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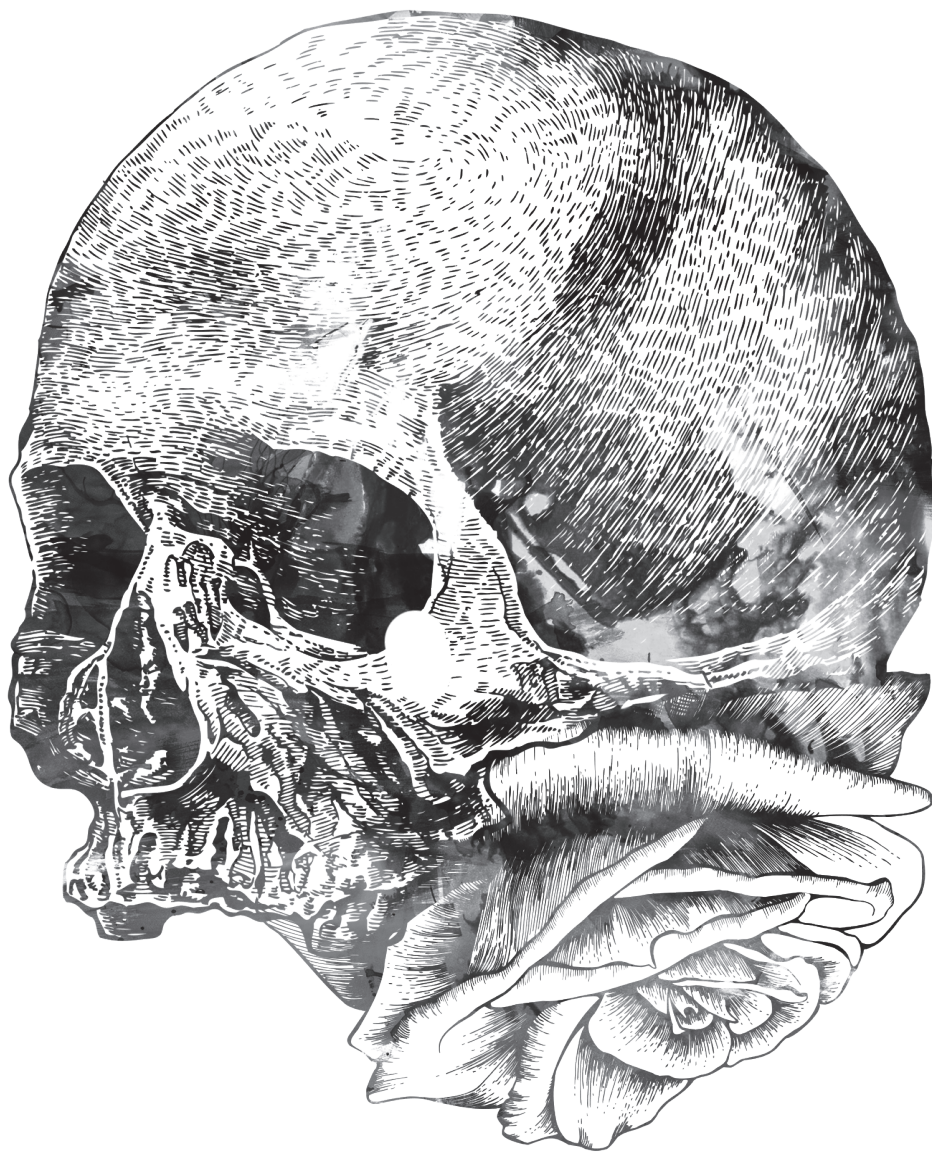
Monika Sosnowska

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Łódź 2015

Monika Sosnowska

From Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare

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Introduction

An exemplary banter between two anonymous people¹ 399 years after Shakespeare's death:

- How can you?
- How can I what?
- How can you say that THIS is SHAKESPEARE?
- Then tell me, how can I name THIS so that THIS is this SHAKESPEARE and not that Shakespeare.
- What do you mean by 'that'?
- That you can categorize.
- No, I meant "What do you mean by 'that Shakespeare'?"
- Oh, you mean this.
- Yes, that is what I meant.
- Just distinguish between Shakespeare's socks and Shakespeare's mocks. "Take this from this if this be otherwise"².
- I got that!

Shakespeare's dramas are potentialities. Each play may be conceived of as space where Shakespeare's legacy and authority is tested, trifled and transgressed. I am fond of the cultural phenomenon called Shakespeare, which is a continuum of human interactions with intermediated and transcoded versions of his plays: from Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare.³

I know Shakespeare's plays from books ... no, from theatre ... no, from cinema .. no, from the internet ... I know them only as/via different media and therefore, on an intermediated level. I treat page, stage, and screen as media. Shakesperare is neither written words/spoken words, nor live/remediated action. Yet each drama depends on the medium, the play is embedded in its materiality. I continue to discover intermediated Shakespeare. What remains is my relation to his plays (an aggregate of texts by a historical figure) and their afterlife (an aggregate of adaptations, spinoofs, allusions, and citations).

¹ Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

² Quoted in *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2.

³ My own term.

Sill, I do not know Shakespeare's plays. There is no reason why I should. I can appreciate the play, unattached to any particular cultural register. I am under the spell of drifting Shakespeare; of those myriad adaptations, derivations, quotations, and fragmentary allusions in media that have in some sense drifted free from anchorage in the master discourse of Shakespeare's texts. Once I accept the play's unmooring, I am free to be an occasional bardolater, worshipper of linguistic intricacies, and a reader who is sensitive to textual subtleties. At the same time it is not necessary for me to declare my devotion to Shakespeare, in order to be tagged 'a regular' in Shakespeareland. Irregular pleasure derived from immersing in intermedia treatments of the drama will suffice.

From Shakespeare to Sh(Web)speare represents selected approaches to Shakespeare. The volume consists of five essays, each followed by a summary. The arrangement of the content into three sections: "Polish Approaches to Shakespeare," "Sensory Approaches to Shakespeare," and "Popcultural Approaches to Shakespeare: Sh(Web)speare," illustrates selected places in culture and cultural spaces in which Shakespeare dwells. In some of these places and spaces Shakespeare is a temporary foreigner (the case of Shakespeare in Poland), a welcomed guest (the case of Shakespeare within the sensory domain), or a natural-born traveler (the case of Shakespeare on the Web). Each section aims at exhibiting the impact of Shakespeare's legacy on different levels of culture: national/local, highbrow/scholar, and popular/global.

There is just always something to learn from Shakespeare. Spatial and temporal conditions, in which people live, invite alternative Shakespeares. The call for modernized, updated and remediated Shakespeares does not go unanswered. Therefore the history of Shakespeare's (and Shakespeares') presence on different levels of culture is a process of rewriting, recreating, revisioning, reimagining, rearticulating and recontextualizing Shakespeare. This process initiated by the Big Bang, when Shakespeare's talent exploded and emanated across his environment, is known by an array of names: abridgment, adaptation, allusion, alteration, amplification, appropriation, citation, conversion, distortion, emendation, expropriation, interpolation, iteration, modification, mutilation, parody, spin-off, transformation, transposition, and translation. Shakespeare's oeuvre manifests itself whenever it returns in any of the abovementioned forms. Shakespeare returns as we return to his works: "If it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all" (act 5, scene 2).

Are you ready for Shakespeare? Are you ready for Sh(Web)speare?

POLISH APPROACHES TO SHAKESPEARE

Romantic Shakespearations in Polish Culture: From Inspiration to Incorporation¹

Polish romantic movement in very “unromantic” times

Unlike today, in the Romantic period Shakespeare and his creations were definitely not cultural commodities, nor were Shakespeare and his protagonists globally recognized icons or pop-icons. Even more importantly, his works were not translated into a multimedia language of a multicultural society. None of the Romantics would have ever conceived of their Shakespeare belonging to the world’s canon, much less the World Wide Web. For the Romantics, manipulations and modifications involving Shakespeare, his literary figures and his texts were limited predominantly to page and stage unlike the multitude of contemporary Shakespearean transmutations and hybridizations. As Manfred Pfister observes in his essay “‘In states unborn and accents yet unknown’: Shakespeare and the European Canon”:

Shakespeare was right: his texts have indeed survived in the “states unborn and accents yet unknown” he addresses and they are constantly reedited, translated and retranslated, read, staged, filmed, quoted, interpreted, taught, discussed, and re- or deconstructed and that not only in Europe but globally. (2004: 49)

Romanticism initiated a complex and complicated process of reception, acceptance, incorporation, and appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays. The nineteenth century can also be praised for giving birth to a cultural phenomenon called Shakespearemania in Europe. In several cultures, including Polish, Shakespeare helped fashion the national identity by captivating the imagination of a Romantic generation of artists, while his theatrical renderings generated significant publicity among the common people. The promotion of Shakespeare in Europe intertwined with the

¹ Using the word “Shakespearations” in the title of this essay is a mingling, meaning cultural explorations of Shakespeare both as inspiration and incorporation.

promotion of national cultures at that time. The Polish case demonstrates how the cultivation of national values was accompanied by the flourishing cult of Shakespeare, entailing the canonization of his works. Shakespeare was there, at the very heart of the Romantic movement.

The word “romantic” can bring to mind adjectives such as dreamy, fascinating or idyllic, but these expressions do not suit the predicament of the Polish nation in the nineteenth century, when pre-Romantic attitudes and new artistic trends paved the way for the future manifesto of Romantics (Adam Mickiewicz’s “Romantyczność,” 1821). Adjectives suited to describe the Polish socio-political reality of the Romantic period are exactly the opposite: realistic, unattractive, and disturbed. What was romantic about a nation without recognized borders, a nation whose political and cultural life was controlled by three occupants, a nation whose future was a great question mark?

In *Odnawianie znaczeń* [*Renewing Meanings*] Maria Janion claims that Polish culture created the most original Romantic literary output in Europe (1980: 7). Elaborated by the Polish writers and artists, equipped with phantasmatical imagination and driven by messianic motives, Polish romanticism was interwoven with historical experiences of the separated nation. Male voices of great individuals – Romantic poets and writers – took possession of the Polish collective consciousness. The unfavorable conditions after the collapse of the Polish state and the three partitions (1772–1795) by Russia, Prussia, and Austria resulted in the awakening of a national sensibility, motivated by the manifesto of Polish Romantics. Living in a divided state, the Poles needed to establish common values and preserve their national heritage. Culture, particularly literature, was fueled by a treasury of national memory and a repository of ideology and knowledge. The fight for national preservation and fashioning of cultural identity energized the Polish intellectual elites. The disappearance of the state’s boundaries could not eradicate the spirit of the nation and erase all historical data from this ‘collective cultural hard drive.’

