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Maciej Pilecki¹, Szymon Chrzęstowski^{2,3}

HAMLET ET AL.

¹Jagiellonian University, Faculty of Psychiatry, Clinic of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychotherapy

²Warsaw University, Faculty of Psychology

³Psychological Counselling Centre of the Warsaw University

Hamlet
psychodynamic understanding
participation in dialogue

Abstract

The attempt to understand the psychological determinants of Hamlet's actions has a rich tradition in both theatrical and mental health literature. Hamlet is often described as having psychotic decompensation. He is also sometimes perceived as a victim of a neurotic disintegration caused by his inability to solve the Oedipal conflict brought about by his father's death. However, does the content of the play bear evidence of any of these hypotheses? What image of Hamlet's inner world can be built on the basis of drama text? How can we perceive the history of Hamlet today? Who is Hamlet in a world liberated from the framework of unambiguous theories and cognitive constructs? What might our understanding of Hamlet be in a globalizing world, with no dominant concept of human psychological development, the revolution of theory of attachment, the influence of feminism, or evolutionary psychology? Who will be the Hamlet of the Time of the Pandemic? Can the story of the young Danish prince still be a source of important reflection for us also about ourselves?

The article opens a series of four publications on the perception of selected works of Shakespeare by contemporary Polish psychotherapists.

Szymon Chrzęstowski

Introduction

It is 2017, in New York, the Public Theater is showing "Julius Caesar", a well-known tragedy of Shakespeare. The Dictator Caesar is murdered by conspirators, which triggers a civil war. In this production, Julius Caesar resembles Donald Trump. A few days after the première, two sponsors – the Bank of America and Delta Airlines, withdraw their funding for the theatre. And now to 2020, in Krakow: the COVID-19 pandemic, I ask several Polish psychotherapists to comment on selected plays of Shakespeare. Everyone agrees straight away. The author of the essay on Hamlet sees the Dutch prince in the corridors of

the Adult, Child, and Adolescent Clinical Psychiatric Ward at the University Hospital in Krakow. To be or not to be has a specific dimension for him as he is a physician responsible for the health of patients, personnel and his own family, alike.

Shakespeare's plays are like a projective test. Wanda Świętkowska in her introduction to "Hamlet.pl. Myślenie Hamletem w powojennej kulturze polskiej" [Hamlet.pl. The Hamlet way of thinking in post-War Polish culture] asks: "What questions have we posed Hamlet after the Second World War and what problems would we want to solve with his help?" [1, p. 7]. Changing this sentence, I would like to consider which questions are posed by contemporary Polish (it being key that they are Polish!) psychotherapists to the Shakespeare's main characters and what problems can be solved when referring to his works.

It is with this article that we open a series of publications referring to selected works of Shakespeare. In the next editions of "Psychoterapia" [Psychotherapy], the reader will find articles whose authors will deliberate on "Hamlet", "The Taming of the Shrew", "A Midsummer Night's Dream", and "The Tempest". Clearly, they are not a literary analysis of these works but constitute a starting point for reflections on different issues that can be of interest to us, contemporary Polish psychotherapists. I am emphasising national identity since, as Świętkowska writes [1, p. 8]: Shakespeare "goes above and beyond history and is universal" [...], but set in history, variable and always determined by the 'here and now'".

Shakespeare's dramatic works and comedies were clearly repeatedly discussed and analysed, hence, this idea is by no means new. It is not the originality of thought that is of essence here. We can repeatedly observe even a patient who is very well known to us, looking for new ways of explaining their functioning. This congenial curiosity concerning the patient, readiness to question what one already knows about them, searching for new explanations, seem to be important elements of the psychotherapy process. Does the fact that the Stratfordian's works have been performed countless times stop them from being acted out on stage again? From the point of view of a psychotherapist, they can be treated as case studies that one returns to time and time again, analysing their different theoretical perspectives, just as one returns to the patient descriptions of Freud. Indeed, Freud himself referred to Shakespeare's works, analysing "Hamlet", for instance, as a clinical illustration of the Oedipus Complex. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the Author also refers to the Swollen-Footed (i.e., Oedipus).

