we cannot overlook the fact that two women had a very important position in its society. The first one is Queen Elizabeth I, who led – for this period – an unusually long life (1533-1603). She succeeded to the throne already in 1558 and ruled England until her death. Queen Elizabeth was accepted in the kingdom rather enthusiastically, for she was a successful ruler who brought prosperity to England. She was also an ardent patron of the arts, especially of the theatre. Her wishes to create the welfare state were answered happily by the citizens and she quickly managed to control both the Parliament and common people. She was a wise and cunning woman, who had many suitors, but – as is generally considered by historians – she found them to be too dangerous for her independent rule either in political or religious matters. Those men, whom she believed to be too ambitious, were sent to prison in the Tower and they were often also executed there – even if they were her former lovers.

The second important woman in the second half of the sixteenth century was Mary Stuart, the Queen of Scotland, who was a Catholic. She was Elizabeth's cousin, by blood she was of Tudor origin, and was by some people considered to be the true heiress of the English throne. Her personal fate was rather tragic and she was politically in disagreement with Elizabeth who was strongly against the idea that after her death England would be ruled by a Catholic queen. The relationship between Elizabeth and Mary was rather complicated, coloured also with jealousy and ambition. When Mary was finally forced to flee to England due to her love affairs and apparent collaboration in the murder of her husband, Elizabeth put Mary into prison but postponed her decision to decapitate her until 1587, when Mary got entangled in a fictitious plot involving the murder of Queen Elizabeth. Mary's son, James, who knew that if Queen Elizabeth had no children – what seemed very likely by that time – he would become the king, did not show much affection for his mother either and James VI of Scotland, really became the King of England (known as James I, after Queen Elizabeth's death in January 1603). Elizabeth is said to have had a very vivid love life even when she was getting old and her favours were also addressed to the young Earl of Essex, mentioned earlier in this study. However, after the rising, she had him executed. Both of these most prominent women of the period were deeply involved in Britain's political, military, and religious activities. Some critics say that their life stories sound as if they were historical legends, which were often used as sources for

the plays written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Queen Elizabeth obviously had a more lucky and socially more influential life than her cousin Mary; she was undoubtedly - for women of her age - the symbol of the age and its unsurpassed female icon.

THE FUNCTION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S GREAT TRAGEDIES

Hamlet: Gertrude, Ophelia

In the Middle Ages, people were still largely under the impact of the doctrine that man was a depraved creature since Adam's fall, allowed to exist by God in order to make man able to decide about his actions freely, but still under the auspices of God's providence. However, in the sixteenth and in the beginning of the seventeenth century the individuality of each human being and a complete responsibility for man's actions began to be stressed. The Elizabethan playwrights created their characters in agreement with their views, namely that man was subject to natural laws and to Christian ethical norms. It was assumed that there should be universal order and that evil was not a normal state of man. The distinction between the universal and the particular became one of the basic characteristics in literature too, and Shakespeare was no doubt well aware of this issue. Therefore he created characters who generally possessed morally and intellectually positive and negative features, but who complied with the accepted norms in different degrees, or even not at all. In the earlier literary tradition (e.g. in the morality plays), characters were often presented in a one-sided way, as either good or bad. Another feature, which is also typical of the Renaissance literature, is "an appeal to optimism, good feeling, and delight in concord" (Harbage 171). But - as it is also in life - Shakespeare's characters, including his female characters, differ a lot regarding their intellectual and moral qualities: some of the female characters even seem to be "too good", they are almost angelic beings (often referred to by an Italian sintagm *donna angelicata*). However, there is also another extreme of females to be found in his great tragedies: these are women who at some point of their life seem to be almost completely overwhelmed by their *delight* in doing evil. What is more, whereas Shakespeare's male characters often openly recognize and repent their evil doing, their faults, some of the female characters - when they are deeply sunk in their immoral actions - are not prepared to do this; they do not repent and admit their faults, but they rather accept their "fate", their self-destruction.

In Shakespeare's first great tragedy, *Hamlet* (probably written in 1600-1601 and first performed in 1602) there are two outstanding female characters: Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, and Hamlet's ill-fated bride, Ophelia. The plot of the play is probably based on an earlier Elizabethan play, which has not been preserved and which was possibly written by Thomas Kyd in 1594. Shakespeare had another possible source for this play, François de Belleforest's prose work *Histoires Tragique* (1576). The central motif may even stem from a very old saga, which was incorporated into a Latin work *Gesta Danorum*, written by a Danish poet and historian Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150-

c. 1206). This story contains all the basic elements of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but there are also some differences between the old story and Shakespeare's treatment. So, for example, in the medieval saga the old King is killed by his brother in front of the whole court, whereas Claudius kills Hamlet's father in secret. This approach undoubtedly makes Shakespeare's version sound more like a modern thriller. The question of Claudius's involvement in the death of his brother is made more questionable until Hamlet becomes persuaded of his uncle's guilt in the famous Mouse-trap scene. In the above-mentioned saga Hamlet's mother is openly on her son's side, whereas in Shakespeare's play her attitude to both men changes during the play. This shows us that although Shakespeare had a number of sources at his disposal, but his interpretation of characters and their motives is far more intricate and complex.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the hero has a very complicated relationship with his mother Gertrude, who married in less than two month's time after the death of her husband, old Hamlet, his brother, Claudius. Shakespeare does not indicate in the play whether Gertrude was in any way, directly or indirectly implicated in the murder of her first husband, however, it is relevant that such a marriage was against religious and social norms of the time. When her (new) husband mentions to her that his principle secretary, Polonius, has told him that he has found the source of Hamlet's distemper, she says: "I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage." (2.2.56-7).¹⁷ Hamlet is definitely shocked by his father's death and his mother's hasty marriage, but what puzzles him even more is the fact that the Ghost of his dead father – to whom Hamlet refers to as his "prophetic soul" (1.5.41) - tells him that he did not die a natural death, but that the real cause was a "foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25). However, some of the Ghost's sayings in his monologue make possible different interpretations. So, for example, he says that he "could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy /i.e. Hamlet/' soul" (1.5.15). It is not clear why the Ghost uses the conditional "I could a tale unfold", although a few moments later he *does* tell Hamlet how the murder had actually occurred (1.5.42-92). Is there more to be told, possibly about the Queen? Further on, the Ghost's wish that the Queen should be spared revenge is not clarified. Is it because of the old Hamlet's love for her, or maybe because she was not involved in the murder and the old Hamlet thus expresses his surprise that she married his brother so soon after his death, or, because he wants to torment Gertrude even more by letting her remain alive and suffer? It seems that the old Hamlet did not notice her lust before, while they were still married, or, maybe he even could not satisfy her sensual desires because of his age? The Ghost now calls Gertrude "most seeming-virtuous queen" (1.5.46), what can be interpreted as if her behaviour, the relationship between them was not sincere or even that she had emotionally (and sexually?) betrayed him while he was still alive. It is obvious that both the dead King and his brother, Claudius, had the same desires: the Ghost tells Hamlet that he was "Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched" (1.5.75) and in the famous prayer scene (3.3) Claudius doubts that God will pardon him his deeds even though he asks God to forgive him "his foul murder" (3.3.52),

¹⁷ References to acts, scenes and lines are made to the following edition: John Dover Wilson, ed. *The Works of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: CUP, 1968.

because he wants to preserve "My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" (3.3.55). This is the first time in the play that Claudius openly confesses his guilt and that Hamlet can overhear his uncle's admission of his crime but he does not wish to revenge the death of his father at that moment when Claudius is praying, repenting his sins, whereas his father had no such opportunity before his sudden death.

The audience hears already during the first Hamlet's soliloquy how he accuses his mother to have less morality than "a beast", which "would have mourned longer" (1.2.151). The Ghost also mentions how his brother - the same image of a beast is used for him ("that adulterate beast") had won the Queen: "O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power / So to seduce; won to his shameful lust / The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen" (1.5.44-6). This statement indicates that Claudius had attempted to "win" the Queen over to his side even before the death of the old King. But we do not learn from the play how Gertrude had responded to Claudius's approaches while her husband was still alive. Was she in love with Claudius before her husband's death and maybe even hardly waited for his end so that she could enjoy in a new (sexual) relationship, although according to the Bible Claudius was not supposed to marry his brother's wife (The Old Testament, Leviticus: "And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing ... (20. 21); "A widow ... shall he not take" (21. 14). Likewise St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy commands him: "Honor widows that are widows indeed. / Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God and continueth in supplication and prayers night and day. / But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (The New Testament, 1 Timothy, 5:3, 5, 6). Had Gertrude been over sixty years old, well-known for her good works, brought up her son etc. she would have been exempt from these rules, but in Shakespeare's text there is no indication that this might be so, even if we know that Hamlet is a grown-up person, but until recently still a student at Wittenberg. Therefore he (and probably also courtiers and ordinary citizens) do not see Gertrude's marriage being in agreement with Christian laws.

Male-female relationships become in *Hamlet* even more complicated if we accept Lacan's suggestion that Hamlet wished to defend his mother in order to preserve her for himself (Lacan 38). This critic obviously does not have a good opinion about Gertrude's moral norms, for he calls her "this voluptuous woman" (51). As we can see Shakespeare does not answer a number of questions directly, and thus leaves several interpretations possible. Therefore any kind of labelling of the play, which has been done through the centuries, is a generalization of only one view. So, for example, Philip Edwards accepted Lucien Goldmann's theory of tragedy (*The Hidden God*), according to which the role of Hamlet can be viewed as his own predicament; the hero tries to obey the distorted voice of a God who may not exist.¹⁸ Jan Kott points out that there are many topics dealt with in this play, as e.g. politics, morals, love, philosophy, etc. and that therefore we should choose which topic we wish to stress. But he adds: we can choose, but we should know why. Such starting point ensures a possibility of

¹⁸ Philip Edwards, »The Tragedy of *Hamlet*. Part Two«. *Report of the twentieth international Shakespeare conference held at The Shakespeare Institute* (University of Birmingham), Stratford-upon-Avon, 22-27 Aug. 1982: 7.

a wide range of interpretations, which are justified due to the openness of the text (in his essay "Hamlet and his problems" T. S. Eliot even says that Shakespeare treated in it too many themes), which is at the same time an advantage and a disadvantage of the play, depending on our interpretation.