In *Szekspiariady polskie* [*Polish Shakespeariads*] (1976) Andrzej Żurowski indicates a double function of Shakespeare’s works for the Romantics. Firstly, it was a method through which they could reveal the past and tell about the great mechanism of history (and its meaning) as well as revolution (and its effects). Secondly, Shakespearean creations allowed them to communicate their views about individual – human beings of a twisted nature, characterized with a tormented psyche and abundance of emotions (1976: 91). Żurowski claims that

this shift from a man ruled by reason to a man beset by emotions is indicative of the nascent nineteenth century culture. It imposed new tasks on literature and its interpreters and creators leading to penetration of the unknown regions of human psyche (98).

In Zbigniew Majchrowski's essay entitled "Pytania o polskiego Szekspira" ["Asking about Polish Shakespeare"] he maintains that one of the golden ages for Shakespeare in Polish culture includes the Romantic period (1993: 22). That Romantics were engrossed in reading his works, is reflected – according to Majchrowski – by Shakespearean references in their correspondence. That they read the world (nature and history) through Shakespeare becomes evident in aesthetic tastes and the reading choices of their literary creations, who literally are depicted holding a Shakespeare play in their hands, f. e. Juliusz Słowacki's Kordian (the main character from his drama *Kordian*, 1834) studying *King Lear* (22).

“Let order die” (2 *Henry IV*, 1.1.154): Romantic quest for dramatic rules and forms

Paradoxical as it may seem, Neo-classics who denigrated Shakespeare and treated his works with programmatic disdain, helped pave the way for a re-discovery of the Elizabethan playwright on the European continent (Lasocka, 1993: 95). Just after this period of distaste for Shakespeare under Voltaire's dictum – which might be compared to an ominous prologue – came a comforting first act, concocted by the Romantics, who paid tribute to Shakespeare by praising and finding inspiration in his dramatic and poetic technique.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's works provided critical ammunition in debates about a model of drama between two generations of intellectuals with the help of an in-between (pre-romantic) literary formation. According to Stanisław Helsztyński:

Until the November Uprising, Shakespeare's position in Poland met with determined opposition on the part of the group of pseudo-classicists who ruled in the salons, amongst the critics and in the Warsaw theatre. Opposition was also very strong in the chief learned institute, The Association of the Friends of Learning. (1965: 16)

For the abovementioned reason the territory of drama might be called a battlefield where disputes were initiated after 1810 by the following writers: Franciszek Wężyk (1785–1862), Kazimierz Brodziński (1791–1835), Józef Korzeniowski (1797–1863) (Kowalczykowa, 1991: 3). The first attempt at loosening the rules and rejecting a hostile attitude towards Shakespeare, presented at the meeting of the Association by Wężyk and formulated in his *O poezji dramatycznej* [*On dramatic poetry*], is especially worth noting. He elucidated his interest in Shakespeare's dramatic output:

The English have only one writer, Shakespeare, in the field of comedy as well as tragedy. But he alone is sufficient to establish the fame of that nation in both dramatic fields. We could speak at great length in the present study about this truly great, but little-known writer. I shall have to limit myself here to a brief reference. For who is able to express, in mere words, his opinion of one of the greatest geniuses of dramatic poetry? Who can exhaust all the vast number of observations on the numerous and so diverse works of Shakespeare, which crowd into one's memory by themselves? We shall add only this, that whoever takes dramatic poetry as the subject of his work, ought to read and probe deeply into the works of Shakespeare by day and by night, as Horace urged the Pisos to acquaint themselves with works of Greek writers. (qtd. in Helsztyński 16–17)

Unfortunately most intellectuals were not ready for Wężyk's trailblazing ideas. Severely criticized or even condemned by the Commission of the Association (Kowalczykowa, 1991: 4), his presentation fell on deaf ears, for the majority of representatives at that time found it unacceptable to modernize drama, not to mention imitate Shakespeare's dramatic conventions. Later, in the twenties of the nineteenth century, other voices were raised, propelling the dramatic machine in a more progressive direction. Although Kazimierz Brodziński did not mention Shakespeare in his lectures and writings, he made a connection between the shape of a drama and its national traits (Kowalczykowa 5). Similarly, Józef Korzeniowski postulated national qualities of drama and a reflection of the epochal spirit as a dramatic innovation (Kowalczykowa 5–6). Another pivotal contribution to Polish Shakespeare criticism, was a lecture given at the Warsaw University in 1818 by Ludwik Osiński (1775–1838), who was regarded by his contemporaries as a prominent and “dogmatic Neo-classic” (Lasocka, 1993: 103). Barbara Lasocka informs that in his lecture, completely

devoted to Shakespeare, Osiński presented an apotheosis of the playwright (102). He stressed that Shakespeare's works equate to an organic whole, which cannot be changed, broken, or adapted without "lose[ing] the logic, wisdom and beauty of Shakespeare's tragedies" (103, translation mine). Lasocka claims that Osiński "spoke as a Romantic not a Neo-classic" (104, translation mine). However, in Kowalczykowska's point of view, Osiński remained calcified to some extent since he purported several Neo-classical dogmas, but he overcame a deeply rooted anti-Shakespearean attitude among the Polish intellectual elite (5). It was only a matter of time before Shakespeare's status as a genius playwright, worth imitating, was affirmed. Pre-Romantics were testing Shakespeare, but not yet accepting his dramatic model, style, and devices in totality.

Undeniable admiration for Shakespeare was confirmed by the first Polish Romantics, both critics and poets. Until the November Uprising they openly expressed their views on the model of an adequate drama in the context of Shakespearean achievements. According to Kowalczykowska (1991: 7):

The Polish Romantics raised drama to a specific rank, regarding it as a genre that to the greatest extent could reflect the mood of the epoch – troubled with catastrophes, full of internal tensions; they regarded it as a category that could express the truth of the history. (translation mine)

Maurycy Mochnacki, a well-known Polish critic and writer, was a strong proponent of this idea, and simultaneously he was an admirer of Shakespeare. In "Makbet: Shakespeare czy Ducis" ["Macbeth: Shakespeare or Ducis," 1829] not only did he declare his dramatic choices and preferences, stating that for example, the sense of dramatic action lies in focusing on human passions and inner moral conflicts of an individual (Kowalczykowska 8), but also praised Shakespearean dramatic form. Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney observes that "Mochnacki revealed the inadequacy of the eighteenth century translations/adaptation, and urged Polish actors, directors, playwrights, and poets to return to the original version of Shakespeare's plays" (*Shakespeare in Poland*). Lasocka also highlights Mochnacki's notable effort to define Polish Shakespeare (1993: 104).

Before 1830 the Polish Romantics attempted to shape drama anew. Rejecting old rules, especially French Neo-classical concepts, they turned to liberating solutions, especially Shakespearean dramatic convention and composition. A noteworthy advance of the Romantics was in reshaping drama in a local context.

Facing the loss of nationhood, they looked for literary tools that would be capable of doing justice to historical tragedy, from which the divided nation suffered. The combination of a local history, under the impression of foreign (Shakespearean) dramatic stories with familiar dramatic strategy, and under the influence of imported (Elizabethan) methods, triumphed among the Polish Romantics.

When theoretical concepts crystallized, the Romantic style flourished in practice, manifesting itself in the work of Polish poets and dramatists. Two of the most prominent Polish poets, and most importantly, worshippers of Shakespeare, were Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), who developed their own, though different, forms of Romantic drama.² Regardless of these differences, their works were clearly distinguished from the previous ones, written according to Neo-classicist rules. As Kowalczykova observes, Mickiewicz’s and Słowacki’s “theory of drama” could be found dispersed in their correspondence, prefaces, a few essays, or individual lectures (9). It is noteworthy that these two names were both luminaries of Polish culture and belonged to the elite which formed the core of the “Great Emigration”. After the unfortunate insurrection of 1830, émigrés formed a cultural centre in Paris, the so-called political and cultural capital of Polish emigration. Most of the significant pieces of Romantic literature were created far from the motherland, with which the poets identified spiritually. They were building a national identity in the context of exile, thus their thematic choices were mostly based on actual historical events and framed with Romantic aesthetics. Stemming from a tragic Polish parted nation, the Romantic drama conditioned the Polish dramatic tradition, which owed much to Shakespeare, and he became an invaluable source of inspiration for the Romantic generation of poets.

The documentary evidence shows that Adam Mickiewicz was the first Romantic poet to recognize the significance of Shakespeare for the Polish nation. Helsztyński states that it was evident in a letter Mickiewicz wrote to Franciszek

2 In needs to be stated here that the so-called triad of Polish bards/seers includes: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859). Each of the great Polish Romantic playwrights was not only prolific, but also an author of a play that constituted the foundations of Polish dramatic canon: Mickiewicz’s *Dziady, część III* [*The Forefathers’ Eve, part III*, 1832], Słowacki’s *Kordian* (1834) and Krasiński’s *Nie-Boska komedia* [*The Un-Divine Comedy*, 1835]. These dramas were included into the list of obligatory readings for young Poles attending junior high schools (aged 13–16) and later, when they were educated at upper secondary level schools.

Malewski in 1822, where he confessed: “My mania for things German has been succeeded by a mania for things English: I have rushed throughout with a dictionary in my hand, like the Biblical Dives trying to get to heaven through the eye of a needle” (qtd. in Helsztyński, 1965: 17). From their very first (textual) encounter, Shakespeare impregnated Mickiewicz’s mind with an illuminating light of passion and originality. Another reference to Shakespeare appears in Mickiewicz’s letter (1822) to Cyprian Daszkiewicz (1803–1829), whom the Polish poet asked to send his most personal (a quilt and underwear) and dearest paraphernalia (in the following order): Russian books, Shakespeare, and a cup (Ławski, 2012: 56). Living in exile, in Petersburg, young Mickiewicz tried not to part with his source of inspiration. Additionally, in Mickiewicz’s correspondence (1828) with Antoni Odyniec (1804–1885), whose poetic and translation works were reviewed by Mickiewicz, he advised him to learn from the “great master” (as he referred to Shakespeare) and encouraged Odyniec to produce historical drama as “our age needs historical dramas” (qtd. in Helsztyński 1965: 19). In his letter to Odyniec (1828) Mickiewicz clearly expressed his admiration of Shakespeare when he stated that: “I am a dedicated admirer of Shakespeare” (qtd. in Helsztyński, 19). This confession was further explained:

If you read Shakespeare, you will yourself recognize better and understand the faults in your own poem. Just concentrate on each of Shakespeare’s plays. [...]