Therefore, an analysis of Shakespeare's works inevitably leads to posing key questions about ourselves, our choices and emotions, which determine our decisions, our social roles, and our use of power in which we are participating. This series of articles came about in order to once again pose the same questions and consider both the answers and the person putting the questions, as well as the context in which these questions are advanced. It is to this very context to which the Author of this article inaugurating the series dedicated to Shakespeare is referring. The backdrop to these questions about Hamlet is the mentioned ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Author writes hereinbelow: "We are stepping back to the world of archaic meanings where the words syndrome, fear, courage, and dedication are starting to take on a concrete and tangible dimension." Shakespeare poses questions to the Reader about these very "archaic meanings". Their discovery seems to be important not only during the pandemic. Psychotherapy without searching for the answers to these questions is reduced to procedures, analyses of mechanisms, and psychopathology. It loses

what seems to be extremely valuable in psychotherapy, namely, compassionately addressing of and being sensitive to the patient's needs and their fate (not just to the psychopathology of the patient). Therefore, an analysis of Shakespeare's works helps psychotherapists not to lose sight of the patient, their conflicts, life choices faced by them and their helplessness towards fate.

One should also steer clear of the divide between a scientific approach to psychotherapy that best represents evidence based practice and treating psychotherapy as part of the humanities, referring to the idiographic method. This breakdown is false. Psychotherapy that does not refer to research findings becomes speculative, perhaps inquisitive, but not very effective and easily leading psychotherapists astray, and pseudoscientific ways of helping (of which there, of course, a great many). Shakespeare helps us, psychotherapists, to notice what is very human, intrinsic, but Shakespeare also clearly does not suffice.

Liz Burns [2], in her book *Literature and therapy. A systemic view* claims that literary works may constitute a bridge between mental health professionals and their patients. This bridge is the *lingua franca* of describing and explaining various problems – a language that is comprehensible to both therapists and patients alike. Literature, similarly to cinema and theatre, also allow us to analyse life dilemmas and investigate various ways of coping with them. What is more, contact with literature (or, more broadly, the arts) opens us (both psychotherapists and patients alike) to different possibilities of interpreting the texts being read or the works of art being viewed. Similarly to psychotherapy, we are often looking for various ways of understanding patient's experiences.

As mentioned earlier, we begin this series of articles from "Hamlet". For the one writing these words, not only is Hamlet a Dutch prince, but also a young man, who landed on a psychiatric ward. Child and adolescent psychotherapists and psychiatrists have seen many different Hamlets. It is worth mentioning at this point that the Hamlet Foundation operates in Krakow, which helps people undergoing psychiatric treatment. What is it that makes Hamlet a patient? From the point of view of a family psychotherapist, the question can be put differently: who is the identified patient and what makes them become a patient? This term, that is, identified patient, is used so commonly by systemic psychotherapists that we do not always consider its true meaning. The author writes below about the "mystery of the person of Hamlet" attempting to confront it. However, his deliberations exceed the problem of identifying the patient.

Maciej Pilecki

I am writing these words in the circumstances of a (temporary?) end of the world. On the micro – and macro-scale. The staircases and wards of our Clinic have been covered in black plastic film referred somewhat exaggeratingly as locks. There are red tape lines on the floor separating off zones of potentially lower and higher risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection. We refer to them –attempting to positively rephrase them – as hot, warm, and cold. The personnel is on the fast track to learning to put on (importantly) and take off (most importantly) PPEs – personal protective equipment, like barrier aprons, masks, goggles, visors, scarves, and boot protectors. We spend hours analysing the routes that we

should move to and from patients diagnosed with COVID-19 so as to prevent the routes of those that enter and leave the hot (dirty) zone from intersecting. In the contredanse of the obsession and compulsion serving to preserve life and health, we wonder what and when can be touched and when can a touch carry with it a disease risk for ourselves and for our loved ones.

The daily temperature measurement is a peculiar test. Have or have we not passed the test of preparing our ward for work as an infectious-psychiatric ward within less than 20 days?

We are stepping back to the world of archaic meanings where the words syndrome, fear, courage, and dedication are starting to take on concrete and tangible dimensions. There is someone – who despite not having to – wants to talk to our room-confined patients diagnosed with COVID-19, while someone else disappears sending a suspiciously looking many-week-long sick leave medical certificate.

We must be wary that our feelings that we have towards the Coronavirus do not become feelings towards our patients – for them not to become enemies carrying the risk of disease and death for us. This is, by no means, easy.

Our language is, in passing but consistently, becoming the language of war. On the front line, losses, supplements, reserves. How will this battle end? Unfortunately, everything seems to indicate that this will be years-long trench warfare.

* * *

When the cannons are heard, the muses are silent. Although, for many of us, surely these fleeting moments of immersion in literary, music, and film worlds without the incessant clamour of the media and the anxiety and uneasiness of those close to us mean a great deal.