It is not amazing that in our age, in which scepticism in long-established moral norms is also often a domineering principle in man's thinking, we are inclined to believe that Gertrude had her share in the crime committed by Claudius and in the events following her husband's death. As we have seen the Ghost (as well as Hamlet) believes that Gertrude is a hypocritical person although all three men love her! Can it be that her worries about Hamlet are - at least to some extent - only pretence, because, like Claudius, she also wishes to have Hamlet under control? Or does she play games with Hamlet as she may have been doing with the old King? Or does this hastily arranged marriage happen so quickly because of Gertrude's desire to remain young and happy, "desperately refusing to grow old", as Granville-Barker suggests in his study (qtd. in Heilbrun 10-11)? If Gertrude is (much) older than her husband's brother Claudius, does she think that it is now her last chance to seduce Claudius, marry him and that nothing should interfere with her plan?

Some critics believe that Gertrude was in no way involved in her husband's murder and that she did not commit adultery with Claudius when she was still married to old Hamlet. For example, Carolyn G. Heilbrun stresses in her study "The Character of Hamlet's Mother" that critics "have traditionally seen her /Gertrude/ as well-meaning but shallow and feminine (in the pejorative sense of the word), incapable of any sustained rational process, superficial and flighty" (10). Heilbrun mainly refers to opinions expressed by some well-known literary historians as e.g. A. C. Bradley, H. Granville-Barker, and John Dover Wilson. She believes they have misunderstood Gertrude and she tries to prove that Gertrude is a "strong-minded, intelligent, succinct, and, apart from this /i.e. her/ passion, sensible woman", and "certainly never silly" (Heilbrun 11-12). As a possible evidence for her assertion she gives examples of Gertrude's "concise", "direct", "courageous", "intelligent" speech (12-13). Even though Heilbrun has to admit that Gertrude is "lustful", she insists that Gertrude "is also intelligent, penetrating, and gifted with a remarkable talent for concise and pithy speech" (17). This conclusion does not sound very plausible, for Gertrude's short and "concise" speech may also indicate that she was not particularly eloquent (and/or intelligent), and that her short responses were a sign of her insecurity and/or of her wish not to expose her true self too much. She was most likely aware that the nobility and even average citizens did not approve of her "o'erhasty marriage", not only because according to Christian teaching it was a sin, but because people might see in it her "true nature", her extreme sensuality, or even her lasciviousness. Shakespeare's Gertrude is, no doubt, a very influential character in this play, although she apparently stands in the shadow of both male heroes, Hamlet and Claudius.

Another important female character in this tragedy is Ophelia, Polonius's daughter. Her character is not as open to interpretation as Gertrude's, but she also has some features in her character, which puzzle the reader. She does not successfully perform her father's order to extract from Hamlet the reasons for his strange behaviour and she

actually approaches him awkwardly so that Hamlet becomes immediately suspicious of her. Although some critics blame Hamlet for breaking off his relations with Ophelia it is evident that Ophelia's behaviour is a proof for Hamlet that the world is evil and women are "frail". Had she loved Hamlet more than her father and Laertes, who warned her not to have a close relationship with Hamlet, had she been sincere with Hamlet and had she trusted him, he would have most probably reacted to her action differently. But because of her complete loyalty to her father Ophelia becomes her own worst enemy, and gives herself over to self-torture. To assert that in Shakespeare's time children had to obey their parents and that this is a sufficient reason to explain her behaviour towards Hamlet as decent, or even loving, is a gross oversimplification of her character and, even more, a basic misunderstanding of Shakespeare's art. It is man's free will, which is the essential condition for actions in Shakespeare's plays and he definitely did not create his characters on the basis of a naturalistic determination. Such a simplified interpretation is a gross misinterpretation of his creativity (possibly showing even the lack of knowledge of his work), particularly if it is considered as the only valid one.¹⁹ If Polonius's will (or generally speaking the will of parents) were the only important and decisive factor for Shakespeare to create this and other female characters, how is it then possible that he created a number of heroines who disobey their father (e.g. Cordelia, Desdemona, Goneril, Regan, not to mention the romantic portrait of Juliet)? The answer is simple, Shakespeare made it clear what parents expected from their children, but their actions mainly depended on their character, on the way they looked upon their parents and/or on their beloved person, whether they obeyed them or not. They choose their actions freely and therefore they are responsible for them.

Piotr Sadowski analyses in his study *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (2004) the behaviour of Shakespeare's characters in terms of functional equilibrium between the stable properties of one's mind – regardless of the pressure of sociocultural environment – and the immediate situational context.²⁰ This principle makes Shakespeare's characters real individuals and perfect artistic creations. Besides, Shakespeare did not place the action of this (and many of his other plays) in Elizabethan England, and he wrote them in such a way that they have a universal and timeless significance. In *Hamlet* - at least as much as we can judge about Ophelia from her deeds - she does not have and does not express her own will; she allows to be manipulated, to be a tool in the hands of her father. She is probably not even aware of this. This is a flaw in her character which can be compared to the blindness of tragic heroes who do not realize that by making a tragic error they cause their own fall. A critic who in the postulated manner simplifies the issue of Ophelia's character is not aware of the complexity and individuality of Shakespeare's person-

¹⁹ Such interpretations sometimes occur in book reviews or even theatre criticism in Slovenia. See also, for example, Piotr Sadowski, *Dynamism of Character in Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (Newark, U of Delaware P, 2003).

²⁰ See also: Laurie E. Maguire, *Studying Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Emma Smith, *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); David Bevington, *Shakespeare* (London: Blackwell, 2002); John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare: The Tragedies* (London: Macmillan, 2001); Kate Chedzoy, ed. *Shakespeare, Feminism and Gender* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

ages and his vision of life. Polonius even uses a very pejorative sintagm concerning his plan to make Ophelia extract the truth from Hamlet when he explains Ophelia's role in this plot by saying to the King and the Queen: "At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him" (2.2.162). The verb "to loose" is explained by John Dover Wilson as: (a) release (as a dog from a leash), (b) turn loose (in cattle or horse breeding) (*Hamlet* 277). Ophelia is only used by her father as bait to please the King. The remark made by Polonius definitely shows his lack of respect for his daughter.

Ophelia is presented in the first half of the play as a "weak" character, who does not stand by Hamlet in need; she does not help him - even worse, she is willing to spy on him. When Hamlet realizes this he is shocked and this fact also explains why he behaves towards Ophelia so cruelly. E. M. W. Tillyard explains Hamlet's relationship to Ophelia with a statement: "Hamlet's disgust at his mother had prompted his dealings with Ophelia; and her actions in their turn exacerbate his feelings against her, his mother, and all women" (Tillyard 29). Unfortunately Hamlet only sees that Ophelia could not bear the weight of her tragic fate when it is too late, at her burial, when he publicly admits his great love for her. Ophelia recognizes that her behaviour was morally questionable only after her father's death, when her mind is for the first time free but also damaged, so that she is incapable of rational actions (4.5). Her song about the girl's seeing her beloved on Saint Valentine's day indicates first a pure love which turns into a sexual encounter (4.5.47-53), and the song that follows may be understood in the same way too (4.5.57-65). The question whether these lines are only the sign of Ophelia's madness or whether they actually refer to her relationship with Hamlet remains open to interpretation. Jacques Lacan finds Ophelia's portrait as one of the "most fascinating creations" (12), a pathetic and disturbing character, about whom one cannot be sure whether she is an embodied innocence or a wanton woman ready for any kind of behaviour. He even equates her in the following manner: "a Girl = Falos" (53-54), whom the hero had rejected (67). A similar interpretation of Ophelia is noticeable also in the film version of *Hamlet* directed by Franco Zaffirelli.

However, in Ophelia's final appearance in the play, when she presents flowers to the King, the Queen and Laertes, her action seems to point to the "real" Ophelia, seized with desolation and despair. After the loss of Hamlet and the death of her father she no longer cares about the impact her deeds make. Dover Wilson explains her conduct with the following words: "Each flower has its meaning and is presented to an appropriate person" (*Hamlet* 226). Ophelia gives the King fennel and columbines, symbolizing flattery and cockoldry; rue to the Queen, symbolizing sadness and repentance, and rosemary to Laertes, for remembrance (4.5.179-186). With this deed Ophelia expresses her true opinion about other characters, but this happens only after she has lost control over her actions and when she is no longer terrified by the authority of her father and the royalty, or by her brother. She has changed, but unfortunately it is too late for her.

In spite of the fact that both characters, Gertrude and Ophelia, are not the protagonists of the play, they are in some ways even more interesting because their characters are in many ways open to different interpretations, although they also embody some of the features, which can often be observed in female characteristics of other Shakespeare's heroines - that is of innocent, inexperienced, and naive women.