I repeat once more that the only kind of drama answering the needs of our age is historical drama. Furthermore, no one has developed this up to now in its full significance. Schiller with all his genius was an imitator of Shakespeare, both in dramatic form and type. [...] There are no new dramatic poets to be found in our own country: we must expect them from England, and most probably from France, after the lapse of many years. We may imitate Shakespeare, Schiller and Goethe, at any rate, adapting their forms to our national requirements. I should like you to begin by adapting some of the plays of these great masters, but Shakespeare in particular [...]

The stories from which Shakespeare spun his chronicle plays and tragedies were a thousand times more poetic than all histories and novels [...] I repeat a million times, that our age needs historical dramas. (qtd. in Helsztyński, 18–19)

Mickiewicz praised this skilled virtuoso, whose techniques in drama were inspiring and worth conscious adaptation into Polish literature. At this

point, Mickiewicz was developing his own dramatic style with an intention of making it as national as possible, as metaphysical as imaginable, and as messianic as conceivable (which was especially apparent after the fall of November Uprising).

Further and more systematic reflections on Polish drama and engagement with Shakespeare were presented by Mickiewicz in a series of courses on literature given in Lausanne (1839–1840) and Paris (1840–1844). Rooted in Polish history and tradition, as much as in the poet's national drama, Mickiewicz's drama (in its advanced form) realized a messianic-mystic idea, which was future-oriented, with prophetic features. The direct influences of Shakespeare on Mickiewicz's drama is visible in his method of bringing contradictory spheres closer, e.g. historical and fantastic reality, natural and supernatural worlds, logical and non-linear order, as well as his mixture of styles. A manifestation of his admiration for the English playwright can be found in one of his lectures from 1843, held in Paris, as he estimated Shakespeare's ability to create wondrous worlds:

It is a well-known fact that Shakespeare's most imaginative scenes were performed in ruined buildings where there was no scenery or stage-machinery. Some of his works were even performed for the first time in sheds. But the magic of the English poet is so great that, even while we are reading him, we see light and shadows, ghosts and knights, castles rising up from the ground: the result of this is that the reader feels he is on the stage amongst the actors. (qtd. in Helsztyński 19)

But Mickiewicz's model of historical drama was meant to be acted in 'one's own head,' not in theatre, which was stressed in the same lecture. The mind was the first and only stage on which a production of imagination was to be performed. Mickiewicz's fascination with Shakespearean poetic style resulted in developing "a Romantic polyphonic play, part of which was meant as a Polish history play. The genre was found in Shakespeare, but the contents did not use Shakespeare in any way" (Gibińska, 1999: 106). Shakespeare remained Mickiewicz's guiding spirit, his male version of a muse. The appropriation of the most expedient features of Shakespearean composition and writing style into Mickiewicz's own works is the best description of his 'dialogue with' Shakespeare.

In addition to Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki was also greatly influenced by Shakespeare. Evidence of his passion for Shakespeare is found

in his correspondence and diaries, (he called Shakespeare “his lover” in one of his letters to his mother (1834) (Nawrocka, 1999: 113), as well as in his own dramas, and aesthetic and cognitive choices. Like Mickiewicz, Słowacki was immersed in Shakespeare’s plays, but he incorporated Shakespearean motifs and drew from his model of drama differently. More importantly, Słowacki was ‘greedier’ for Shakespeare than Mickiewicz and more extensively incorporated Shakespearean form and content into his plays. Unlike Mickiewicz, Słowacki had a chance to encounter both textual (during his studies in Vilnius) and theatrical Shakespeare (during his stay in London in 1831 when he saw *Richard III*) (Kujawińska Courtney, *Shakespeare in Poland*). In her essay “Szekspir Słowackiego” [“Słowacki’s Shakespeare”] Ewa Nawrocka mentions the poet’s first written reference to Shakespeare. It appears in a letter to Aleksandra Becu (Słowacki’s step-sister) from 1828, where he writes about *Romeo and Juliet*, a French adaptation of the play, which he was familiar with (1999: 109). Numerous allusions to the Elizabethan playwright’s quotations and remarks are scattered through Słowacki’s letters to his mother, relatives and friends, as well as his diaries, poems and dramas. Słowacki exploited Shakespeare’s oeuvre not only to build his “theory of national drama” but to understand human nature, the psyche and become more self-aware. In Nawrocka’s opinion, since Słowacki applied Shakespearean language to express his existential dilemmas (1999: 110), Shakespeare was “a kind of mirror in which Słowacki was able to make an insight into himself” (110, translation mine). Above all, in Słowacki’s understanding of Shakespeare, he was a universal poet, depicting not so much the preoccupations of his own times, but the anxieties and thoughts troubling all human beings regardless the epoch, as Słowacki confessed in an introduction to the third volume of his collection of poems (*Poezje*, 1833) (Nawrocka 111).

As Słowacki’s fascination with Shakespeare intensified in the 1830’s, his appropriation of Shakespeare consisted not only in drawing inspiration from his works, but also imitating the greatest quality he found in Shakespeare – his ability to remain contemporary for all times. Marta Gibińska claims that Słowacki’s “Romantic interpretation of psychological truth in Shakespeare, concentrating on the recognition of the poet’s own discovery, is akin to Coleridge’s reading of Shakespeare and placed at the other pole of the Romantic reception of Shakespeare in comparison to Mickiewicz’s” (1999: 16). During the time the poet widened his reception of Shakespeare, his dramatic output was

impressive. Słowacki offered his own adapted Shakespeare, having entwined his dramatic imagery with Shakespearean imaginary worlds.

Although in Słowacki's dramas the Polish context and references to Polish culture were clear (e. g. in *Kordian* – 1833, *Horsztyński* – 1835, *Mazepa* – 1839), he did not aim at creating a historical drama, which was a programmatic – aesthetic and ideological – priority for Mickiewicz. For Słowacki the choice of historical topics could even be accidental, depending on the poetic stimulus and his own imagination (e.g. *Balladyna* – 1834, *Lilla Weneda* – 1839). But his treatment of history evolved with time, and Słowacki at the beginning of 1840 turned to prophetism, which engendered changes in the meaning of dramatic actions in his plays (Kowalczykowska 11). His attitude to Shakespeare also changed: from aspiring to become Shakespeare, through hope at being his double (in *Krytyka krytyki i literatury* [*Critique of criticism and literature*, 1841], and proclaiming himself a Slavonic Shakespeare (Nawrocka 1999: 112), to returning to Słowacki with Shakespearean features, after achieving artistic maturity in the last several years of his life. Discovering Shakespeare-the revealer, the soulful Słowacki modified his dramatic style and 'retuned' to the melody of mystical, revelatory poetry in accord with the ultimate sound of Shakespeare's works.

In contrast, Zygmunt Krasiński is the third of the great Polish Romantic poets, whose literary output is not characterized by Shakespearean inspirations. Interestingly enough, Krasiński openly expressed his discontent for the Elizabethan playwright in a letter to Słowacki (1840): "There is in old Shakespeare a spirit that is good, lofty, titanic and yet also one that is evil" (qtd. in Hellsztyński 1965: 20). Krasiński had reservations about "an insufficiency of good, a lack of concepts on which universality, generality and harmony are dependent" (20). He claimed that as the result of "English materialism", Shakespeare "is excellent in the sphere of details, in the sphere of their creation, in the question of an analysis of life," yet he is also "too exclusive and one-sided, dealing with too many individual matters and focusing on a part only" (20). Krasiński was dissatisfied with Shakespeare being "a great master of dissonances and these are half of life" (20). In his opinion "Shakespeare's attitude [...] was even wild and childish: he stood among diversities of the world, observed its phenomena, but never arrived at the heart of its motivating forces" (20). He thought that Shakespeare did not grasp the world in its totality. Since the playwright was too attentive to detail, it made him "a great empiricist," who "does not penetrate the core of life and therefore it is a mistake to read only

him” (20). In his letters Krasiński did not recommend Shakespeare as a source of inspiration to Słowacki as he purported that: “The world of Shakespeare, though excellently actual, tangible and visible, is not the true world, for it is not the whole world... Old Will set it up (the small part of it) as the whole; old Will regarded it as the Alpha and the Omega, and therein lies his defect” (21). Although Krasiński used a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in his drama *Nie-boska komedia* (1835), he did not praise the playwright’s skills and style. He was definitely not under Shakespeare’s charm, unlike other Romantic artists, who are considered less influential in shaping the contours of Polish drama, and whose names are mentioned below.

In *Shakespeare in Poland*, Kujawińska Courtney mentions several Romantic poets and writers, whose works are marked by the Shakespearean guidance and spirit: Józef Korzeniowski’s (1797–1863), Józef Conrad Korzeniowski’s uncle) *Aniela* (1823) or *Karpaccy górale* [*Carpathian Highlanders*, 1843], Józef Szujski’s (1835–1885) *Jerzy Lubomirski* (1862), Aleksander Świętochowski’s (1849–1938) trilogy *Nieśmiertelne dusze* [*Immortal Souls*, 1875] and Jan Kasprowicz’s (1860–1926) *Powstanie Napierskiego* [*Napierski’s Revolt*, 1899]. Inspired by Shakespeare’s plays, dramatic achievements, and philosophical attitude, the Polish Romantics exploited numerous citations and references to his works. This generation of artists’ goal was to nurture the Polish culture of the partition period. Foreign cultural domination threatened not only the existence of contemporary society, separated by three oppressors, but also the survival of a cultural heritage in the future. To protect it was to defend the Polish language against foreign contamination, censorship, and attempts at depravation of national linguistic identity. In reference to these cultural, societal, and political perils, Marta Gibińska makes an observation on the relation between the language, Shakespeare, and translation in her article “Politics of Theatre versus Politics of (Non)state: Shakespeare in the Repertoire of Polish Nineteenth-Century Theatres:”

A large task in the exacting task of keeping up the language and the cultural tradition, of ensuring continuous public education and refinement of taste in drama and literature goes to Shakespearean plays, newly and successfully translated in the middle of the century, increasingly present in the life of Poles, their language and their cultural identity, in spite of political non-existence. (2007: 231)

The mother tongue is considered as the *conditio sine qua none* of a nation's identity, integrity and immanency. For this reason, significant pieces of literature and liberating art that were appropriated by the Polish Romantics to talk about the national cause and deal with problems of geo-political non-existence of Poland, had to be translated into Polish to be understood. Shakespeare was the most pressing matter on the list of the foreign 'masters of words,' whose linguistic potential was meant to be utilized to voice the Romantics' concerns.