And so it is, Shakespeare and Hamlet. So be it.

* * *

This reminds me of a story about the beloved father of Professor Maria Orwid (Pfeffer), an advocate and intellectual who was reading the works of Shakespeare, hardly leaving his library, when the German troops entered Przemysl in September 1939. This Polish Jew (a Pole, a Jew) was already suspecting what fate may await all those whose origins differ from the nationality of the socialist ideal. The Professor would tell us about this scene in a way that awakened in me vivid and supple associations. The interiors of a dark room lined with books, slivers of light coming in through the drawn curtains, and an elegant man sitting in a stately, richly-carved wooden armchair, engrossed in reading. A child watching this scene from behind a half-open door. Perhaps an overwhelming silence of the lifeless city. Perhaps the sound of the boots of the Wehrmacht soldiers marching in groups of four, striking the cobblestones; the roar of engines of military trucks. Then, there are images from being in hiding on the Aryan side and from the ghetto in Przemysl.

Which of Shakespeare's plays is suitable for the true or temporary end of the world? What was Mr Pfeffer reading? Something amusing? Perhaps "The Taming of the Shrew"? The story of wartime victories despite everything going not quite as it should – "Henry V"? A political drama with elements of propaganda for the "ignorant mob" – "Richard

III”? Something about love and the key significance of the lack of high-speed wireless communication – “Romeo and Julia”? A solipsistic escape into fantasy – “The Midsummer Night’s Dream”? “Hamlet”? Why “Hamlet”?

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Although actions like “Hamlet” can be summarised in a few sentences, this play is widely considered as difficult to act out. The next generations of actors and directors are looking for ways of playing its main figure – somebody who is discovering the order of things, understanding and interpreting Hamlet’s character, understanding the coherence and sense that gives behaviours and decisions their meaning.

Inspiration for art and the character of Hamlet is sought in the old Saxonian saga about the figure of Amleth. After his uncle murdered his father, for many years he feigned madness and planned revenge so as to ultimately, once he came of age as a man, undertake his revenge with fire and sword. This tale is simple in its original version, with no shades or Shakespearian subtleties; a saga about a cursed heir. Amleth is, therefore, a name meaning ‘dimwit’ or ‘idiot’.

Thus, one can understand the story of Hamlet directly, without splitting hairs. Fleeing from his royal fate, the lover of theatre and of having fun has to abandon his present life and endeavour to seek revenge for his father’s death and save the kingdom – the world, which *is out of shape*¹. He deliberately feigns his madness to confuse and distract others. He does what he has to do. In what different light do we then perceive the gesture of Horace, ordering the corpse of Hamlet to be treated as a body of a deceased war hero.

At present, in everyday language (at least until relatively recently) the term “hamletising” could have essentially meant such a reading of this figure as not to get lost in dilemmas but make difficult choices and act in accordance with our decisions – the consequences of one’s actions, despite the costs entailed, which one may possibly have to bear.

This is not, however, a line of interpretation that can be easily defended.

* * *

Hamlet is associated with two other heroes from the ancient world – Oedipus and Orestes. In the history of each of them we can find the death of a parent and choices that inevitably lead to tragedy.

Both Orestes and Oedipus are built around clear conflicts and challenges. Their fate is understandable and we can trace the inescapable path to the final *coup de grâce* of fate.

In the case of Aeschylus’ “Oresteia”, the similarities of the details and fates of Orestes and Hamlet are considerable. However, they do differ in terms of the metaphysics. In the story of Orestes, the drama is not in the lack of possibilities of making choices but rather in the situation where every choice is connected with the transgression of divine standards. The dilemmas are clear and comprehensible, here, in the context of this transcendent di-

¹⁾ Act I, Scene 5, W. Shakespeare. Hamlet. Król duński [Hamlet. King of Denmark]. Translated by Józef Paszkowski. Wolnelektury.pl

mension. Orestes, seeking revenge on his mother, breaks one of the divine standards. Not taking revenge for his father's death, he contravenes the second standard.

In the distant from the dramaturgy prototype, although interesting production of Jan Klata from the National Old Theatre in Krakow, the gods are like modern-day celebrities playing with people like puppets. It is the gods and not the inner world and dilemmas of man that are the most important point of reference.

The associations with Sophocles' Oedipus are more distant – he too, however, commits an act of murder of one parent and leads to the death of the other. Here too, the whole story can be summed up – free of dilemmas and the meanings of personal dilemmas – as *the Gods wanted this*.