But we most frequently encounter in his great tragedies females who lust for joys of sensual life and, particularly, for power. Whereas the first type of a woman is an almost angelic being, the second type is shown as a ruthless creature, without moral norms, obsessed by evil and enjoying in the process of her misdeeds. Some of the female characters portrayed by Shakespeare are – figuratively speaking – even more covered with blood than their partners, because once they start doing evil deeds they do not stop doing them, for they lack a sense of justice and/or real repentance. They are clever enough to realize that they have chosen a destructive path (this is true especially of morally negative female characters in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*), but they are so deeply involved in criminal actions and so morally corrupt, as well as pitiless that they do not regret their wrong deeds and continue to perform evil until they are physically or psychologically ruined; in most cases their destruction happens on both levels of their existence.

Theatrical experiments with *Hamlet* in Slovenia during the last two decades

Since the first performance of *Hamlet* in Slovene language at the Deželno gledališče v Ljubljani (The Provincial Theatre in Ljubljana) in 1899 there have been more than twenty different productions of this play done by Slovene professional companies.²¹ The directors mainly tried to follow the “classical” vision of this play, paying most attention to psychological persuasiveness of characters, particularly of the main hero. Each production was in many ways unique, either in attempts of directors to follow suggestions which can be obtained from Shakespeare’s text, or by “re-creating” the text, seeing it from a modern perspective, but nevertheless trying to preserve essential dramaturgic elements of Shakespeare’s play. After World War II there have also been a number of attempts made by theatre directors in Slovenia to produce “experimental performances” of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, including adaptations of Shakespeare’s text. Such attempts usually had various purposes: to apprehend the meaning of the play in a new light, to search for new artistic elements, which could enrich the traditional theatrical productions, and sometimes simply to shock the audience. The extent of such experimentation is rather large therefore these productions will not be dealt with here in their theatrical totality, but only with regard to some of the more noticeable features which we could see in Slovenian theatres during the past two decades. Several such “experimental” performances were based on the assumption that there is an artistic crisis in the professional theatre and theatre directors and producers should not repeat the “orthodox” ways of treating the text. As I have indicated above these – generally young – directors, who often collaborated in preparing the production with script-writers and actors believed that each performance should bring the main ideas of Shakespeare’s play closer to our reality (than this is generally done by “classical” productions) and that it should provide new means and

²¹ See the bibliographies *Repertoar slovenskih gledališč* (The Repertory of Slovene Theatres) and *Slovenski gledališki letopis* (*Slovene Theatre Annual*), now published yearly by Slovenski gledališki muzej, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

modes of theatrical expressions. The central question regarding such improvisation is how to create a theatrical event, an event which will be – in opposition to the “mimetic” performance of reality – a representation of something vague, something which had been pushed back in our subconscious, and which may still not be quite clear, but which the actors and the director “sense” exists, along with what they wish to discover.

Another fairly frequent premise of such experimental groups is the realization of the total theatre. This idea is one hundred years old and was first theoretically explained by Edward Gordon Craig in his work *On the Art of the Theatre* (1905). The total theatre was practised in England in the 1930s by the Group Theatre, in which – besides the director Rupert Doone and scenic designer Robert Medley – an important role was played by new, young poets, writers (turned) dramatists, including W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, and, although only at first, also by T. S. Eliot. However, when such productions based on the vision of the totality of arts are staged, it often occurs that the abilities of individual actors (like singing, playing music, dancing, mimics etc.) do not reach a very high artistic level, and that therefore such experiments may be aesthetically less satisfying than a straightforward realistic production. The improvisation, which is also frequently declared as a basis for experimental productions and which depends on a particular situation in the theatre, often lacks the director’s inspiration and actors’ artistic accomplishment. This may therefore be one of the main reasons why such productions are often artistic failures, met by the negative response of critics and also by a disinterested public. Although experiments in the theatre are, generally speaking, most welcome and necessary, theatre directors and theatre critics do not always seem to be aware of these artistic problems with which such productions are faced.

In 1971 the well-known British theatre director Peter Brook founded the International Centre of Theatre Research in Paris, which became an international theatre centre (Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord – C.I.C.T.). Brook directed there several plays, among them also his adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In his advice to a young actor, who tries his skill in one of the great roles in this play, Brook advises him:

Forget Shakespeare... think that your first responsibility of an actor is to give a breath of life to human beings ...set aside every thought that Hamlet is ‘like me’. Hamlet is not ‘like me’, he is not like anybody, because he is unique ... And it is ridiculous to think that someone could be replacing Ophelia with his beloved, or Gertrude with his own mother, express himself with Hamlet’s vigour, his vocabulary, his sense of humour and opulence of thoughts .../In this play/ every new syllable gains new importance, every new letter can become an essential key in reconstructing a particularly complex personality ..and the entire play becomes a huge mosaic ...Over and over we can rediscover that play and make it alive by starting to search for its truth again... Behind the surface of the play there is a hidden myth.²²

²² See the theatre programme: *Hamlet*. Adapted by Peter Brook. Directed by Peter Brook. Performed by actors of the International Theatre Centre (C.I.C.T), Paris. - The group visited Dubrovnik, Croatia, and gave there three performances of *Hamlet* on the island of Lokrum (I saw the performance on 27 June 2003).

If we agree with Brook's suggestions they may be an interesting starting-point for our understanding of so many "classical" as well as experimental versions and adaptations of this play. Let me mention some of the more interesting performances which took place in Slovene theatres during the period under discussion. Such a new approach towards Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could undoubtedly be found in Mile Korun's production of *Hamlet*, performed by the Mestno gledališče v Ljubljani (The Municipal Theatre of Ljubljana). The premiere was on 12 January 1984. It was an experimental production primarily as far as the casting of roles of characters and consequently relations among them are concerned. Claudius was presented by a young actor (Boris Ostan), who was only a few years older than the actor who was playing Hamlet (Slavko Cerjak). As in many "classical" performances of this play Gertrude was also here acted by an "opulent" actress (Nika Juvan Kalan). She is past her prime but she may still be sexually attractive, which is indicated by her fleshy body and her sensual behaviour. She looked on the stage like one of Rubens's portraits of passionate mature women, a voluptuous figure, whose physical desire for much younger Claudius cannot be controlled. Although this triangle seemed somewhat ridiculous at first, as if the actor who played Claudius was not properly cast, such casting soon made sense and proved to be a possible variation of the plot and the usual character portrayal. Claudius could be the old King's (much) younger brother, who desired to secure the crown and with it a lusty Queen. In Korun's production Claudius was completely self-sure and he cynically treated Hamlet as a sissy, or as a latent homosexual. This was indicated already during the first encounter between Claudius and Hamlet, when Claudius embraced Hamlet and kissed him on the lips. The kiss could also be seen as Judas' kiss, as a symbolic indication of Claudius' betrayal of Hamlet. Gertrude's efforts to persuade Hamlet to forget the death of his father and to accept her new husband could be interpreted as her perfidious mask with which she tries to cover her lustful nature. But if we accept the suggestion that Hamlet is impotent, or that he is a homosexual, the closet scene (4. 3) in which many directors see Hamlet's discovery of his Oedipus complex, Hamlet's rage of his mother's marriage could also indicate his envy supported by his abnormal feelings towards his mother. Then his "struggle" with Gertrude in this scene could indicate his wish for matricide, as it is understood by Gertrude. If we accept the above mentioned assumptions about his character we also find the explanation for why he hates women, even his sensitive, fragile, frightened Ophelia (Jožica Avbelj). Although Gertrude is not the protagonist of the play, she provides a new focal point in this tragedy and becomes an important combatant among the central characters in this production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

A much more radical adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could be seen in Heiner Müller's version of this play, in *Stroj Hamlet (Die Hamletmaschine)*, first performed in Slovenia by the experimental theatre Glej (the premiere was on 1 October 1988) and directed by Matjaž Zupančič. Müller used Shakespeare's play as a starting point for the interpretation of the main hero, or rather, of the actor who performs in this role and who searches for his own identity. There are only a handful of other characters transferred from the original, Shakespeare's play into this (short) play, but the production was "enriched" by three dancers. The central dilemma in Müller's play is the discrepancy between the real and the fictitious world: the real world is here shown as more intensive and it is filled with hero's hallucinations, reflected in his

schizoid behaviour. But Hamlet is still “me”, whereas allusions connected with the character of Claudius (he could be simply a father figure, or Stalin, or the rebel, the master, the machine), can be numerous. The hero’s destruction represents also the destruction of the myth, linked with classical myths of the Argonauts and Medea), and linked in time with a number of authors (e.g. T. S. Eliot, S. Beckett, Dostoyevsky, Verlaine etc.), quotations from whose works became a part of the play.

Another adaptation of *Hamlet* was also performed by the experimental theatre Glej, entitled *Hamlett Packard*. It was directed by Tomaž Štruel and shown at the Cankarjev Dom Stage Production in Ljubljana (the premiere was on 3 April 1992). Parts of Shakespeare’s text were produced as a MTV video clip, supposedly meant as a parody of popular television serial programmes and hardly a word was said in Slovene. Four actors impersonated Hamlet’s character, behaving like “puppets” (as caricatures of “heroes” in a James Bond film), placed in a modern, digitalized world. The whole play was done as a mixture of Shakespeare’s text, television shows, ballet, music, including a rapsong written for the performance by Zdravko Duša (see Appendix 2). This “adaptation” of *Hamlet* was meant to be a simplified travesty of modern world but the performance itself was not removed enough from the target.²³ Although the production was accepted with the approval and laughter by young audiences, theatre critics in Slovene newspapers showed less understanding for this experiment done with the help of various media.

There is hardly a thematic connection between Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Vinko Möderndorfer’s play *Hamlet in Ofelija* (Hamlet and Ophelia), which was performed at Mala drama (The Small Stage) of the Slovene National Theatre in Ljubljana (the premiere was on 14 October 1994, directed by the author).²⁴ The play presents two juvenile delinquents who find refuge in the basement of the theatre where they are joined by an aged, drunken actor, who has just performed in the role of the Ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The debate between these characters centres on their view about the immorality of the modern world consisting of the world of poverty and crime, which is the reality of the two youngsters, and the world of apparently glittering past, which has turned into illusion. The text lacks coherence and leaves too many unanswered questions.