“The word is well culled, chose, sweet and apt” (*Love Labour's Lost*, 5.1) or Shakespeare lost and found in translations (from scraps to completeness)

Although Shakespeare was enthusiastically welcomed in Poland by the new generation of poets and writers, his first linguistic (as well as theatrical) 'visits' to Poland were not paid in the form of first-hand materials but second-hand translations. He was mostly heard in German or French and adapted to their local cultures, still submerged in Neo-classical aesthetics. Helsztyński explains that “Shakespeare had to wait for the rise of Romanticism before his works could appear in Poland in a true form, translated neither from French nor German versions, but from the original” (1965: 16). The Romantics were determined in their mission to express the preoccupation of the troubled *Zeitgeist* of the nineteenth century by correcting the inaccurate literary paths beaten by their ancestors.

The tissue of Polish drama served as a field for the cultural appropriation of Shakespeare and the inspiration that came from his works was utilized for national (political and ideological) and literary (aesthetic and theoretical) causes. Apart from the fascination with Shakespearean dramatic form and content, and from imitating/adapting his dramatic craft, which entailed incorporation of motives, references, allusions, and dramatic concepts into works of Polish poets and writers, there was an increasing interest in Shakespeare's linguistic interpretations in the form of translations into Polish language directly from English. In Kujawińska Courtney's opinion,

The universal and enthusiastic admiration of Shakespeare shared by the Romantic poets of Poland, themselves striving with passion and energy not only against foreign cultural domination but also against the rule of classicism,

failed at first to produce any good translations. Yet this was the time when Shakespeare began his lasting reign in Polish *belles-lettres* (*Shakespeare in Poland*).

The history of Shakespeare in Polish translation started with ‘scraps’ (Franciszek Zabłocki, 1750–1821) to reach a complete translation of his plays (Stanisław Koźmian, Józef Paszkowski, Leon Ulrich, 1875). The dominating quality of these translations, measured by artistic expression and aesthetic value, is considered poor. It should not be surprising, because there was no translatory tradition in Poland. The generation of Romantics initiated this process, thus the revival of Shakespeare in Polish language is to their credit. They did not struggle so openly as theorists and dramatists, for their translatory efforts were to some extent a competition, particularly when the Romantic movement was in full swing. The Polish Romantic idiom began to shape Shakespeare’s dramas especially after 1830, when there was an urgent “need of Polish literature to possess the whole of Shakespeare in translation” (Helsztyński, 1965: 22). The need to translate Shakespeare’s plays into Polish was conditioned by rendering them part of theatre repertoire.³ Russian, Prussian, and Austrian authorities restricted and suppressed the development of Polish theatrical life.

Early translators of Shakespeare in the original must have felt a double burden in their role: the risk of losing meaning in their renderings and the weight of the expectations of Romantic intellectuals. And they were negotiating the very essence of Shakespeare for the whole Polish nation. Their interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays was based on cultural selection, which can be understood as analogical to natural selection, which assumes that only the organisms best adapted to their environment tend to survive and transmit their genetic characteristics to succeeding generations. Similarly, cultural selection applied to Polish translations of Shakespeare held that only the

³ King Stanisław August Poniatowski founded the first Polish public theatre in Warsaw in 1765, which was part of his programme of reforms in culture. With the first partition of Poland in 1772 the building went to ruin, therefore – as Gibińska informs – a new building for the theatre was chosen in 1779, known as the National Theatre in Warsaw, functioning until 1833 (2003: 59). Poniatowski, an enlightened monarch, was also an admirer of Shakespeare, for example, he encouraged the intellectual elite to present their opinions on the playwright’s works in *Monitor*, a leading periodical of the Polish Enlightenment.

words best adapted to the Polish cultural environment would last and convey their linguistic (symbolic and literal) meaning to both present and future generations. Unadulterated Shakespeare was an ideal for the Romantics, attached to the concept of undisturbed flow of feelings and unhampered creativity. How Shakespeare was translated on page determined the way his works were received on stage, not only by artists and critics but theatre audiences. By embracing English Shakespeare and rendering him into Polish, the interpreters of his works broadened the literary horizon of the Romantic movement.

The fluctuating value of the early translations stabilized with the publication of the first full edition of all Shakespeare's works in the Polish language – *Dzieła dramatyczne Williama Shakespeare'a* [*Dramatic Works by William Shakespeare*], compiled and edited by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812–1887), a leading Polish novelist. He postulated that Polish readers and theatre audience should familiarize themselves with Shakespeare's translations from the English (Komorowski, 2002: 70). The intense translation endeavours of three prominent figures: Stanisław Koźmian, Józef Paszkowski and Leon Ulrich, resulted in a complete Shakespeare in translation. These three translators prepared their texts mostly in the fifties and sixties of the eighteenth century (they were also previously published as separate translations). The first complete edition was fully illustrated with approximately five hundred and a half copies of engravings created by H. C. Selous (previously decorated *Illustrated Shakespeare*, 1864) (Ryszkiewicz & Dąbrowski, 1965: 22). In *Szekspir – ich rówieśnik* [*Shakespeare – Their Contemporary*], Andrzej Żurowski accentuates the significance of Kraszewski's edition in the Polish reception of Shakespeare for subsequent generations, suggesting that some linguistic expressions used by the translators became recognizable quotations, which in the process of repetition became part of contemporary everyday language (2003: 43). Visual aspects of Shakespeare's works (*Hamlet* in particular), not only attracted readers and established alternate cultural readings of Shakespeare, but also inspired artists to produce their own interpretations of the scenes. In the course of time, paintings and photographs as well as their reproductions were disseminated in press e.g. Miłosz Kotarbiński's "The Dream of Richard III" in *Kłosa* of 1879, and P. Szyndler's "Julietta" and "King Lear" in 1886 in *Kłosa* (Young, 2002: 127).

Mickiewicz and Słowacki also tested themselves to see how they could cope with Shakespearean linguistic mastery as they were developing their own style and attitude towards Shakespeare. Mickiewicz chose a quotation from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a prelude to his Romantic manifesto, a poem "Romantyczność" ["Romanticism," 1822]. Preceding his first 'Romantic song' with his own translation of: "Zdaje mi się, że widzę... gdzie? / –Przed oczyma duszy mojej" ["Methinks, I see... where? / –In my mind's eye."], he heralds the essential characteristic of his ballads – imaginative perception, which was meant to be the highest form of vision. Another quotation from *Hamlet* appears in Mickiewicz's *Dziady, part 2* (1823): "Są dziwy w niebie i na ziemi, / O których ani śniło się waszym filozofom" [There are more things in heaven and earth, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy"]. Mickiewicz also offered his own rendering of an excerpt from *Romeo and Juliet* (act 3, scene 2), published in 1836 in Paris (Helsztyński, 1965: 17). Similarly, Słowacki's translatory achievements are confined to fragments: an excerpt (act 4, scene 6) from *King Lear* in 1834 and around 1840 parts of *Macbeth* (act 1, scene 1,2 and part of 3) (Hahn, 1958: 21). Citations from *Hamlet* (and especially the 'philosophical' phrase), which became the most exploited Shakespearean drama, were also paraphrased and incorporated by Słowacki in *Sen srebrny Salomei* [*Salomea's Silver Dream*] (1845) Cyprian Kamil Norwid in *Czarne kwiaty* [*Black Flowers*] (1845), or by Antoni Malczewski in *Maria* [*Mary*] (1825) (Halkiewicz-Sojak, 1998: 12). Mickiewicz's and Słowacki's direct translatory games with Shakespeare are rare and invaluable. Also Cyprian Kamil Norwid, called "the most 'intellectual' poet ever to write in Polish" by Czesław Miłosz (1983: 272), produced a fragmented and original translatory rendering of *Julius Ceasar* (act 1, scene 1, act 3, scene 2) and *Hamlet* (Hamlet's monologue, act 5, scene 2) (Sudolski, 2003: 239). This linguistic obsession with Shakespeare took various forms, from an attempt at translating only part of his plays or just a short borrowing – a quotation or paraphrase – and using it as a motto or restating the content. Such Shakespearemania highlighted the rank of a particular work and the author's familiarity with the English playwright. Preference for Shakespearean language was not only an expression of a poet's/writer's attitude to Shakespeare (sometimes with polemical overtones as in the case of Zygmunt Krasiński) but it was also a gesture towards defining the artist's identity among other Romantics. Simultaneously, Shakespeare's Polish identity grew stronger.

“Imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown” (*Midsummer Night’s Dream* 5.1): Shakespearemania of the Polish Romantics

The term Shakespearemania highlights Shakespeare’s skills and achievements in drama and the cultural fascination with the Elizabethan playwright and his oeuvre. References to thematic and compositional qualities of Shakespearean drama were incorporated by the abovementioned Polish poets in their works. The Romantic messianic readings of Shakespeare stemmed from the socio-political predicament of Poland. The idiosyncratic style of the Polish Romantic period was predominantly shaped by efforts to raise the general public’s consciousness of the need for national unity regardless of the dismemberment and obstructed communication between its parts. Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” dilemma, which also bothered the Polish nation, gave invigorating and instructive answers in literature as regaining independence and maintaining existence of the Polish culture grew into a national cause. ‘Literature without borders’ was a guiding principle for the whole nation. Endangered by foreign cultural domination, the representatives of Polish intellectual life during the Great Emigration (1831–1870) moved to France, Britain, and Germany in order to carry out their cultural activities without censorship from the oppressors. They wished to spread the ideology of freedom, which found shelter in literature. They turned to mysticism and messianism as integral elements of other great revolutionary movements in the history of the world. Romantic poets referred to motives of imaginary collective forces that could change the course of history. Hamlet’s mission, the Poles were out to “set it right” since the historical time “was out of joint.”⁴

In non-existing Poland the gradual cultural soaking with Shakespeare came during the Romantic period when – according to the title of Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney’s essay “Shakespeare in Poland” – Shakespeare assumed Polish identity. In metaphorical terms, the Polish Romantics wrung dramatic qualities and thematic quantities from Shakespeare as they desperately searched

⁴ The period after the third partition abounds with national uprisings aimed at regaining independence and demonstrating resistance against the oppressive practices and cultural domination of Russia, Prussia, and Austria. The most important insurrections include: The November Uprising against the Russians (1830–1831), Kraków Uprising against the Austrians in 1846; Poznań Uprising against the Prussians in 1848; The January Uprising against the Russians (1863–1864). None of them were successful in creating a Polish nation.

for creating moving drama. Their quest was not fruitless since their engagement with Shakespeare resulted in emotionally engaging drama. Perhaps the secret of their emotionally engaging drama's influence lies in a specific construction of *dramatis personae*, who only could have been born in Polish Romantic culture. Certain literary creations (still recognized by the Polish readers/audience) have Shakespearean marks, which are manifestations of the impact of Shakespeare on the Polish Romantics.

Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821–1883) is one of the talented, yet unappreciated Romantic poets during his lifetime. His intention was to create a “white drama” based on a premise that *dramatis personae* are hurt and killed with the power of words. Although it cannot be said that Norwid ‘devoured’ Shakespearean achievements and skills like other Romantics, he ‘tasted’ them in portions and praised the English playwright’s works. In Norwid’s unfinished drama *Kleopatra* [*Cleopatra*] (written between 1869–1871), published for the first time in 1904, a connection with Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra* becomes apparent. Norwid confessed in one of his letter to J. B. Zaleski (1872): “I am still lacking half of the last act of my favourite tragedy, which I was very hesitant to write after Shakespeare: *Cleopatra and Caesar*, three acts.” (Sudolski, 2003: 523). Norwid made his reading a historical tragedy. Tadeusz Kudliński states that Norwid polemicized with Shakespeare, claiming that tragedy was part of history, while life was composed of comedy and tragedy (1985: 332).

Norwid also created a poem “W Weronie” [“In Verona”], which is worth citing in its totality:

1

O’er the abodes o’the Capulets and Montagues,
The gentle eye there in the spacious skies now views,
By thunder whipped and washed with rain — —

2

The lonesome ruins of the two adverse estates,
The once so splendid, now demolished, garden gates;
And casts a star from the heavenly plain —

3

The cypress says: For Romeo and Juliet
It is a tear that permeates their tombs so wet,
And drenches them – now even more.

4

But many people, in a sagely fashion, say
That it is rocks and stones not tears that fall today,
Stones and rocks – that none’s been waiting for! (trans. Jarek Zawadzki,
2007: 35)

Appropriating the motif of dead lovers, Norwid paints a lyrical picture, which is considered a pearl of Polish lyrical poetry. The expressive lament over the abandoned grave was intended to stir sensitivity in his contemporaries. First Norwid refers to Romeo and Juliet indirectly, through the title and their family names. Above the houses of two hostile families, a moving narrative spreads. The Polish poet relies on the reader’s knowledge, for it is only the reader who can identify the whole story and trace it back to Shakespeare’s tragedy.

Norwid, who succumbs to the romantic atmosphere of Verona, paints the mood with sublime words, introducing the motifs of “the gentle eye in the spacious skies” and “a tear that permeates their tombs.” When the sky becomes personified, it weeps with stars that fall on Romeo and Juliet’s grave. It is heaven that still remembers their touching story. It casts stars as a gesture of compassion. These stars are recognized by sages as meteors – no more than solid rocks moving at random, without any connection to Verona. Another interpretation exists, suggested by the cypress – meteors stand for tears, and they are awaited by the spirits of bygone lovers. He contrasts two attitudes: one that is sensual and intuitive, while the other is mundane, based on rational judgment, devoid of romantic sensibility.

The gallery of Shakespearean-like figures opens with Słowacki’s main character from his drama *Horsztyński* (1835).⁵ Słowacki, who found inspiration in Shakespeare’s dramatic skills and his kaleidoscope of characters, created his own fictional worlds full of dissonances, conflicting values and intricate subplots.⁶ In his interpretation and re-reading of *Hamlet*, parallels between the

⁵ The “titleless” play was partly destroyed and therefore incomplete before its first publication. The title was not Słowacki’s choice but instead it was added by the first editor A. Małecki, who published it after the playwright’s death in 1866. The editor of Juliusz Słowacki’s *Pisma pośmiertne* [Posthumous Writings] also made some corrections in the text.

⁶ Primarily Słowacki wrote drama but also lyric poetry where he incorporated symbols, motifs and plots, derived from other sources. His innovative poetic style and literary

main protagonist – *Szczęśny Kossakowski* – and the Danish prince emerge. The action of *Horsztyński* is set in the Polish context of historical events of 1794 in Lithuania,⁷ just before the outbreak of insurrection in Vilnius against Russia. Some years before the insurrection, two confederations were established: the Targowica Confederation (1792)⁸ and the Bar Confederation (1768–1772).⁹ Within the play the Confederation of Bar is represented by Ksawery Horsztyński, while the Targowica Confederation – by hetman Kosakowski, father of *Szczęśny Kossakowski*. The plot centers on *Szczęśny*'s dilemma of joining his father's political formation and accepting their actions or betraying his father – the traitor – by not supporting him. Słowacki accentuates the problem of the individual tragedy of this young man and the quintessentially tragic predicament of a Polish nation on the crossroads (Kurek, 1999: 129). Modeled on Hamlet's hopeless situation, Słowacki confronts his protagonist with the necessity of choosing one moral option. The collision of values repeats Hamlet's scenario, leading to disastrous indecisiveness and inevitable conflict. Ryszard Przybylski points out that Słowacki exposed the motif of betrayal, which becomes the source of *Szczęśny*'s ethical dilemma (1985: 122). According to Janion and Żmigrodzka, Hamlet's counterpart in Słowacki's drama is even more torn than Shakespeare's Danish prince (1996: 118). Yet there is no clear ending in the play, just *Szczęśny*'s hesitant question: "what to do?". The unfinished drama leaves interpretative possibilities to the reader, which was an uncommon dramatic resolution.

method was compared by Zbigniew Ławski (2012) to that of an ivy, a climbing plant, which needs outward support to grow properly. In addition, Słowacki-the borrower acted similarly to Shakespeare, who was fond of sophisticated literary games.

⁷ Since 1569, when the Act of Union was promulgated in Lublin, Poland and Lithuania existed as the dualistic state, semi-confederal Republic of the Two Nations (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). It continued its existence until the three partitions, beginning in 1791.

⁸ The conservative Polish-Lithuanian confederation of nobility formed against the Constitution of 1791 (based on liberal principles) under the leadership of Stanisław Potocki and Seweryn Rzewuski. Confederates were supported by Russia and their actions led to the second partition of Poland. This formation is regarded as traitorous.

⁹ The liberal Polish-Lithuanian confederation of nobility organized to resist the Russian interference in Polish internal affairs and preserve the independence of the country under the leadership of the Polish hetman Michał Krasiński and the Pułaski family. Eventually the confederation was defeated by the Russian army.

Since *Horsztyński* carries numerous motifs from *Hamlet* – i. e. delivering a modified “to be or not to be” soliloquy by *Szczęśny*, sending *Szczęśny*’s sister, *Amelia*, to a nunnery, or the appearance of his father’s Ghost – it is viewed as the deepest interpretation and appropriation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Yet it was a nationalist re-reading. *Horsztyński* was not the only play where *Słowacki* tracked the issue of individual versus national tragedy. It is almost impossible not to find references and allusions to *Hamlet*/Hamlet in his earlier plays *Kordian* (already mentioned) and *Mindowe* (1833), where, for example, a madwoman, *Aldona*, is styled as *Ophelia*, or the motif of a singing gravedigger appears.

Słowacki’s mania for Shakespeare and *Hamlet* in particular was not an isolated case. Other Polish Romantics followed this so-called Hamletism. The term was dubbed in the Romantic period and as R. A. Foakes explains:

Hamlet, reconstructed as a reflection of a modern consciousness, was thus identified with the problems of the age, and politicized as mirroring those who from weakness of will endlessly vacillate. This Hamlet was further abstracted from the play into an embodiment of what came to be known as Hamletism (the verb, o Hamletize, came later). No other character’s name in Shakespeare’s plays, and few in other works of literature, have come to embody an attitude to life, a philosophy as we say, and been converted into a noun in this way. [...] Hamletism as a term had become established by the 1840s, and came to have a range of meanings, all interconnected, and developed from an image of Hamlet as well-intentioned but ineffectual, full of talk but unable to achieve anything, addicted to melancholy and sickened by the world around him, a Hamlet such as might be reconstituted from first and third soliloquies, Hamlet contemplating self-slaughter, speaking of death as a kind of sleep, or Hamlet in the graveyard, with a skull in his hand confronting death. (2004: 19–20)

Hamletism has begun to haunt Polish culture since the Romantic period. The crux of the matter was identified by the prominent Neo-Romantic Polish poet, dramatist, and painter, *Stanisław Wyspiański* (1869–1907), who wrote in his *Study of Hamlet* in 1905, that the riddle of Hamlet in Poland is what it reflects of Poland (*Wyspiański*, 2007: 101). Hamlet serves as a mirror for the Polish nation, he was relevant to Polish tragedies, and as *Kujawińska Courtney* and *Kwapisz Williams* claim in their essay “‘The Polish Prince’: Studies in Cultural Appropriation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet in Poland”:

In fact, the very character of Hamlet is very often described as “the Polish Prince,” and he is regarded as a significant figure in Polish culture. It is as if the play had been written for the Poles, and it serves as an amazingly functional vehicle to break down any presumed cultural barriers between Polish audiences and the works of a master British playwright.

With reference to Polish Hamletism the Polish people owe the Romantic artists a debt of gratitude for their keen interest in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*/Hamlet, exploited both for literary purposes (their own poetic achievements in the field of drama) and for political reasons (comments on historical reality).