When Oedipus attacks the old man in the narrow mountain ravine, this does not surprise us. We conjecture the sources of his act of violence. We understand why, when he hears that he can kill his father and wed his mother – he believes in prophecy. He is running away from something that must have triggered in him some desires concealed below the surface of consciousness and that terrified him. We can only surmise what meanders of fate led him to that place. What can he recall from his past?

We can, therefore, look at Oedipus as a victim of a multidimensional, complex trauma. The cripple from the dysfunction of which his name comes from in Greek – *Oideo and Pous* —\-, when that which was true was taken away from him or never awarded to him. Laius' grandson, son of Labdacus. This "La" from which it was undoubtedly to begin from, is another wound of Oedipus, an awareness of which he can surely gain late on, once his story is on course to its ultimate end. Does he put the question to Jocasta? "What was my name? How was I to have?" Taken away from his mother, disfigured, handed over to childless parents who were undoubtedly dealing with grief and bereavement after the loss of the children of their own flesh and blood which they could not have. Kept in the dark, among the whispers that fell silent as he approached. When he heard the words of the prophesy about the patricide, he found anger in himself which substantiated the act?

We can also reach for the transgenerational thread here. Labdacus, Oedipus' grandfather, dies when his son Laius is a one-year-old child. His own story repeats itself in the fate of the son. Are the men who finally meet in the ravine not guided by impulsivity, which in past times – as claimed by some – make heroes and kings out of warriors and now condemns pupils with a diagnosis of ADHD to repeat the school year? We can ultimately focus on the diplomatic thread and consider which of them should cross the narrow ravine first, reaching the clear conclusion that this was not at all clear-cut.

And what justifies Hamlet?

* * *

The world of metaphysics is reduced in Hamlet to a somewhat gaudy dimension of the father's spirit roaming the castle walls. Is transcendence a collective hysteria, hypocrisy or the delusion of the mind descending into madness? There is no answer to this. Hamlet, left to his own devices, engages in dialogue not with the gods or even with his father's shadow, but with himself.

An argument that is frequently raised by directors and actors in favour of there not being any possibility of creating a psychological and dramaturgically probable figure of a young prince is his madness. In the literature on the subject, one can even come across publications attributing schizophrenia to Hamlet. How convenient! He ultimately hears (this is typical) and sees (this is atypical) the spirit of his father. We, nevertheless, know that there is nothing more logical than madness. However, its hidden code requires looking beneath the surface of things, discovering the relationships between the past and disintegration.

When Hamlet tells Ophelia that two days have gone by from the death of his father and not – as she argues – two months, he is surely right. For him it is a fresh corpse.

Similarly in the dialogue:

Queen

Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

Hamlet

Mother, you have my father much offended.

Queen

Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.²

Outwardly, Hamlet's answer sounds almost like echolalia. But surely we are not dealing with senselessness here but with an emotional and metaphysical order overwriting the real one. For Hamlet, the spirit of the father is real or is a real being. Perhaps it may also be the answer of the artist playing with words, so used to ambiguous, metaphorical statements. Hamlet uses and transforms the words of his mother so as to tell her something very important about his feelings towards her. However, his mother does not understand him. It is as though the semantic code appearing in his statement was not common here. It is as though they did not speak the same language. Nevertheless, this is only a fraction of the knowledge about the inner world of Hamlet that we manage to glean.

Hamlet returns to his home in Denmark as ahistorical and unrooted. We know nothing about his earlier relationships, closenesses, and traumas of this perhaps twenty-five-year-old, perhaps thirty-year-old man.

Circumstantial evidence is all we have. The father's spirit who only after his death, hesitantly and in a roundabout way, enquires about the love of his son. He listens to him out of duty, not out of love. An attempt of calmly talking to his mother disrupted by the discovery of Polonius hiding in the chamber. We only know about his school friendship with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, about their time learning together and their wartime adventures with Horace. Perhaps the only time he reveals any important aspect of himself from his past is his turpistic monologue with Yorick's skull — the court jester. This is the only figure about whom he speaks with affection, reminiscing about how he was nursed and kissed as a child. Perhaps this was the teacher of his style of expressing himself.

The response of one of the gravediggers to the question of Hamlet about himself who was hiding his identity is symbolic, like a counting-out rhyme.

²⁾ Act III, Scene 3. W. Shakespeare. Hamlet. Król duński [Hamlet. King of Denmark]. Translated by Józef Paszkowski. Wolnelektury.pl

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Hamlet

How did he go crazy?