On August 22, 1997, a reduced version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was done as a street-theatre production on the Čevljarški most (The Shoemakers’ Bridge), a popular venue for musical and theatrical performances during the summer months in Ljubljana.²⁵ The performance was prepared by a group of amateur actors, KUD France Kotar, and it was directed by Natalija and Ravil Sultanov. Circus tricks, juggling with balls, acrobatics, walking on stilts etc. were combined with monologues from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and humorous “paraphrases” taken from some other Shakespeare’s plays. The performance was primarily intended as children’s entertainment and it was also accepted as such by occasional passers-by.

²³ Tadej Čater, »Enigma Hamlet,« *Dnevnik* 7 April 1992: 8; Marko Crnkovič, »A bi al’ ne bi, to je zdaj vprašanje,« *Naši razgledi* 17 April 1992: 967.

²⁴ Aleš Berger, »Bonnie in Clyde pod odrom,« (*Delo* 19 Oct. 1994: 12).

²⁵ M. V. »Shakesperiada«, (*Delo* 22 aug. 1997: 11).

The fact that the performance is only an adaptation of Shakespeare's play is clearly indicated on the theatre bill for another experimental production of *Hamlet*. The author of the adaptation was the actor, Andrej Rozman Roza, and the play was performed by Slovensko mladinsko gledališče (The Slovene Youth Theatre) in Ljubljana. The premiere was on February 18, 2001, directed by Dario Varga and announced as "tragic comedy".²⁶ The role of Hamlet was given to a twelve-year-old boy, who plays a computer game called Fortinbras. The boy repeats some of Hamlet's famous lines, but he is shown as a person who is emotionally and morally unable to accept the responsibility forced upon him. His opponents wear grotesque rubber masks and they look like some kind of humanoids from another planet. If the boy wishes to survive he must pretend to agree with corruption, greed and moral grossness of his mother and his uncle. Roza very much truncated the original text, omitted a number of characters, and rewrote the text so that the language used by Hamlet suited the mentality of a young, clever boy. The ending comes as a big surprise: Hamlet survives and he discusses the past events with Fortinbras. It was all just a computer game.

On 16 August 2001 the Glej Experimental Theatre ("i" Teater) produced a choreographic version of *Hamlet*. In this production of *Hamlet* life is reduced to television reality. The script was written by an actor, Aleksander Jurc. There is only one female actor, actually a dancer performing in this production (Mojca Türk) whose medium are not words, but human body.²⁷ It was a dance performance, filled with energy and full of dynamics, moving facial expressions, but Shakespeare's play was almost reduced *ad absurdum*. The dancer's movements were accompanied by almost indiscernible sounds of a modern urban noise stifling the terrifying silence of the heroine's inner world, which was occasionally broken by hysterical laughter or ticking of the alarm clock. The director's point was to show that the youth today can no longer listen to the words (meditate) or to accept silence, because they live in the world of TV productions or they escape to the world of dreams.

An early experimental play written by Bernard-Marie Koltes, *Dan umorov v zgodbi o Hamletu* (The Day of Murders in the Story of Hamlet) was performed in Ljubljana on 6 January 2005 by the Glej Experimental Theatre.²⁸ It was directed by Ivica Buljan, and staged as a practical exercise (a variation on the theme of *Hamlet*). The combination of quotations from Shakespeare's play was performed by four actors representing four characters from *Hamlet* (Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude and Claudius), and the Voice. The production did not receive much attention either by theatre public or by critics.

Another adaptation of *Hamlet* is announced to take place by the end of 2005 by a semi-professional theatre company (Šentjakobsko gledališče in Ljubljana).²⁹ The script was written by Barbara Kapelj who included in it besides the text taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also passages from *Romeo and Juliet* and from *Othello*. Kapelj

²⁶ Tanja Jaklič, »Otrok v gnilem svetu,« (Delo 16 Feb. 2001: 9); M.T., »Hamlet, (Delo 17 Feb. 2001: 16). – Blaž Lukan, »Mrtve Hamletove spake,« (Delo 20 Feb. 2001: 9).

²⁷ Špela Stramšek, »Hamlet brez besed v 'i' Teatru,« (Delo 16 Aug. 2001: 6). – Špela Stramšek, »Kričanje brez smisla ali neznosni užitek,« (Delo 21 Aug. 2001: 6).

²⁸ Blaž Lukan, »Premetanka na Hamletovo temo,« (Delo 5 Jan. 2005: 9).

²⁹ S.S. »Iz take smo snovi kot sanje,« (Delo 26 Oct. 2005:10).

is also going to direct the play. According to the programme announcement the play will be done as "a show" in which pathos, banalities, humorous situations and simplification (whatever this may mean) will be used to show "various prejudices denoting contemporary 'trade' of images".

These are some of the main features used in experimental productions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Slovenia. However, there are another two performances of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which were staged by professional theatrical companies in Slovenia since 1990, and which should be mentioned in the context of theatrical experiments made by two best professional companies in Slovenia. The first one is the performance which was directed by Tomaž Pandur and staged by Drama slovenskega narodnega gledališča v Mariboru (The Drama of the Slovene National Theatre in Maribor) on 7 December 1990. A slightly revised version of this production was done on 29 March 1994.³⁰ Pandur is known as *enfant terrible* of the modern Slovene theatre, who has "adapted" a number of classical plays in Slovenia and abroad. His *Hamlet* symbolizes the decomposition of the world and his pathological creatures (living in a castle) remind the audience of "the ship of fools". The performance began with fire works celebrating the marriage between Gertrude (Milena Mišič) and Claudius (Matjaž Tribušon) in front of the theatre, and then the actors and the audience moved into the theatre. The director rearranged the plot of the play in the form of Brechtian montage of individual scenes. Characters behaved as if they were in a delirium: they were all very aggressive, terrifying personalities (particularly Claudius), almost pathologically obsessed by sex. Horatio (Livio Badurina) is Ophelia's (Ksenija Mišič) lover (!) and also Hamlet's "friend". Gertrude is noticeably older than Claudius (this is a feature, which we have already noticed in the production of *Hamlet* directed by Mile Korun). Hamlet finds himself to be "misplaced" in this world, and what is happening in the catacombs of the Elsinore castle seems to him like a bad dream about the mad world. He is also a witty intellectual, full of dilemmas, innocent and melancholic, but at the same time God's avenger in the world which he had been doomed to put in order. As a born dreamer he never knows whether he moves in the real world or in dreams. Some of the characters from Shakespeare's play are missing (e.g. Fortinbras, the Grave-diggers). Nevertheless by the end of the play individual scenes begin to make sense, they are again put together to make a complete picture presenting the beginning of a new world. The nightmare has passed away. In the revised version, produced by the same company in 1994, Hamlet's figure (Matjaž Tribušon) acquired a more lyrical note and Polonius (Radko Polič) is not shown as a servile minister but as a shrewd man, looking after his own interests. He is at first an equal opponent to Hamlet and he covers his real essence with humorous behaviour. The roles of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are represented only by one actor (Peter Ternovšek), although both school-fellows are addressed by other characters as if they were only one man representing a double personality. The text was shortened for this production but the dramaturgic structure remained the same as in the 1990 production: it is composed of a series of individual episodes, which are much less tightly connected than in

³⁰ Andrej Inkret, »Mariborski *Hamlet*,« (Delo 12 Dec. 1990: 9).- Andrej Inkret, »*Hamlet*, izčiščen in dognan« (Delo 28 Mar 1994: 7).

Shakespeare's text. Pandur's productions of *Hamlet* were mostly praised by critics as rather original, although some critics and audiences believed that he used too much spectacular machinery to present our "mad world".

Although the production of *Hamlet* staged by Janez Pipan at the SNG Drama Ljubljana (The Drama of the Slovene National Theatre of Ljubljana; the premiere was on 14 October 1994), does not belong to the experimental productions in the strictest sense, it should be mentioned here briefly because Pipan introduced some new textual interpretations.³¹ Milena Zupančič performed the role of Gertrude as a clever, speculating woman, but one who is so overwhelmed by her sensuality that she suppresses her intelligence in favour of her carnal pleasures. But at the moment of catharsis, which is brought about by her admission of guilt when confronted with Hamlet's accusations, she cannot control her life any more and is led into irrevocable madness, which she tries to drown in constant intoxication. In this production the figure of Hamlet (Jernej Šugman) is modelled as an angry revenger, who hesitates at first in performing his duty, but who is from the very beginning of the play a dangerous opponent of Claudius (Boris Cavazza). It is obvious that in such a world Ophelia (Saša Pavček), presented as a young, naive, almost child-like figure not yet fully grown (she could also be another Juliet), is out of place – she is only really happy when she is with her brother. In critical situations she shows her inability to freely express herself, because she is completely intimidated by her father and she therefore would not allow herself to grow to womanhood. Her sensuality bursts out from time to time (shown in her masturbation) but whether this could indicate that she has had sexual relationship with Hamlet, is not clear. Although actors in this production wore modern dress, the director did not stress this fact in any way: his interest was centred on the major characters and their fate - which also denotes the decay of society and the destruction of the kingdom. In Pipan's production the personal fate of individual personages is most closely linked with the fall of the state.