Hamlet reverberates in Mickiewicz’s main protagonist Konrad from *Dziady, part 3*¹⁰, becoming a symbol of the Polish struggle for identity. Konrad, who in parts 1, 2 and 4 is named Gustaw, is first portrayed as an unfortunate lover, preoccupied with an unhappy love affair. Part 3 is set in times contemporaneous to Mickiewicz’s, and it was a chance for the poet to raise the problems of the loss of independence. As the plot develops, the young man becomes engaged in the national cause. When Gustaw’s is accused of conspiracy against Russia, he is imprisoned and it is in his jail cell where Gustaw’s transformation into a patriot takes place. Gibińska claims that “Konrad is the first on a long list of protagonist to be recognized as Polish Hamlets” (1999: 14). The poet appropriates the tragic figure and remodels him as a patriot, forced to choose between his personal tragedy as an introverted romantic character (Gustaw from part 3) and his nation’s misery. In a messianic and cathartic act of metamorphosis, Konrad rejects his self-centered concerns, preferring the love of nation that he discovered in himself. Konrad was Mickiewicz’s Hamlet, to whom Słowacki responded with his Kordian/Hamlet. The latter is hypersensitive and so preoccupied with

¹⁰ *Dziady* might be classified as verse drama – in part lyrical and in part dramatic. Mickiewicz’s masterpiece consists of four parts (not written in numerical order, but in a Romantic fragmentary fashion): part 2 and 4 (*Dziady wileńsko-kowieńskie*) were composed mostly during the poet’s stay in Vilnius and Kowno and published in 1832, while part 3 (*Dziady drezdeńskie*) was written in Dresden in exile and published in Paris in 1832. Part 1 – *Dziady – widowisko* [*Dziady: Spectaculum*] is an unfinished work written in 1821, and never published during Mickiewicz’s lifetime. The title of the drama pertains to a Slavic semi-pagan religious ceremony, which was organized to honor deceased ancestors by the living. The spirits of the dead were summoned and as they talked about their sufferings, the living could bring relief to their souls.

his self that he constantly hesitates whether to act or not to act. When he finally decides to fulfill his patriotic and moral obligations, he is overcome by doubts that led to his failure. Initiated by the Romantics, a myth arose around the figure of Hamlet (Żurowski, 231), which became incorporated into Polish culture as “the Polish prince,” helping the Poles vent their feelings and concerns in different but always turbulent political times.

It is worth mentioning that apart from Hamlet, the figure of Ophelia, for Jarosław Komorowski, as the female patron of Polish Romanticism (155), haunted the Romantic imagination. Numerous representations of this figure in Western culture attest this.¹¹ In her Polish version, Ophelia created in the tormented period of the nineteenth century, was also full of passion, perhaps even overwhelmed by emotions. In an appropriated form of the Shakespearean tragic heroine, the Polish Ophelia fulfilled two crucial functions of the Romantic period. She was both a model of a subordinate young woman and an abandoned lover. Her first role results from being an inhabitant of the Danish court, where she was a subject to the king, but also subordinate to her father and dependent upon Hamlet’s fluctuations of affection. She involuntarily became entangled in his myth and story, marked by a dilemma whether to act or not, which was described as hamletizing. Such an attitude was considered typical of the Polish nation and recognized by Jacek Trznadel in his book *Polski Hamlet. Kłopoty z działaniem* [*Polish Hamlet. Problems with Acting*] published in 1988. According to Trznadel, Hamlet is a suitable, or even a perfect hero to expose the characteristics of the average Pole, facing

¹¹ The nineteenth century sentimentalized the act of madness and dying. Allan Edgar Poe wrote that: “The death ... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world” (1951: 369). He probably did not have only Ophelia in mind, nevertheless she might have been one of the most recognizable literary models of sleeping beauties. According to Elaine Showalter:

The romantic Ophelia is a girl who feels too much, is a girl who drowns in feeling. The romantic critics seem to have felt that the less said about Ophelia the better; the point was to look at her. Hazlitt, for one, is speechless before her, calling her “a character almost too exquisitely to be dwelled upon.” While the Augustans represent Ophelia as music, the romantics transform her into an *objet d’art*, as if to take literally Claudius’ lament “poor Ophelia/Divided from herself and her fair judgment,/Without the which we are just pictures” (1985: 83–84).

The Romantic critics treated Ophelia as an icon of a young virgin, whose disgraceful love story drives her mad until she finally sinks into the arms of death.

a critical choice of whether to fight or not to fight. Epitomized by Hamlet as a representative of a Polish nation paralyzed by indecision, tortured by his own helplessness, incapable of taking on a task or engaging in action owing to his troubled mind and vivid imagination. Ophelia did not share Hamlet's attitude to life, being more a pawn, perhaps even a victim of the game of the Danish court. The Polish version of this Shakespearean heroine resembles a childish-like figure, a bit naïve, who takes part in the tournament between men but does not understand the weight of it.

The Shakespearean mad girl (Ophelia in her second role) corresponds with a Romantic image and an ideal of an abandoned lover. Pretty, pure, innocent, and predisposed to mental instability, Ophelia 'passed the test' of a topical icon. This image was proliferated and took on many forms of local Romantic Ophelias in Poland. Ophelia's suicidal inclinations shaped a model for a female "poor wretch" doomed to die for love. As a source of inspiration for the Polish Romantic poets, Ophelia had no rival among Shakespeare's heroines. Being "a document in madness," she was used as a prototype for other passionate and miserable creatures. She was given Polish names, yet Ophelian traits were obvious for audiences, especially when female protagonists were left by their lovers and went insane and finally merged with nature. An aura of mysticism surrounding the death of such young women was of particular interest to the Romantic imagination of Poles. Setting plots in the Polish landscape, they showed her fusion with nature. To die in a natural setting was to confirm the special relation between women and nature. Romantic imagery was abundant in love-crazed women driven to insanity, who poured out their suffering and frustration. In the Polish Romantic period Ophelia began to symbolize a poeticized rejected lover, who experienced a fantastic state of mind, and finally – as she passed away – communed with the natural world.

In Romantic literature she materializes on the page as Aldona in Słowacki's tragedy *Mindowe* (1832). In Józef Korzeniowski's comedy *Zaręczyny aktorki* [*Actress' Engagement*] (1845) the madwoman appears when an actress plays the role of Ophelia, and in his drama *Aniela* (1826), the title character resembles suicidal Ophelia, while another female protagonist – Helena – goes to a nunnery. Moreover, Korzeniowski in *Karpaccy górale* (1843) depicted the most Polish Ophelia of all, where the heroine becomes a female highlander, dying in a mountain stream. Later, in one of the translations/adaptations of *Hamlet* by Krystian Ostrowski (1870), Ophelia is a noblewoman of Poland, whose story

is completely written in the Polish social context. Other attempts at rendering Ophelia Polish are to be found in: Kazimierz Gliński's novel *Obłąkani* [*The Insane*] (1882) with an episode of Halina's/Ophelia's madness; *Dwie Ofelie* [*Two Ophelias*] (1880), a drama by Joanna Betlejowska, where the heroine, Antonia, styles herself as Ophelia, which fortunately results in restoring her senses; or Jadwiga Marcinowska's novel *Ofelia* [*Ophelia*] (1899) about an actress called Maria, who dreams of playing Ophelia. Overwhelmed by this vision, Maria goes insane, which paradoxically, allows her to embody the madwoman perfectly. The abovementioned examples demonstrate that Romantic incarnations of Ophelia were not common in Polish literature of the period. The figure of Shakespeare's madwoman haunted the Polish poetic imagination, which brought about various literary manifestations.

From an independent cultural life of *Hamlet* (*Szekspir współczesny*, Kott, 77), an autonomous existence of the title figure emerges. Moreover, Shakespeare's tragedy also enables the Polish Ophelia to lead a sovereign life, far from the Danish context. Apart from Hamlet-like figures, there are Ophelia-like figures in Polish Romantic literature. Ophelia was as meaningful and useful as Hamlet; a catalyst for the Romantics to work over the dramatic historical moments of the Polish nation and its culture.

“What's done cannot be undone” (*Macbeth* 5.1): Shakespeare's Polish cultural identity card

When the Romantic movement blossomed into maturity, Shakespeare became the most influential playwright in Polish literary and cultural life. Shakespeare helped the Polish Romantics elaborate their dramatic techniques. In their quest for new rules and forms, Romantic poets drew from the Shakespearean model, borrowing those solutions which shaped a Polish national drama. Supplied with Shakespearean dramatic means, they were prepared to rework an actual woeful socio-cultural situation. Additionally, Shakespeare became a source of inspiration for the Polish Romantics. The consequence of appropriating Shakespeare's works and creations was that Poland read with Shakespeare and through Shakespeare. For the Romantics Shakespeare was contagious and his influence spread so rapidly in the second half of the nineteenth century that the Shakespeare phenomenon infected Polish culture from literature, theatre and art, through philosophy and ideology, to politics. The idiosyncrasies of Polish Shakespearemania are entangled

in the literature and national cause. Shakespeare is so entangled in Polish culture that it would not have been an exaggeration to issue him a Polish identity card during the (un)Romantic period of partitions. This cultural card certifies Shakespeare's right to effect Polish literary heritage as well as it establishing his status as Polish Shakespeare, our Shakespeare.

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SUMMARY: The Polish Romantic movement can be proud of fashioning its own Shakespeare, its own ‘kind of Shakespeare’, namely, a national Shakespeare. The process of this domestication began with artists drawing inspiration from Shakespeare, through interpretation and appropriation, followed by idealization, and finally incorporation into the national culture. Shakespeare’s legacy in Poland began with inspiration, which pushed for inner unification of his work with Polish national values and art, followed by incorporation through rendering Shakespeare in Polish, which allowed for a detachment from other European readings of Shakespeare. Polish engagement with Shakespeare depended on transforming his literary output into a source of inspiration for the Romantic generation of poets and artists. Shakespeare moved along an unpredicted trajectory in Poland: from inspiration by Shakespeare’s dramatic technique, linguistic style and motifs to incorporation of his output into Polish literature. In this essay I seek to explore the role Shakespeare played in building the Polish national culture and the extent to which Polish prominent poets and writers were fascinated by Shakespeare. I demonstrate how Polish national identity developed along with the idea of Shakespearemania and how he grew into that culture, acquiring a status of Polish (Romantic) Shakespeare.

Having Fun with Shakespeare: The Case of the Polish Cabaret's Take on Shakespeare

POTEM'S activity in Poland: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't"

POTEM was a group of multitalented youngsters from western Poland, who in 1984 were bored with their pedagogy studies and decided to found a cabaret in town Zielona Góra (in Polish a green mountain). The goal was twofold: to give vent to their artistic inclinations and to stimulate audiences to promote alternative and original interpretations. The name POTEM (LATER in English) was chosen and the first community of seven nonconformists with their leader Władysław Sikora prepared to revolutionize the Polish cabaret scene. Membership fluctuated until 1990, when the core group consisted of 5 men and a woman, the number by which POTEM is commonly recognized today. POTEM was active until 1999 when the performers felt the time was right to stop on their own terms. Most of POTEM's members continued to perform in cabarets, but POTEM never reactivated. Not greedy for commercial success, POTEM chose to perform on small stages. Today their fans may find some extraordinary shows on YouTube, while others buy DVDs.