First Gravedigger

In a strange way, they say.

Hamlet

What do you mean, "in a strange way"?

First Gravedigger

By losing his mind.³

Going mad results from loss of reason. The labyrinth in which we move without a map, led astray by words.

* * *

Is, therefore, the choice of the company of actors as the precipitator of truth and revenge not just a dramaturgical technique of a theatre within a theatre, but an important indication about what gives stability and structure to Hamlet? It is his passion, it is his world.

Konrad Swinarski in his rendering of "Hamlet", which was ultimately not performed, took as the starting point the perception of the main character of the play as suspended between the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In the opinion of Anna Plona who was meant to play Hamlet's mother, for Swinarski, Hamlet is not only a man who has been stripped of his crown, who has to take revenge for his father's death and his mother's adultery, but someone who wants to rule over human souls [3].

Ultimately, Hamlet can, in this context, be considered as the prototype, the foretelling of a modern-day post-psychological hero. His behaviours are directed not by the gods, fate, duty, unconscious lust, or life experiences but by the fragmented, inconsistent pieces of his psyche hidden from him in his unconscious, created from matrices of events and early childhood traumas. Anyway, one can never really know the extent to which they are a recreation of genuine experiences and the extent that they are a distortion by the prism of the genetically conditioned instability of the inner world or external circumstances.

The tragic dialogue with Ophelia – one could call her a spokesperson of the Ego-world, cannot end well here. The emotions and thoughts accompanying the famous *Get thee to the nunnery! To the nunnery!*⁴ Surely this is only an expression of a temporary mental state and not a final constation. It is only one of the episodes of the emotional tingle-tangle of closeness and distantness, desires and destructions. Perhaps Hamlet could take up this dance with the main character of "Psychosis" by Sara Kane, who knows these steps and rhythm well. Indeed, here he would meet a worthy partner for himself, one just like him, capable of balancing on the verge, along countless boundaries, exceeding them freely and not definitively (up to a time) each way. Here, the dilemma to live or not to live would

³) Act V, Scene 1. Hamlet. Król duński [Hamlet. King of Denmark]. Translated by Józef Paszkowski. Wolnelektury.pl

⁴) Act III, Scene 1. W. Shakespeare. Hamlet. Król duński [Hamlet. King of Denmark]. Translated by Józef Paszkowski. Wolnelektury.pl

come across a response in the form of considerations on the optimal sequence of suicidal gestures and, perhaps at this point in time, in this unveiling, would not have to end with psychotic disintegration and death in the depths. Nothing (up to a point) calms suicidal desires as fantasies about death.

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I will now return to the thought about Hamlet in a thinking modality that is close to me – psychodynamic. Orestes, Oedipus, and Hamlet. One can look at all these figures as characters who are trying to cope with the murder of their father, revenge, and a complex, ambiguous relationship with their mother.

This list of the enmeshed can be supplemented by at least one pop culture *dramatis personae*: Simba from the Lion King. We could turn our noses up at tarnishing high art with popular film pulp but this is an important tale of the post-Shakespearean world about a father's relationship with his son. The Lion King is a story that is largely 'Hamlet-like'. We have here a son-revenge-seeker and his two friends (Pumba is Rozencrantz and Timon is Guildenstern – or is it the other way round?), the father of the king, a cousin father-slayer, the mother of a prince being the trophy for the killer, and a young lioness betrothed to the prince. And, finally, last but not least, the meeting of the son with the spirit of the father.

Incest is either expressed directly in these stories or in a hidden way by fighting with someone who took the mother away from the father.

We can go one step further and look for these triangular interactions in the fates of the gods. These are the oldest of tales. Among the Greek gods, practically every acquisition of power is connected with being divest of male power and expelled with the mother's participation. This is how Uranos, Cronus, and Zeus come to power. What would our reading of the story of the relationship between Jesus and Yahweh look like were it not carried out on the basis of the scholastic interpretative tradition but in relation to the stories of Greek heroes? Up until what point is Jesus the begotten-from-a mortal child of God and not God? What happens in the nether world after the words *God, my god, why have you forsaken me*⁵⁾? What is the source of the transformation?

This triangular relationship is conceptualised in psychoanalysis based on the pattern of the Oedipal conflict where the son, jealous of the relationship with the mother, in his murderous fantasies about the father ultimately forges closeness with him and his own male identity. This is a multi-stage and complicated process. Straying from the ideal model can, on each of its stages, lead to another psychopathology. Each of the different scenarios of solving this Oedipal situation ends badly.