Some recent visits of foreign theatre companies performing *Hamlet* in Slovenia

Among performances of foreign theatre companies which we could more recently see in Ljubljana was also the production Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Schauspielhannover under the direction of Nicolas Stemmann (Drama SNG Ljubljana, September 20, 2003).³² Stemmann has been known in Europe as a minimalist, adherent of pop aestheticism, whose interest lies in investigation of new theatrical forms which reflect modern pop iconography, in the post-ideological world. Shakespeare's text was shortened and the performance was centred on Hamlet's response to the murder of his father: will he react upon this event and how will he do it. Stemmann's *Hamlet* has many references to contemporary political and social situations, particularly in Germany (e.g. the prototype of Hamlet's

³¹ Aleš Berger, »Hamlet med nekdanj in zmerom,« (*Delo* 17 Oct 1994: 7).

³² Vesna Jurca Tadel, »Neuravnoteženi *Hamlet*,« (*Delo* 23 Sept. 2003: 8). – Tanja Jaklič, »Politični kraljevič v režiji pop esteta,« (*Delo* 20 Sept. 2003: 8).

uncle Claudius was the then German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer). Hamlet's character is combined with Horatio's character; he is the hero's alter ego and also speaks several of Hamlet's monologues. Claudius accuses Hamlet of not wishing to change the world, but to destroy it. The director uses a number of means to make the audience aware that we are only watching a play. For example, several TV sets are placed on an empty stage and they show us parts of various film versions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as well as parts of the play which we are watching. An interesting alienation effect is used in the Mousetrap scene, when Hamlet forces the King and the Queen to perform in it the murder of old Hamlet. In spite of various shortcomings this, somewhat ludistic production, was very well accepted by the audience.

This cannot be said about the production of *Hamlet* by Divadlo Komédie from Prague, which visited Ljubljana with its production of this play in the Mestno gledališče ljubljansko (The Municipal Theatre of Ljubljana; the premiere was on 15 April 1998). The play was directed by Jan Nebesky, and the role of Hamlet was performed by David Pracharž. The performance began with a short puppet play, which was done as a comic parody of Shakespeare's play. The story is set in an indefinite place and time, and Hamlet's opponent is Orestes, who was faced with the same duty as Hamlet – carrying out the revenge of his father's murder. But after some initial shocking scenes, after Hamlet's tenseness is reduced to madness, the play loses its initial force and after what had been an innovative approach the performance lost its impetus instead of gaining it.

----- A similar fate awaited the production of *Hamlet. Dreams*. This is a long, unconventional performance consisting mainly of visual-kinesthetic-musical elements, a kind of modern revue, only vaguely connected with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It was directed by Andrij Žoldak, and performed by Taras Ševčenko Theatre, from Harkov, Ukraine (at the Drama of the Slovene National Theatre, Ljubljana, 17 September 2004). Slovene theatre goes - after having seen a number of excellent film versions of various musical comedies and revues either in theatres or on television - are not easily satisfied with such productions unless all the component parts (acting, ballet, singing, music, visual elements etc.) are well united and on a very high artistic level.

As my report has shown this is true regardless of the fact, if the company comes from Slovenia or abroad. Improvisations are only accepted by various experimental stages, which are usually run by students, as e.g. KUD France Prešeren, or Stara elektrarna in Ljubljana, and similar experimental theatres in Maribor (e.g. Pekarna) and – from time to time – also in other cities in Slovenia. They often aim at “creating an event”, at *poiesis* instead of *mimesis*, even though some such events are not always noted by wider audiences or by mass media.

Othello: Desdemona

In the past women were often seen as the bearers of the principle of goodness, sometimes symbolized by the Holy Grail. On the other hand men were largely blamed and made responsible for the decay of society, what was one of the basic distinctions between the sexes. The male domination in society has eventually become less powerful, although in Shakespeare's plays it is still rather obvious. The mother was consid-

ered not only the bearer of children, but also the basic source of emotional connection among the members of the family, as well as an important socializing and moral force for the children, by being herself an example of the way of living. It should be pointed out here that in Shakespeare's great tragedies the mothers - as an ideal image for her children's conduct - are missing. Can this be considered as an influential factor in the character development of Shakespeare's evil, morally degraded heroines? It seems that we can assume that his evil females developed into self-centred, egotistic, kindless and even cruel women because they lack motherly love.

The person who has "divine" qualities in Shakespeare's tragedies is Desdemona in *Othello*, written in 1602-1603 and first performed in 1604. Although Shakespeare used as a main motif for this play Giraldi Cinthio's tale in his *Hecatommithi* (1565), it is relevant that in the Italian version of this story Iago is in love with Desdemona. Because she does not answer his pleas he suspects that she is in love with Cassio and therefore he invents a plot against her. Like in other plays (e.g. in *Romeo and Juliet*) Shakespeare intensified the story by leaving out this possibility and he also changed the character of Othello. In Cinthio's version Othello does not admit his crime, whereas in Shakespeare's play the hero accepts his responsibility as a man of honour so that the dramatic reversal and recognition take place.

If we accept the traditional division of characters, as suggested, for example, by L. C. Knights, that there are the deceivers and the deceived, both the hero and the heroine fall into the second group. If Othello is misled by Iago into making false judgments about Desdemona, her "mistake" seems to be her naive trust in the goodness of people and her lack of ability to see what Othello's nature, his character is like. He, meanwhile, obviously imagines that he can judge other people's characters, which proves to be his big mistake, because he does not estimate correctly anybody who is close to him, least of all Desdemona and, of course, Iago. We can assume that he has a preconceived opinion about Desdemona, and being aware of the racial, religious and the age difference between himself and his wife, he becomes an easy prey to Iago's plotting. Both, Iago and Desdemona's father Brabantio are racially prejudiced and Brabantio had warned Othello "not to haunt about my doors" (1.1.97). Brabantio calls Iago a villain when Iago uses one of his many vulgar images hinting that Othello and Desdemona have a sexual intercourse ("your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs" 1.1.116-117). But Brabantio is also shocked because Desdemona has allowed herself to become involved with "an extravagant and wheeling stranger" (1.1.138), as Roderigo describes Othello to Desdemona's father. Of course, Brabantio has no better opinion of Othello and of his race: he considers him to be "a devilish malefactor" who practices black magic (Wilson 149). Brabantio cannot get rid of his preconceived opinion about the man who is different, even when the Venetian Senate speaks highly of Othello and when the Duke tells him "Your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1.3.290).

At that moment in the play Othello is still completely certain about Desdemona's love for him and when her father warns him that "She has deceived her father, and may thee", he answers, "My life upon her faith!" (1.3.293-294). What a change between this moment and all the doubts in Othello's mind after a prolonged and skillfully managed Iago's devilish plan to blacken Desdemona's character, when Othello - still

very much in love with Desdemona – calls her ironically “Excellent wretch!” (3.3.91). Iago uses now the same argument as Brabantio has hinted at by saying: “She did deceive her father, marrying you” (3.3.208) implying the suggestion that Desdemona is now deceiving Othello. (Is it possible that – at least partly - Othello represented to Desdemona a substitute for her father, that she was “acting out” an Oedipal situation?) The system which insisted on female obedience made the hero uncertain, he is torn between his love for Desdemona and his thoughts, and his fear that she is deceiving him. He does not know what to do until he is completely persuaded by Iago that his fear is rational. Othello loves Desdemona and he knows life without her would be completely meaningless, because her betrayal would mean a complete absence of all human values and worldly order for him (“But I do love thee; and when I love thee not / Chaos is come again” (3.3.92-93).

When Desdemona rejects Othello’s accusation that she is not true and loyal to him and she calls heaven as her witness, Othello responds to her that “Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell” (4.2.40). Her honesty is for him a matter of life or death, but because he thinks that she has betrayed him, he cannot bear this thought and he indirectly condemns her to non-existence before he actually murders her: “O thou weed, / Who art so lovely fair and smell’st so sweet / That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst ne’er been born!” (4.2.68-70). And further on, when he calls her “Impudent strumpet!”, she refers to herself as “a Christian” who “shall be saved”, Othello with masochistic irony comments upon her statement by crying: “I took you for that cunning whore of Venice / That married with Othello. You mistress / That have the office opposite to Saint Peter, / And keep the gate of hell!” (4.1.84-90). Desdemona cannot stand Othello’s torturing any longer; she has become apathetic, starting to think about her death (4.3.24). Iago’s wife Emilia tries to console her and tells her a story about her mother’s maid Barbara whose lover “proved mad / And did forsake her”. Then Barbara used to sing a song about a willow tree which “expressed her fortune, and she died singing it” (4.3.29-30). Thus Desdemona’s premonition of her death is announced in her singing, and her song ends with a knock of Death, an image of terrified woman, “Hark! Who is’t that knocks?”. The question is answered by Emilia (trying to comfort Desdemona), with an enigmatic statement “It’s the wind.”. (4.3.52-53) These lines are referred to in “A Game of Chess”, the second canto of T. S. Eliot’s poem *The Waste Land*. Shakespeare makes little usage of the fact that Othello is a Mohammedan, whereas Othello places Desdemona into a Christian sphere, albeit he believes that Desdemona’s sin pushed her among the fallen angels. His torment in accepting the decision whether to murder her or not is based on the images of light and darkness (“Put out the light: and then put out the light” (5.2.17), for he will carry out his deed in darkness and he will, symbolically speaking, extinguish his “light”, his beloved and – as a consequence of this deed - he will shed “cruel tears” (5.2.21). Shakespeare also very intensively applied the images of light and darkness in *King Lear* and in *Macbeth*, in which man’s cruelty, his denial of any moral laws is brought to a peak in Shakespeare’s plays.

The final scene between Othello and Desdemona is again full of his threats upon her life and her pleas to heaven for his mercy. Like Hamlet, who would not kill praying Claudius Othello says, that he would not kill her “unprepared spirit”, he

would not kill her soul (5.2.32-33); but the difference is, of course, in completely different circumstances: Claudius is guilty of the murder of his brother, whereas Desdemona is innocent. This is an extremely intense emotional scene (5.2.24-87), because the audience still hopes that Desdemona will be saved; however, the tragic deed is carried out, and her innocent life sacrificed.