POTEM is close to my heart as it developed when I was growing up, starting when I was three and giving their last live performance when I was eighteen. For many years I was unaware of its existence, for as a teenager other things than Shakespeare occupied my mind. Up to 1989 Poland was a communist country and artistic activity was partially controlled and censored, if it included dubious content or if it propagated ambiguous ideas. POTEM was programmatically and practically a politics-free cabaret, which relied on the aesthetic engagement of its audience. If the cabaret should have promoted itself, it should have propagated and paraphrased a proletarian slogan: 'The absurd-conscious of all countries, unite!'

The cabaret's leader and author of most of its sketches, Władysław Sikora, explains how he understands art. His ideas are important in understanding the quality of the work. For Sikora art means an original and intentional artist's

activity which arouses emotions in others through aesthetic means.¹ He does not consider moral or cognitive values necessary for art to influence people, nor does he think art should primarily make one think or educate. Art should give aesthetic excitement and stimulate reactions. Sikora designed sketches, songs and according to this assumption developed a philosophy of artistic cabaret. Sikora used the themes of classic literature to introduce multifarious characters and stories to the cabaret scene.

A survey of POTEM'S creative activity shows that classic literature, including Shakespeare, served as inspiration. I cannot think of any other cabaret that exploited various plots so persistently and fruitlessly. Among their both minor and major cosmetic surgeries on the body of literature, one may find 'transplantations' of such recognized plots as: *Sleeping Beauty*, *Pinocchio*, *Little Prince*, or *Antigone*. These famous plots are treated with humorous absurdity and absurd humor. The most visible outcome of each 'transplantation' is the removal of the original narrative from its firm location in the classic body (of literature) and introducing it into the local, Polish body. Not only the sound of POTEM's language and the usage of specific phraseology, slang, clichés, colloquialisms accentuate its Polishness, but also references to Polish legends, historical figures and literary characters. Apart from the abovementioned Polish dimension of 'transplantation,' a broader dimension can be discerned – the cabaret's fixation on pure nonsense or black humor.

POTEM managed to skillfully juggle a few invisible objects during their performances. Besides the topic of the play, they employed obviously senseless and illogical unfoldings and endings, or unexpected and non-stereotypical gender roles and behaviors. It allowed POTEM to create an autonomous scenic reality. Usually sketches of the period lasted longer than 10 minutes, especially monologues, while POTEM took advantage of a shorter formula. Their performances were communicative acts cut down to few minutes. The second trick was to make the best use of costumes and props. Clothes were a bit outmoded yet meticulously chosen and matched. Additionally, performers did not avoid props such as crowns, hearts, swords, or letters. Since they belonged to theatrical convention, all of these articles were symbolic, simple and minimalistic, used to signal somebody's part in performance or to support or supplement performative deeds. The third device was of acoustic

¹ Władysław Sikora, http://www.sikora.art.pl/teoria_kabaretu.html

nature. Performers modulated their voices, they knew how to imitate other voices, and they were professionally prepared to emit different sounds. Music played a vital role in POTE M's sketches and it was an integral part of their performances. Untypical usage of the piano resulted in building tension in the same way cinematic tension intensifies feelings. Its function was also to bring forth associations and render performances more aesthetically pleasing. When these combinations of visual and acoustic solutions became the artistic frame for a Shakespearean plot, POTE M's performances could not disappoint.

POTE M'S squeezed Shakespeare, or how do you like a Shakespearean juice?

Indeed Shakespeare was a good companion of the cabaret. If he was not, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* would not have been condensed to a less-than-five-minutes shows.² Although this compression meant a smaller version of Shakespeare, it did not make him smaller. On the contrary, it demonstrated that this literary cabaret recognized the canonical place of the Bard and "Will Power" to shake the Polish cabaret scene. The Polish cabaret's artistic endeavors rendered Shakespeare on the cabaret scene through unconventional recreations or expropriations of selected plays. POTE M made something totally new from the wealth of Shakespearean dramas. POTE M did not adapt Shakespeare into their sketches, they created new pieces, innovative parodies, which could exist independently. Performers took liberties with Shakespearean tragedies but without any detriment to their aesthetic values. They did not follow any tragedy closely; perhaps cited a line or two from the plays. 'Unfaithfulness' to Shakespeare also meant that it was only for entertainment purposes. Other purposes such as educational or pedagogical were not taken into consideration. They proved that tragic plays, if served in a topsyturvy and sophisticated way, may turn into brilliantly comic Shakespeare.

Knowing that audiences would not take their pronouncements seriously, performers declared that Shakespeare could have written his plays differently but if he did not do so, they took their chance. The first willfully recreated dramatic structure that I will discuss is *Hamlet*. This cult literary figure stands for faked insanity, indecisiveness and engagement in mental battles. In POTE M's

² POTE M also wrote two sketches on *Romeo and Juliet*, but I do not discuss them in my essay.

performance the Prince of Denmark is turned into a naughty boy who needs to be reminded by his mum how to behave properly, how not to disturb the still of the night, and what one should do when it is getting untidy around him, especially when the dead body of Hamlet's uncle causes a mess in the castle.

First Hamlet reflects on his present family relationships and his predicament. He paradoxically begins with a conclusion: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" and explains why he became his own cousin. The opening is just a foretaste of POTEM's fascination with absurdity. Performers not only trifle with a well-known narrative, they also subvert dramatic conventions. In *Tugged Hamlet* the mockery is targeted at the convention of revenge tragedy. Hamlet's dialogue with his Father's ghost is unnaturally emotionless and one gets the impression that it is held only to...kill time. The motivating and moralistic Ghosts' speech in *Hamlet* is replaced with a burst of animal insults at his brother's deceitful and incestuous deeds. The form of punishment is not verbalized, but the awareness that 'something should be done' to Hamlet's uncle is in the air. After the ghost's disappearance, the uncle miraculously appears after Hamlet articulates his revengeful thoughts. Hamlet's abrupt greeting indicates his intentions. Feeling that his end is near, Hamlet's uncle plays for time and makes a fool of himself. In the face of danger he cries for help. Now it's time for Hamlet's mother to intervene as Hamlet and his uncle ruined her deep sleep. By separating the two for 3 seconds her function is to suspend the action. She advises Hamlet to kill the uncle in the morning. Without any introduction and hesitation, Hamlet 'does something' he should not do without a tug. Instead of thrusting a dagger in his uncle's breast, he inserts a sword between his uncle's flank and arm in a clumsy manner. The performance of killing looks like an imitation of a children's game. When it is over, Hamlet's mum reappears, but this time she is stricter. She tugs on Hamlet's ear and orders him to clean the mess he (and his uncle) left.

TUGGED HAMLET (1992)³

Dramatis personae:

Hamlet – tugged prince

Father's ghost – duralex-like figure

³ All translations are mine.

Uncle – close family

Hamlet's mother – no longer a widow

Skeleton – very slim Yorick

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark...

Hamlet: – Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. Dad is dead, mother married my uncle. The situation is complicated. Uncle is my father, mother is my aunt, and I am my own cousin.

Father's Ghost: (*a voice from the Beyond and from backstage*) – Hamleetet, Hamleeeeeeeeet (*he appears*) Hi!

(oh!)

Hamlet: – Oh, my father's ghost

Father's ghost: – Yeah. My ghost.

(*oh, how stiff it is*)

Hamlet: – You're dead, aren't you?

Father's ghost: – Yeah....

(*stiff*)

Hamlet: – How are you, up there?

Father's ghost: – Mhmm..... down there. Not so bad. That hat you threw into the grave is not necessary. It's warm there.

(*damn stiff*)

Hamlet: – Well, are you on furlough?

Father's ghost: – Yeees...I fled from the cauldron.

(*stiff*)

Hamlet: – ...You know, mother has married my uncle.

Father's ghost: – REPTILE!

Hamlet: – Yes, and now it's half past midnight.

Father's ghost: – Uncle is a reptile! He poisoned me!

Hamlet: – Oh, what a swine!

Father's ghost: – Terrible!

Hamlet: – Dad, should I do something to my uncle?

Father's ghost: (*he is content*) – Well, that's the point, that's the point...

(*the topic is exhausted*)

Hamlet: – So... it's so late. Devils aren't looking for you?

Father's ghost: – Indeed, it's time to go back. I'll just frighten the uncle on my way. (*he disappears hastily*)

Hamlet: (*he is left alone in the middle of the night*) – What an uncle! With poison to my dad! Oh, uncle! Uncle...

Uncle: (*oh, there he is*) – Here I am, Hamlet.

Hamlet: – Hi, uncle! (*he takes out his sword*) And good bye!

Uncle: – Do you want to kill me?

Hamlet: – Yeah.

Uncle: (*he plays for time*) – You know, I've heard a new joke. HELP!!!!...

Hamlet's mother: (*she is sleepy*) – What noise is this?

Hamlet: – I'm killing my uncle, while he is telling jokes. Unfunny jokes.

Hamlet's mother: – Hamlet! Do you know what time it is? It's one at night!

Hamlet: – Ha, ha. And the last one for our uncle!

Hamlet's mother: – Go to sleep. Yawn! You'll murder your uncle in the morning. (*she leaves yawning*)

Hamlet: – Now! Blood, blood, blood... (*he stabs the uncle with a sword*) Die now!!!

Uncle: (*he stands with a sword in his chest*)

Hamlet: (*he waits*)

Uncle: (*he stands*)

Hamlet: (*he reprimands*) – Uncle...!

Uncle: (*unwillingly*) – I know! (*he falls to the floor in the grip of a convulsion*)

Hamlet: – Oh! (*he leaves out of the chamber with satisfaction*)

Hamlet's mother: (*she tugs on Hamlet's ear*) – Hamlet, what is lying here?

Hamlet: – It's uncle, mum.

Hamlet's mother: – Who killed him?

Hamlet: – I did.

Hamlet's mother: – Damn, you'd better clean up!