From this perspective, Freud perceives Hamlet as being put before an impossible task of coping with resolving the Oedipal conflict which, unscathed, loses its mental integrity [4, 5].

However, is this perspective sufficient to understand Oedipus and others?

⁵⁾ The Gospel according to Matthew Mt (27.46)

* * *

The Oedipus' complex, being the founding myth for psychoanalysis, seems to be teetering. It strains it by both perceiving other than European traditional patterns of family relationships, the multiplicity of family constellations in the post-modern world, as well as the discoveries of anthropologists and evolutionists concerning the history of our species. It is shaken by John Bowlby who, in his theory, replaces the mother by the person of a primary caregiver, and separating the drive for attachment from libido.

The point in history at which psychoanalysis arises and the observations of Freud about the development of human sexuality and identity is the final, end stage of agrarian culture where family relationships are designated by succession and land; whereas, at the top of the pyramid of people and creatures subject to them, stands the male, possessing both land, and women, and animal stock, alike – the dominant *Homo sapiens* [6, 7]. This is a mere episode in the long history of our species spanning a period of hundreds of thousands of years. In fact, we cannot know whether it is shorter than the time when we are conscious of the fact that sex leads to pregnancy, and a child has some kind of a relationship with the man who had intercourse with the woman many moons before the childbirth. Many details of our physiology and anatomy, like the shape of the penis, for instance, point to monogamy not constituting the dominant procreative model of our species. Here, not much fits the concept of two halves of an orange searching for each other across the world.

The social relations in the 19th century Jewish community in Vienna are just glimpses of glimpses compared to the countless generations of collector and hunting cultures in which the basic pattern of building a social structure was group identity, and social relations and sexuality were complementary, implemented in thousands of patterns. Much points to a frequent pattern of upbringing from as early as three years of age involving not the parents in the education, socialisation, and teaching of children but older children from the group or tribe. So how did the catalogue of human intra-psycho conflicts look like for hundreds of thousands of years; how was its inner structure shaped? What about the fathers and sons? What about the relationships in the father, son, and mother triangle? What about the siblings? What about the fathers and daughters?

The concept of the Oedipal conflict tells us to treat every story of relationships in a father, child, and mother triangle as an emanation of the same hidden story where the son sexually desires the mother, whereas, if she is not loyal to the father, things can go from bad to worse. Let us bear in mind, however, that in several of the triangles mentioned herein, the mother supports the son in the destruction of the father, not expecting the fate of Jocasta. There are other women alongside heroes and heroines (or females, if we take Simba and Nala into account). Therefore, are the actions of the mothers directed by libido or another power? Is this about a sexual and reproductive fulfilment with the son or rather about fighting to save the son's life – at all personal costs. In the oldest versions of this story, those about the Greek gods, the sons are not only fighting for themselves but also for their brothers and sisters. They are representatives, not lonely heroes. They are, in a sense, defending themselves, not attacking. Let us pluck up the courage to read these stories directly before we process them through an analytical twist.

This is the second key to the figure of Hamlet according to Swinarski [3]. In the opinion of Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz, he thought that the basic driving force of Hamlet is his disappointment resulting from his mother's betrayal. A betrayal of the son, not the father. Her probable participation in the death of Hamlet's father and her links with the killer are undermining Hamlet's right to the throne and exposing him to the risk of death from the hand of his father's slayer.

* * *

We are freely searching for further associations with the story of Hamlet, but this time in the social area. Yet another perspective connecting the story of Hamlet with those alike him can, therefore, be assumed. This is a spatial context. The land that has to be left, kingdoms that have to be recovered or upheld.

The drama of interpersonal emotions and relationships is construed by the desires of possessing and maintaining, not in the early childhood dimension described by Melanie Klein, but in artificial feudal entourage. Here, consciousness defines the being.

For Swinarski – according to Jan Paweł Gawlik – this was a perspective that was key to understanding Hamlet [3]. He saw this figure/him as a person who was enmeshed in changing the model of power. The rise of a modern state in place of an archaic and medieval state. Here, the main character was meant to be Claudius, and the old and young Hamlet the contestants of such change. But is this change genuine or seeming? And the world is merely renovated, not profoundly rebuilt.