Shakespeare's portrayal of Desdemona represents one of the morally purest female characters in Shakespeare's tragedies, which is shaded only by Desdemona disobeying her father, and her tragic fate could be compared to Gloucester's fate in *King Lear* (4.1.36-7). Such a situation evokes in the reader the thought about the injustice of gods, which we cannot understand and which may indicate the absurdity of man's existence.

King Lear: Goneril and Regan, Cordelia

In the Elizabethan times children's obedience to parents was a social rule (but as people say, rules are there to be broken), which was based on one of God's Commandments to Moses: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." (The Old Testament, Exodus 20:12) Although Kott thinks that it is difficult to find some psychological probability in exposition of the play in the character of the main hero (Kott 105), Lear's foolish behaviour at the beginning of the play can be accepted if we take into account his old age and his long rule. As we know he is terribly mistaken: whereas Goneril and Regan pretend to agree to his suggestion about the division of the kingdom, and when Cordelia has nothing to say upon Lear's question which of his three daughter loves him most, Lear is immediately insulted and his answer shows his despotic attitude of a ruler, and his ill temper: "Nothing will come of nothing; speak again" (1.1.89). How little he knows his three daughters is clearly seen by his immediate division of the kingdom between his two elder daughters and his straightforward disclaim of Cordelia as his daughter: "Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood, / And as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this forever" (1.1.112-15). He considers her now his "sometime daughter" (1.1.119). Although the Earl of Kent has obediently served his master a number of years he cannot make Lear see his emotional and intellectual blindness and is punished because of his pleas for Cordelia, banished from the kingdom. Lear's delusion about his daughters is absolute and is a moving cause for the development of the play, of all the crises which follow this (almost) unbelievable exposition.

The story about King Lear appeared in 1136 in a Latin version, which was written by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britannie* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*) and is presented in Part II, "Before the Romans Came" (ii, 11- ii, 15). This is an important source, because we can find in it all the basic elements of Lear's story, with an important exception: just before the end of this story Cordelia's husband Aganippus, King of the Franks, summons all his soldiers to help King Lear restore the kingship of Britain. And when this happened "Leir marched at the head of the assembled army, taking his daughter (Cordelia) with him. Lear beat his sons-in-law (husbands of Goneril and Regan) and brought them all under his dominion again"

(ii, 14). Three years later Leir died, his daughter Cordelia inherited the government and the kingdom of Britain and she ruled it peacefully for five years.

It may be interesting to note that Holinshed's version of the story was also known in Slovenia at the end of the seventeenth century. The Jesuit teachers, who came to Ljubljana at the end of the sixteenth century, also produced several plays for which they took the subject-matter from English history, among them a version of King Lear's story (Grošelj 61, 67-69). Although the plays are lost, the synopses (in German) and the extant manuscripts report about the plays; data preserved in diaries and annals offer some insight into the subject matter as well as in the dramatic structure of the texts. The play was called *Tugend-Cron Der Kindlichen Liebe. In Cordilla einer Tochter Layri Königs in Britannien* (The Virtue-Crown of Filial Love. In Cordilla, a Daughter of Layrus, King of Britain). The play was performed at the concluding distribution of school prizes in 1698. The plot begins with Layrus (King Lear) being banished from his kingdom; he is accompanied with his faithful servant Spiridus (Kent). They return to England from France together with Cordilla. Layrus is proclaimed King, but he is later killed in battle. The battle continues between Spiridus and his opponents, Merganes and Conedagus, who are Cordilla's nephews. Spiridus wins the battle and Cordilla is crowned Queen. She rules Britain for five years, but then she is captured and imprisoned by her evil nephews, and then, out of despair, she kills herself. The play consisted of a Prologue, Act 1 (ten scenes), Chorus, Act 2 (ten scenes), Chorus, Act 3 (6 scenes) and Epilogue. The audience only learned from the Argument about the tragic end of the Queen, so that the play ended happily. The play was accompanied by music (performed in the Prologue, Epilogue and between scenes) and the tragic suspense was lessened by dancing and low comic interpolations. Thus the theme of the play, stressing the triumph of filial love, was emphasized.

The reason why I have briefly presented the story is that it becomes clear how Shakespeare made Lear's daughters much more important than they were in the original version. The comparison also shows that Shakespeare did not believe that a happy ending was appropriate here and changed it into a tragic end. Besides, Shakespeare used in his play several other sources, among them Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the anonymous play *King Leir* (with a happy ending) and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, from which Shakespeare took the Gloucester story. It is interesting to mention that the version of *King Lear* with a happy ending was approved by Samuel Johnson (1709-84), who prepared an edition of Shakespeare's plays (1765). Several best English actors of the time, including David Garrick (1717-79), J. P. Kemble (1757-1823) and Edmund Keane (1787-1833), acted in a "revised" version of this play with happy ending. In 1838 Shakespeare's ending was finally accepted by an actor-manager William Charles Macready (1793-1873), and the play has been performed since as a classical tragedy. Shakespeare's tragic vision of this story is obviously much more persuasive than a happy end. In *King Lear* the psychological delineation of the hero and of his three daughters matches the playwright's highest achievements of human portraits in his plays, although it is only Lear who grows throughout the play emotionally, morally and in wisdom, whereas the characteristics of his three daughters remain the same. Goneril and Regan hide at first, in public, their true, evil nature, but the audience learns about it immediately after the division of the kingdom, when the two sisters remain alone:

Goneril: I think our father will hence tonight.

Regan: That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

Goneril: You will see how full of changes his age is. ..He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly. (1.1.280-89)

Goneril accuses her father as having been rash and that they cannot expect him to be wiser; due to his old, choleric age he will only "offend" them in the future, and therefore she believes that she and Regan should act in agreement. They immediately find excuses to scold him and Goneril's explanation provides the main reason for her impatience with him: "...Idle old man, / That still would manage those authorities / That he hath given away!" (1.3.17-19). If not earlier the understanding of the characters is by now completely clear to the audience, whereas the other characters in the play (with the exception of Gloucester's bastard son, Edmund, who made love to them both) are not openly informed about Goneril's and Regan's character until much later. Regan, Goneril's younger sister, competes with Goneril and therefore she stresses in her answer to their father's absurd question: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most" (1.1.50) her self-value ("I am made of that self metal as my sister, / And prize me at her worth" (1.1.68-9). Even more, she professes her love for him above "all other joys" (1.1.72). Goneril and Regan do not mind if some of the courtiers may realize that they exaggerate – or even lie – about their love, because their aim to achieve power is at stake. As soon as they get what they want Goneril has nothing nice to say about their father; he is for her an "idle old man", an old fool who is like a baby, who believes that he has preserved the authority, which he has given away.

The truth about the real feelings Goneril and Regan have for their father comes out soon, it appears to him as a shock not only because of his misjudgement of his daughters: "Are you our daughter?" (1.4.219), but also about himself: "Does any here know me? This is not Lear" (1.4.225). Lear's doubts about the reality, his disappointment with the world and human relation grow throughout the play; the world has become hell for him and he experiences the torments of the biblical "wheel of fire" (4.7.47), which the Renaissance period has "inherited" from "the mediaeval legends and visions of Hell and Purgatory" (Wilson 257). Therefore the majority of events in the play spring up and develop from Lear's famous question, "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (1.4.230), a question which has become misused and in a scientific manner almost impossible to answer, but which is still just as relevant today as it was in Shakespeare's time, if we wish to screen our ethical norms, our essence.

When King Lear's rage with Goneril becomes almost uncontrollable the most severe punishment he can wish her is his appeal to Nature to make her sterile (1.4.279), "And the stored vengeance of heaven fall / On her ingrateful top" (2.6.158-9). And when he is confronted with an identical situation with Regan he cannot bear his daughter's heartlessness any longer and he pleads her, "I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad" (2.4.24). But it is all in vain, Goneril and Regan proceed with their foul play, first by contibuting their voices to blind the Earl of Gloucester and by Regan's murder of the Servant. Besides, Edmund has made love promises to both of them, and particularly after the death of Duke of Cornwall, Regan's husband (4.2), Regan is pre-

pared to fight for her lover and she tries at first to bribe Goneril's servant Oswald ("I'll love thee much", 4.5.23) and she even tells him about her secret plans and about their relationship: "Edmund and I have talked, / And more convenient is he for my hand / Than for your Lady's. You may gather more." (4.5.30-33) But after Edgar kills Oswald in a duel he reads Goneril's letter in which she complains to Edmund that her marriage to the Duke of Albany is like a prison to her. Goneril hopes that Edmund will kill him and thus free her from her husband's bed "and supply the place for your labour" (4.6.259-267). When they meet again and when she asks Edmund, "Tell me—but truly—but then speak the truth- / Do you not love my sister? (5.1.8-9), Edmund, of course, denies this, but in his monologue at the end of this scene he admits, "To both these sisters have I sworn my love" (5.1.). However, from the rest of the monologue we see that he does not love either Goneril or Regan: "Which of them shall I take? / Both? One? Or neither?" (5.1.57-8). A common feature of character both Goneril and Regan have is betrayal. They betrayed their Father by lying to him about their love; they betrayed Cordelia by taking away from her a part of kingdom which was to belong to her; they betrayed their husbands by having a relationship with Edmund, and finally, they also betrayed each other by being dishonest regarding their relationship with Edmund. Additionally, Goneril is jealous and afraid that Regan might be more successful in enticing Edmund to become her husband, so she decides to poison her and then to commit suicide. Edmund, who is aware that "The wheel is come full circle" (5.3.173) and that his death is near, openly admits: "I was contracted to them both; all three / Now marry in an instant" (5.3.227-8). Goneril and Regan, whose main law of life is evil, have practically broken all Ten Commandments (The Old Testament, Ex. 20), and even if some of the wrong deeds which they had committed could nowadays be forgiven by civil law they could not be pardoned their murders (for example, in Act 3 Sc. 7, when Cornwall's loyal Servant tries to prevent the blinding of Gloucester Regan "shows her strength", and kills the Servant).