* * *

Perhaps, then, we can read the stories about the relationships between a father, mother, and child and other relatives in several different ways. It is worth remembering that we are genetically closer to Bonobo than the common chimpanzee [7]. The positions of the sons among the Bonobo depends on the role of the mother in the troop, being won and maintained in subtle competitions between the females from the same generation. There is no room here for violence and domination. Sexuality serves not only for procreation purposes but also for resolving conflicts, forging bonds in the group.

Effective contraception, in vitro fertilisation, freezing sperm, eggs, and embryos, pregnancies in the bodies of other women than the egg donors, children carrying the genetic material of three parents – all this makes us become – from the biological perspective – almost a different species from the one we were only several decades ago. Is our mental structure from the start of the 21st century still the same as in the first decades of the 20th century?

Perhaps the Oedipal conflict is not the norm but the outcome of similar tensions as every evolutionary step where the environmental conditions tell us to bend our bodies and physiology to impossible limits, to transform and reorganise ourselves in pains. The history of our psyche cannot be different from the history of our spine, constantly adapting but not without costs to subsequent environmental volte faces: coming down from the trees, a straightened body posture, working with a computer. Every solution is, in this sense,

transient, non-ideal, and leading to new possibilities. We also cannot know whether what we are discovering today in this respect on the social level is not, essentially, a return to the patterns already practised during the course of evolution. We know this from the example of other animals which are capable, due to changing environmental conditions, of significantly modifying sex roles, procreational behaviours or herd relations within the life course of one generation. Why would it not be like this among humans?

Let us, therefore, feel free in these dynamic searches, without excessive attachments and loyalty to concepts and theories.

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One of the reviewers alleged in relation to this text that it does not contain anything that a psychotherapist could comment on. Thus, let us add here the question that cannot be cognitively ignored. Is a boy who is being brought up by a pair of lesbians, conceived by one of them as a result of being inseminated with the sperm of an anonymous donor, doomed to surrogates of the developmental path of Oedipus? If he does not fantasise a father for himself and a relationship with him, will he be *ex definitione* damaged, incomplete? Does he have a chance of correct psychological development? We invite you to reflect on this.

* * *

Thus, how can we read Hamlet anew, liberated from the divine order and overly clear-cut reins of the theory on the structure of the inner world? Perhaps we still have to be freed of the theatre (Theatre?).

Krystian Lupa, a protégé and assistant of Konrad Swinarski in this play, in a conversation with Opalski describes the difficulties that Swiniarski experienced when directing "Hamlet" [3]. The emergence of the magic of the complete play from the joint effort that was put into it before the tragic death of the director was the most difficult and, it seems, unsuccessful. The director appears as someone who can only prepare the conditions for the spectacle to arise, not the final work of art.

In fact, this unfinished play similarly presents itself within the relationships between the actors and colleagues of Swinarski [3]. it is somewhat different for every one of them. Every one of them explains the nature and sense of the actions of the main characters differently. It is as though a new image was only to emerge from this very mosaic. A new meaning. Although the threat that it will not ultimately emerge is imminent.

They too, the actors, describe the hard work put in to the characters. One can get the impression, especially from the interview with Anna Polony, that the long hours of work on the figure of Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, fantasising about her early relationship with her son, was meant to translate into emotions encapsulated in one word, gesture.

From this perspective, the text may not only seem a mere form, but also a prison. Can one speak of important matters treating the text as a starting point? As food for one's own inner process that translates into a choice of scenes, fragments from other plays, and texts creating the play. How does the author of the play add associative elements to it in the structure of the unconscious? The play becomes a daydream, inviting viewers to coexist,

to have their own associations, which are intimate and shared at the same time. Finally, one can scrap the text and create a play based on the collective unconscious and creation of the theatre troupe. It is then that the director becomes the master of ceremonies of a rite. These are the paths of the further theatrical path of Krystian Lupa. It seems to be a return to the primary function of a story, still before the time of its enmeshment in religious or post-religious rituals, each time somewhat different, giving a chance of bringing relief, catharsis, and the possibility of reorganisation for both for the teller and the listener.

This was Freud's understanding of the power of theatre [5].

Perhaps the fairest solution to the issue of the riddle of the character of Hamlet, remaining in agreement with the text (although cut into pieces with the deftness of a dramaturgical butcher) seems to me to be the solution adopted by Bartosz Szydłowski in one of his latest Krakow adaptations of the play in the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre. Marcin Kalisz, playing the role of Hamlet, portrays him in a way that brings to mind tossing the role to one's partner while recording film scenes. The text is uttered without intonation, without any emotional timbre, instrumentally. Almost as though the place that Hamlet was in was a void, and the edges of his character are delineated by the passion and emotions of others.

* * *

And now, modern-day Poland. *Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*⁶. *Nobody wants to listen to the spirits of the past. Court intrigues. A play at the beck and call of revenge. Ophelia will definitely no longer go to the nunnery, although it is not known if she will survive. Who betrayed who or what? Will blood be spilt in the next scenes? How is the poison administered? Who will ultimately win? We are all waiting for the final act. However, victories are only eternal on stage and the story itself ends or, at most, repeats itself.*

*I am typing on my computer. One click separates me from everything and nothing at the same time. An imminent answer can be found to each of my questions. But it is the lack of response to the questions that I will not ask that becomes all the more important here. I only get the information that I am looking for, and their versions that were selected for me, cut off from others by the complex algorithms of the artificial intelligence of social networks, search engines, and streaming platforms. The past few months were a time of enhanced online activity for me. Therapeutic, supervisory, and training. I am slowly returning to working face to face. There is the dilemma of how close can we sit in an office so as no harm will come to anyone. How safe is a shop visit; is this waiter not coming up too close; what has my friend been doing over the past two weeks... I must keep myself from asking him. Perhaps I should stay online? As Jacek Dukaj writes "this is how the core of the soul is changing"*⁷.

But we already know this and we have seen this – in Szydłowski, for instance. Is the quantity of these experiences not transforming into a new quality?

⁶ Act I, Scene 4. W. Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Harper Collins Publisher, 2012

⁷ <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,25929950,tak-wymienia-sie-rdzen-duszy-nowy-esej-jacka-dukaja.html>

* * *

Rhodri Lewis, in the introduction to *Hamlet and the vision of darkness* [8] demonstrates that “Hamlet” is a play which, in isolation from classic and modernist interpretations, can be a pretext for in-depth cogitations on human nature, enmeshed in both moral dilemmas and political and public contexts. Contrary to the interpretations of Szydłowski, he considers the nature of Hamlet to reveal itself not in his statements or states of mind but in a collision, or meeting with other figures, in a mutual dialogue of inaccuracies, paradoxes, and blind fields.

A condition of understanding the play is fidelity to the text and an in-depth knowledge of all the contexts from the epoch affecting its structure.

Is this level of analysis of the text available to us, consumers of translations? Perhaps not. Surely, the translators are also there, behind these stories, with their own intentions and unconsciousness.

Every answer of ours to the question about the inner world of Hamlet and of his like will ultimately be an act of usurpation. We will never know whether Hamlet was a master of cold blooded revenge, experienced neurotic decomposition due to the trauma of the circumstances inciting inner conflicts, if had a borderline personality, or suffered from schizophrenia. Discovering the inner world of the other person is possible only through the process of dialogue, when they consent to it. Dialogue, a prerequisite of which is attentive listening and attempting to understand. Psychotherapy is a slow process, layer by layer, sometimes being half a step behind, and sometimes half a step in front of the patient, helps in getting to know and understand oneself. The criterion of the objective truth cannot be easily used here. Insight is sometimes described as adopting the interpretation of the therapist. It can be perceived as an act of succumbing to their reason and the therapist’s will. An act of submission to authority. If, however, we will be faithful to work technique, it will be the patient’s insight that will constitute a deep understanding of oneself, collaboratively developed in the tiresome therapy process. In this process, it is the therapist and patient who lead each other at various stages. That is why we cannot understand Hamlet without having the possibility of talking to him.

* * *

Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” is a tale that we can use to understand Hamlet in order to understand ourselves. Let us leave the overly local political and social associations behind. What could the Hamlet of post-pandemic times be like? When will we return to theatre halls without any fear? What will theatre (Theatre) be like then?

How will this collective experience be processed – the first in the lives of the contemporary generation of a satiated Europe – that the world can stop from one day to the next, that nothing is certain and stable? Up until now, we have been dying in a sad, but also giving some kind of perverse consolation, consciousness that the show is going on, that the world is prevailing despite the fact that we, or those close to us, will no longer be in it. Over the past few months, we have been observing with surprise that death can carry the world that we know. Will the momentary (?) end of the world herald the

permanent and great one which is to come because of global warming in several dozen years to several decades?

Is Shakespeare a good author for such times? Does he still have anything to say to us? Is “Hamlet” still suitable for us to express ourselves with his help? Will he be useful in this to you, Dear Reader?

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Email: maciej.pilecki@uj.edu.pl