Shakespeare does not provide any particular reason for Goneril's and Regan's evil nature. They are simply immoral creatures whose negative impulses have prevailed. On the other hand, although Edmund is also evil he is completely aware that "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices / Make instruments to plague us" (5.3.169-170). When he is mortally wounded he wishes to annul his order for Cordelia to be hanged in prison (5.3.242-55), but it is too late. His repentance, his catharsis, may not seem believable, unless Edmund's deeds are shown in the performance as the result of his rational decisions, especially when compared to Goneril's and Regan's evil nature which they never recognize. Edmund knows that his guilty actions are the consequence of his own decisions, a thought which he clearly expresses in the monologue at the beginning of the play:

This is the excellent foppery of the world that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and stars; as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and traitors by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in by a divine

thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of stars. (1.2.120-31)

Goneril and Regan are two morally negative characters, who can “compete” in their immorality with features we find in Claudius and in Macbeth. Their cruelty is also a decisive factor for the whole development of tragic events in *King Lear*, and in a sense they are the forerunners of the morally most corrupt female character in Shakespeare’s great tragedies, Lady Macbeth. They are the proof that Shakespeare showed that regarding moral issues his women characters are men’s equal partners, and they are also given the dramaturgic impetus, which sets them in equilibrium with the rest of protagonists of this tragedy.

Among Shakespeare’s morally positive female characters the profile of King Lear’s youngest daughter, Cordelia, is drawn most positively. When the three daughters are asked by King Lear: “Which of you shall we say doth love us most” (1.1.50), Cordelia immediately decides that her motto is: “Love, and be silent” (1.1.61). She can say nothing, which would not be true, and not dishonest as her sisters were, and which would provide her with a part of the kingdom. Although Lear is enraged by her answer and he disclaims “all my paternal care, / Propinquity and property of blood”, and calls her “thou my sometime daughter” (1.1.112-3, 119), she remains firm in her stand and she tells her sisters that she knows what they are like and that their cunningness will be revealed in time (1.1.260-280). Cordelia knows that she has lost her father’s favour because she did not use “that glib and oily art” (1.1.223), which her sisters had used, but she does not give in and accepts her father’s decision, preserving her moral integrity. She remains loyal to him and is moved by his misfortunes and she responds to them with “patience and sorrow”, not with rage. Shakespeare’s poetic imagery for Cordelia’s response (her face showed “Sunshine and rain at once”, “As pearls from diamonds dropped” 4.3.19, 22) properly characterizes Cordelia’s character. She returned to England for “love, dear love, and our father’s right” (4.4.28) and their reunion is one of the most moving scenes of reconciliation between a parent and his child in world literature. The suffering Lear had to undergo changed him completely and he now perceives reality knowing about the mistakes he had made in life. He receives Cordelia with the following words:

You do me wrong to take me out o’ th’ grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead. (4.7.45-48)

Lear is now aware of his physical and mental condition, and like Hamlet before his tragic death, Lear has achieved mental and spiritual ripeness and he is ready for death when it comes. He could accept all sorrows had Cordelia remained alive but Cordelia’s death pushes him back into the situation when man realizes that his life is ruled by forces of Nature, which he cannot control (cf. Lear’s emotions in the storm scenes, 3.2. and 3.4). He wishes to express his sorrow over Cordelia’s death with words indicating the Apocalypse: “That heaven’s vault should crack!” (5.3.259). Shakespeare’s tragic vision of life is here at its lowest ebb, for Cordelia’s tragic fate could only be compared with that of Desdemona, even though Desdemona does not reach such a high level of moral integrity and of intellectual awareness as Cordelia

does. She is the most developed female character although she is given less opportunity for discourse than some other female protagonists in Shakespeare's mature plays.

Macbeth: Lady Macbeth

Critics agree that Lady Macbeth is the most sinister female character in Shakespeare's tragedies. If Macbeth is sometimes interpreted as "the history of a human soul on its way to Hell, a soul at first noble, humane, innocent; then tempted through ambition to commit an appalling crime; and last, passing through the inevitable stages of torment and spiritual corruption that precede damnation" (Wilson in *King Lear* xlvi), this cannot be said of his wife. After having read her husband's letter about the Sister's prophecy, who addressed Macbeth as the future king of Scotland ("Hail, king that shall be" 1.5.9), Lady Macbeth accepts this as an aim which they should reach, regardless of moral norms or any other inhibitions they may be confronted with on their way to this goal. In the hierarchy of evil thinking and evil deeds she stands higher than the Weird Sisters, who have often been characterized as "the incarnation of evil in the universe" (*ib.* xxi). The Weird Sisters only foretell Macbeth's future whereas Lady Macbeth actually persuades her husband that in order to prove himself his deeds should match his desires, to be a king. She wishes him to be a kind of a superman, who has no moral obligations, not even to King Duncan who is even his relative (Macbeth is his cousin), who is his superior and besides, who has just promoted him. She knows that Macbeth is ambitious, but on the other hand he is too kind, his moral standards would not allow him to "play false" or to use for advancement ways which are not proper. But she does not stop and in a monologue which she speaks before the arrival of Macbeth back home she delivers herself to the realm of evil, yet upspoken by a female character in Shakespeare's plays:

.....Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visiting of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry 'Hold, hold!' (1.5.39-53)

Lady Macbeth does not renounce here only the moral and religious principles that existed in Shakespeare's time and are still valid, she also refuses to accept the natural

laws of womankind, her gender and her human nature. She becomes personified evil. But when she is supposed to perform such cruel deeds, as e.g. the murder of King Duncan, she cannot do it. However, she still sticks to her ambition and she cunningly persuades Macbeth to perform the murders himself or to use other morally corrupt men, as e.g. the First and the Second Murderer who are to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. Even though Macbeth becomes aware that Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain suspect that there is some foul play going on and that they become suspicious (Donalbain says to his brother Malcolm: "... where we are, There's daggers in men's smiles" 2.3.139-140), and they run away, Lady Macbeth still encourages her husband to continue killing their (possible) opponents. The butchery cannot be stopped; Macbeth becomes terrified and mentally disturbed believing that dead Banquo has taken his seat at the banquet table. In this moment Lady Macbeth is still strong enough trying to persuade the guests that Macbeth had a sudden fit. She tries to provoke him by suggesting that he is not a man if he cannot control his fear. But in his mind the ghost of dead Banquo reappears and Macbeth is lost again (3.4). He cannot control his speech, but he is aware that he has crossed the Rubicon and that there is no return possible. He realizes that there is no end of killing ("It will have blood; they say, blood will have have blood", 3.4.123). The Weird Sisters seem to pacify his fears when they warn him to "Beware the thane of Fife" 4.1.72), when they promise him that "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth." (4.1.80-81), and that he will not be vanquished "until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him" (4.1.92-94). These pieces of news seem favourable to Macbeth and his first move is to surprise Macduff's family, to kill them all, or as Macbeth sees it "To crown my thoughts with acts" (4.1.149).

The slaughter of Macduff's wife, his children and his servants is one of those "acts of Gods", which cannot be rationally explained. Macduff's question, "Did heaven look on, / And would not take their part?" (4.3.223-24) can be compared with situations in which Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia found themselves before unjustifiable death, and which is so briefly but also so hopefully declared by Desdemona before her death: "I am a Christian ... I shall be saved" (*Othello* 4.2.4.2.83, 87). But, as we know, none of Shakespeare's great morally positive female characters is physically "saved", neither is saved Lady Macduff nor her innocent children. Whereas Macbeth and his wife willingly and knowingly chose the path, which was morally wrong, Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia were the victims of circumstances, they are not responsible for their fate. Lady Macbeth is a driving force in the play and her husband's fate as a murderer is also largely due to her plotting. Her sleepless nights, which are the result of her depression are reflected in the disturbance of her behaviour and lack of feelings (these effects could be made worse if she drank a lot of alcohol). The symptom of depression also cause a person sleepless nights. Psychoanalysis, as practised by Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler and other psychiatrists, might even bring her back to normal health condition unless her subconsciousness was already in such a bad state - as Carl Gustav Jung would say - that it could not work efficiently unless her consciousness properly performed its function, which, of course, is doubtful regarding crimes which she (and her husband) had committed.

The Gentlewoman tells the Doctor about her Lady's strange behaviour but she would not reveal the words spoken by Lady Macbeth during her walking at night,

although her excuse is rather weak; she would not do it, because she has “no witness to confirm my speech” (5.1.17-8). Both of them see how Lady Macbeth rubs her hands trying to wash away the blood of innocent people Macbeth and his wife had killed and the Doctor’s diagnoses Lady Macbeth’s behaviour correctly: it is schizophrenic, paranoid, it affects Lady Macbeth’s heart (5.1.51) and he knows that this disease is “beyond his practice”, because it is caused by an illness when “Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles”; “More needs she the divine than the physician” (5.1.70-1, 74). Of course, Lady Macbeth cannot be cured, she has not openly admitted and repented her crimes; she has not gone through the process of catharsis, she is still dominated by her guilty conscious for which she finds death as the only possible solution.³³ Therefore her depression (even her madness) is not tragic in the Aristotelian sense of this concept. When Macbeth is informed about her death, he is not emotionally touched by the news and he calmly retorts to Seton’s information about her death: “She should have died hereafter” (5.5.17), he does not even enquire of Seton when or how she actually died. Now Macbeth begins to realize that his past life was full of mistakes, that it was wrongly and foolishly spent; there is no doubt that Lady Macbeth immensely contributed to such an end. On this occasion he pronounces the words, which in modern times have sometimes been interpreted as one of the darkest moments in Shakespeare’s life too. The hero sees no aim in life, or rather, accepts the view that life is absurd, meaningless:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (5.5.19-28)

Such nihilistic thoughts can only be expressed by someone who has not only lost his hope in God, but who is weary of life, of his existence. However the question remains how are we to explain the deaths of innocent heroines in Shakespeare’s great tragedies. According to Christian belief, which was rather common in Shakespeare’s time, the suffering of a righteous man was often linked with the question of God’s justness, his righteousness. This topic is extensively dealt with in the Bible (in the Old Testament, in the Book of Job). Job’s initial answer to this question is that God “destroyeth the perfect and the wicked” (Job 9:22). But when Job recognizes his own worthlessness and his inborn evil he begins to see the suffering as his chastening. After man has done whatever he can to bring about love and happiness then he can accept his fate as God’s will, as a sign of God’s omnipotence. Christian faith brings

³³ Eva Petrič, »Ko so noči predolge ...in prekratke« (*Delo znanost* 7 July 2005:17), - See also: Kenneth Tucker, *Shakespeare and the Jungian Typology* (London: McFarland, 2003).

him hope of God's blessing and restoration of his life in God. But such a mental and emotional state can only be achieved if man is aware of his sinful nature and of his responsibility to choose his ways justly and honestly. Then he is, like Job, granted the protection from anxiety and peace of mind. According to the Bible man should not judge God's doings, "For my thoughts are not thy thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). We may surmise that such were the answers not only some of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines might have given, but also many of the Bard's contemporaries. We may speculate that in this period of his life Shakespeare saw man's fate as absurd, like the Earl of Gloucester ("As flies to wanton boys we are to th' gods, / They kill us for their sport". *King Lear* 4.1.36-7). In our age in which agnosticism and religious as well as moral nihilism seem to have won as philosophical doctrines a number of adherents, Christian views may not be seen as values by some (many ?) readers and theatre-goers. In the twentieth century when philosophical views asserting the absurdity of life were widely spread, Christian ideas might seem obsolete and questionable. Nevertheless, judging on the presentation of life, man's thinking, events, ideas and persuasiveness of their artistic implementation in Shakespeare's great tragedies, we may conclude that the playwright saw life as an intricate battle between good and evil, in which evil finally always loses the battle, but it also creates a lot of tragedies and the loss of many innocent people.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of some major women characters in Shakespeare's great tragedies proves that the dramatist did not underestimate the role women played in lives of men in his age, even though they were not given such social importance as men. He explored their psyche with great depth; however, only two characters, Gertrude and Ophelia, are open to different interpretations as regards their ethical norms, intelligence, and integrity. Other female characters are much more clearly and definitely drawn and there is no doubt about their basic moral and ethical features: Desdemona and Cordelia as morally positive and Goneril, Regan, Lady Macbeth as negative characters. The latter are shown as more cunning, plotting females, who use their intelligence primarily for their wicked purposes. They are self-sufficient, self-assured, egotistic creatures, whose ambition for power and whose lust dominate their lives as well as lives of men who surround them. They can be referred to as embodiments of primeval evil, whereas Cordelia symbolizes "the redeemer" (see *King Lear* 4.6.203-5). Shakespeare also characterizes them by the lack of motherhood and lack of sincere emotions. They also often overestimate their strength and end their lives either in committing suicide or in murdering their rivals before their own tragic end. The dramatist's artistic force is also seen in the fact that they are not perceived – at least not predominantly – from a masculine perspective, but are portrayed in such a way that they stand before us as complete human beings whom we might encounter nowadays in females frustrated for one reason or another, but who are definitely far from ideal, socially and sexually liberated women. They must take into account their own mental and emotional limitations just as men have to do.

Appendix 1

I believe that the title of my article as well as its subject matter need a brief explanation. In 1964, at the time of the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, I visited Stratford-upon-Avon for the first time in my life. Shakespeare's birthplace offered then a number of exhibitions and, of course, new performances of Shakespeare's plays, some of which I had the opportunity to see. I reported about my visit on the Slovene Section programme of the BBC (on 29 April 1964; this was my first article on Shakespeare). During the academic year 1963/64 (which I spent at the University of Sussex preparing my Ph.D. thesis on English poetic drama of the 1930s under the supervision of Professor David Daiches) I saw a number of performances at the newly established National Theatre including the "romantic" version of *Hamlet* with Peter O'Toole in the main role. This production was not particularly well received by English theatre critics; however, they were enthusiastic about Sir Laurence Olivier's performance in the title role of *Othello*. I reported about this and some other modern English plays in various Slovene publications. In the following decades I was lucky enough to travel quite frequently so that besides seeing many performances in the Slovene theatres and in Croatia (at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival a play by Shakespeare was regularly produced) I saw theatrical performances also further afield (e.g. in London, New York, Sydney). About some of them I also wrote articles for Slovene newspapers and magazines.

The first complete edition of Shakespeare's work in Slovene appeared in 1974 under the editorship of a well-known Slovene poet, dramatist and translator, Matej Bor (this is a pen name of Vladimir Pavšič, 1913-1993). Bor asked me to write for this edition an essay on Shakespeare's use of literary and historical sources in his plays, which I did ("Vloga in pomen virov za Shakespeareovo dramatiko". *William Shakespeare. Zbrana dela* 14. Ljubljana, DZS, 1973: 499-545). In 1968 I became the first Professor of English Literature teaching Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. At that time it was extremely hard to buy English books in Slovenia and therefore I decided to prepare for my students a short text-book, entitled *Notes on Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Ljubljana: FF, 1985. 119 pp.). Later on I revised this text-book and it appeared under the title *Zapisi o Shakespearu. Notes on Shakespeare* (Ljubljana: ZIFF, 1995, 171 pp.; rpt. and revised in 1997, 207 pp.). Some of my other articles on British and American drama (including Shakespeare) were published in my book *Od Shakespearo do naših sodobnikov* (From Shakespeare to Our Contemporaries. Ljubljana: FF, 1983. 175 pp).

Since 1995 another Slovene poet, dramatist and translator, Milan Jesih (1950-), has newly translated a number of plays written by Shakespeare, and I have written nine prefaces for these editions. I also wish to mention in this connection the main predecessor of the two above mentioned translators of Shakespeare's plays into Slovene, Oton Župančič (1878-1949). He used in his translations poetic, elevated speech, whereas Bor and Jesih tried to modernize their translations of Shakespeare's plays and bring them closer to everyday, spoken Slovene.

The Slovene theatres perform almost yearly a new, "classical" production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. However, during the past few decades a number of Slovene (and foreign) theatre directors tried to create and produce their own, experimental versions of this play. Therefore I have pointed out in my article some of the most characteristic features of these productions, which have been performed in Slovenia during the past two decades. My paper is thus a continuation of my past work on Shakespeare and I have tried to deal in it with some new and specific questions and interpretations of *Hamlet* and other Shakespeare's great tragedies.

Let me also use this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for their help to the following: Jason Blake, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana; the Librarians of the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana; Francka Slivnik, Slovenski gledališki muzej (The Slovene Theatre Museum), Ljubljana; and Marija Nodilo, Librarian, Inter University Centre, Dubrovnik, Croatia.

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Appendix 2

Zdravko Duša: "Hamlett Rap". This song was part of the text in *Hamlett Packard* production on (The Glej Experimental Theatre and Cankarjev dom, Ljubljana, 3 April 1992). It was printed in *Naši razgledi* 8 May 1992: 260. The song was sung by a well known Slovene actor Boris Cavazza. It is quoted here with the author's permission.

He had a lousy uncle that killed his dad
And his mother took the killer to her bed
How very sad! Oh Hamlet!
He had this friend Horatio a kid next door
In this old Danish castle of Elsinore
And there was a ghost coming to the place
He was a clever motherfucker wouldn't show his face
Hamlet had to promise he would kill
But then he wasn't sure if he ever will
Frankly speaking he was not the kind
He had a serious flaw he couldn't make up his mind
To be or not to be to be or not to be to be or not to be
To be be bebebe be be be bbbbbb ...
Oh Hamlet!

Was it true they were lovers he didn't know
'T was all yes and no and no and yes and yes and no
For prince of Denmark! Oh Hamlet!
So once these actors came to set a trap
His mama and his uncle took a wrong step
Now he had a proof they were a horny couple
Mama was a bitch and uncle was a fucker
In his fury Hamlet did a stupid thing
He murdered Polonius instead of the king
He was sent abroad to be killed on the spot
But had a naval rumble and was left behind
He had a serious flaw he couldn't make up his mind
To be or not to be to be or not to be to be or not to be
To bbe be bebebebe, bebebe be bbbbbb ...
Oh Hamlet!

Now Hamlet had to kill or be killed by the king
This was no more a game but a real thing
'Twas life or death! Oh Hamlet!
So there was this funeral and all that stuff
They buried Ophelia his only love
Her brother was real pain in the ass
He jumped into the grave the guy had no class
They started to fight Hamlet and the brother
With a poisoned sword they wounded each other
Some good poisoned wine killed the mother-witch
And Hamlet killed the royal son of a bitch
He ran a sword through the old man's heart
Then said to Horatio his friend be smart
Try to keep your ass away from the bloody mess
... the rest is silence.

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