(everything ends well, Hamlet cleans up, mother is not waken up until the morning, Uncle doesn't need the hat)

Authors: We – Władek and William

Another attempt at recreating a Shakespearian plot resulted in a new version of *Othello*. The most jealous of all Shakespearean characters becomes the object of ridicule in POTEM's sketch. Performers turn Othello into his own caricature while Desdemona seems to be a puppet and existing only to satisfy Othello's egoistic needs. As the plot unfolds it becomes obvious that her utterances and love declarations are partly calculated. Paradoxically they are also automatic and Desdemona's behavior might be compared to that of Pavlov's dog. The first instance of Desdemona's deliberately mechanical and mechanically deliberate answer to Othello's inquiry about who she is talking to is a confession that she talks to herself. There can be only one person that occupies her mind: Othello, who

should be present both in her fantasies and in the real world. Othello admits that in his perfect world Desdemona must love him (because he gives her happiness and she confirms that) and there is no reason to strangle her. POTEM focuses on strangling as the leitmotif and vent to the ambiguous emotions it provokes. In Shakespeare's *Othello* it is an act of violence, while in POTEM's reinterpretation, strangling becomes a play between lovers, which Desdemona is used to.

Iago is partly erased from the sketch, but reincarnated as Kind person. This defender of morality prompts Othello to begin to investigate into Desdemona's infidelity. Supposedly she looks favorably at the postman and a handkerchief with a stamp is "the ocular proof." Desdemona understands her situation and defends herself with declarations of love. A wordplay on the word 'relic' leads to a performative strangling of Desdemona. It is interrupted by a visit from her father, who decides to take her home. Again, the appearance of a parent (like in *Tugged Hamlet*) suspends the action and produces a comic effect. As he agrees with Desdemona that killing by squeezing the throat is stupid, Desdemona talks back...She recommends that her helpless Othello, who is left alone, choke on a peanut.

OTHELLO (1992)

Dramatis personae:

Othello – nice guy

Desdemona – wife of a nice guy

Kind person – anonymous defender of morality

Father-in-law – husband to mother-in-law

Desdemona: – My Othello is such a nice guy, but also so jealous. When he imagines something, he gets down to strangling.

Othello: (*he pops up with a series of questions*) – Desdemona, who are you talking to?

Desdemona: – To myself.

Othello: – Well, and what did you say?

Desdemona: – That I love my Othello.

Othello: – And you... what was your answer?

Desdemona: – That loving Othello is my happiness.

Othello: – Great.

Desdemona: – Yes, great.

Othello: – Correct. Desdemona, you must be really happy with me.

Desdemona: – Yes, Othello, I must!

Othello: – It's so good together. You love me and I don't strangle you (*he exists*)

Desdemona: – Nice guy, isn't he? But my dad doesn't like him (*she gets out a letter*) He persists asking if he can beat him.

Othello: (*he returns from a walk*) – Desdemona!!! I have a question.

Desdemona: (*she has the answer*) – I love only you.

Othello: – Wait. This is an unexpected question. (*he asks*) Why do you look at the postman so FAVORABLY...

Desdemona: – That's not true!!! Who says so?

Othello: – Nobody, I bluff! Go away. Stop! Say any name...

Desdemona: (*she speaks straight away*) – Othello!

Othello: – Well... good. Go away!

Desdemona: (*he goes away, but not forever*)

Kind person: (*he sneaks into the house*) – Othello. We know each other... my literary pseudonym is "Kind person".

Othello: – And what is your name?

Kind person: – I have no name. I was passing by and I heard your conversation. I'm outraged at Desdemona's deceits. She looks at the postman (!) and gives him HANDKERCHIEVES AS REMEMBRANCES! Here is the proof: a handkerchief with a stamp! (*he hands in the handkerchief*)

Othello: – Desdemona! (*she lifts the handkerchief high*) What is it?

Desdemona: – You're my dearest and anything you touch turns into relics. THIS IS A RELIC!

Othello: – So I will turn you into a relic, too! (*he strangles her*)

Father-in-law: (*he enters*) – My son-in-law! Good morning, allow me this lie.

Othello: (*he still keeps Desdemona in his hands*) – O, daddy....

Father-in-law: – I have to seriously talk to you!

Othello: – Daddy is always so serious... Be more cool!

Father-in-law: – Othello, I found out that you're strangling Desdemona.

Othello: (*he drops Desdemona*) – No.

Desdemona: (*she has just been dropped by Othello*) – This strangling is so stupid!

Father-in-law: – Yes, not a very wise activity. I'm taking Desdemona to her mother.

Othello: – No, Desdemona. What shall I do without you?

Desdemona: – Othello, choke on a peanut.

THE END

Autor: Władysław Sikora

POTEM's recreation of the bloody story of *Macbeth* is told with no navigation nor influence of Lady Macbeth. Removing her from the plot was necessary to design the sketch as the longest (in literature) encounter between Macbeth and a Witch. Since it was also invented as *Speedy Macbeth*, my analysis should not brake this pattern. POTEM's performance is about sacrificing Macbeth's life for a throne. And hell is his final destiny.

SPEEDY MACBETH – LIFE FOR A THRONE (1999)

Dramatis personae

Macbeth – filthy but classy murderer

Witch – intermediary between Macbeth and destiny

King – bloke who is blocking promotion

Prince – young man with a sword

Motto:

It's not dry in the rain and in the mist

Władysław Sikora

(*burble, burble, caw, caw, uhuuu..., burble, burble – such atmosphere*)

Witch: – I live a hundred years and I haven't done anything good yet. I'm so foul. Ha ha, ha ha.

Macbeth: (*thump, thump*) – Hey, you Toad!

Witch: – Don't call me Toad.

Macbeth: (*he is surprised*) – And what is your name?

Witch: – Sophie.

Macbeth: (*he is surprised*) – Toad suits you more!

Witch: – My middle name is Katherine.

Macbeth (*he is surprised*) – I would give you another – Cockroach.

Witch: (*he gives up*) – Then I choose Toad.

Macbeth: – Fine. Can you foretell?

Witch: – Sure, you BLOCKHEAD!

Macbeth – My name is Macbeth!!!

Witch: (*she is surprised*) – Blockhead suits you more!

Macbeth: – Let me call you Sofia.

(*the end of preliminary arrangements*)

Witch: (*she reads Macbeth's hand*) – Macbeth, a throne and a crown are waiting for you. You'll be a king. I'm reading your hand (*she exits*)

Macbeth: (*he looks at the letters written on his hand with a felt tip*) – I know,

I wrote it myself.

Macbeth: – First I have to chop the king. (*he takes out his sword*) Snip, snip!!
Kiiiing!

King: (*he arrives as he is called for*) – What’s the matter, Macbeth?

Macbeth: – There is a matter. Snip, snip.

King: – Is this the urgent matter?

Macbeth: – Yes. And it is the dead matter. Sniiiiipp (*he stabs the king*)

King: – He killed me! How unexpected it was! (*he falls down unexpectedly and dies with the same unexpectedness*)

Macbeth: (*he puts the crown on his head*)

Prince: (*he pokes his small spotted nose into affairs of adults*) – Macbeth, where is daddy?

Macbeth: – Beat it! I don’t talk to orphans.

Prince: – Tell me where dad is!

Macbeth: (*he pushes the king’s body with a leg*) – There is something here...

Prince: – Oh! You killed him!

Macbeth: – Good guess! You won daddy. Take him. (*Prince drags his dad at his leg to the cemetery*)

King: – How wretched my last journey is!

Macbeth: – We have to get rid of Prince; when he grows older, he is going to reclaim the throne.

Prince: (*he returns for a while*) – Macbeth, give me hellers.

Macbeth: (*she hands them in*) – Take it, squirt.

Prince: – Thanks. (*he exits*)

Macbeth: – I will not rest until I kill him! It’s time to go to bed so I need to hurry!

Macbeth: – Sofiiiiia!

Witch: (*she arrives because she is called for*)

Macbeth: – Hello Sophie.

Witch: (*she mumbles*) – Open it yourself!

Macbeth: – Have you got any princicide?

Witch: – You cannot kill the Prince. Someone has to take the crown away from you.

Prince: (*he pops in*) – Macbeth, give me 80 hellers!

Macbeth: – Take it! Out! (*Prince is out*) This is who you are!?

Witch: – It’s written in the stars.

Macbeth: – What?

Witch: – That he will kill you with his own hends!

Macbeth: (*he corrects*) – Hands!

Withch: – ‘Hends!’ is written in the stars. (*she leaves*)

(*bim bom, uhuuuu, peek-aboo-, clank, clank – shackles – such atmosphere*)

King: (*he appears as a ghost*) – Uuuuu Macbeth, uuuu!!!!

Macbeth: – What is roaming in the castle?

King: – I am, the King!

Macbeth: – What do you want?

King – You will die, blockhead!!! Ha ha ha!

Macbeth: – And you are already dead. He he he!

King (*definitely confused*) – Damn, that was so stupid of me! (*he runs away*)

Macbeth: – Who else wants something else?

Prince: (*more alive than his dad*) – I do. Give me the crown!

Macbeth: – Out!

Prince: – Don’t say so, or I will stab you.

Macbeth: – Oh, he stabbed me! (*he dies as he is stabbed*)

Prince: – Don’t cry after him. He was a blockhead. (*he leaves*)

Witch: (*she pops up with a simple question*) – Macbeth! Are you dead?

Macbeth: – Because of you! Dead as a dodo!

Witch: – Then go to hell! It’s warmer there!

Macbeth: (*he goes there although its far away*)

THE END

Władysław the Author (born as Shakespeare) Sikora

Shakespeare expropriated, well done!

If I was to classify POTEM’s Shakespearean recreations I would place them under category of expropriation understood as a radical interpretative innovation. Neither Shakespeare nor anybody else is the proper owner of literary texts. Herein lies the space for POTEM’s artistic liberty. POTEM’s Shakespearean sketches developed into easily identifiable comic scenes through its liberal use of tragic plots. In my opinion, the performers’ correction of Shakespeare is an act of auto-irony intended to ridicule any attempt to

improve classic narratives. Moreover, they demonstrated that theatre does not have a monopoly on adapting/appropriating Shakespeare. The cabaret scene is as suitable and welcoming for the Bard as reputable places. When show time comes, any venue can be as good as the classic theatrical one to put Shakespeare's name on the marquee. Simultaneously, POTEM'S Shakespeare travesty is a kind of 'comic relief' to overwhelming media seriousness. Whenever I am exhausted with portentous media messages, I pause and return to one of my favorite Shakespeares, Shakespeare by POTEM.

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SUMMARY: Shakespeare parodies have been mushrooming in popular culture since the groundbreaking sketch *A Small Rewrite* was performed on stage at the Sadlers Wells Theatre on 18 September 1989 with Hugh Laurie as "Bill" Shakespeare and Rowan Atkinson as his agent or manager. "A Small Rewrite" might be called a "classic mockery" of the classical text of *Hamlet*. It is performed in English, circulates around the globe via Internet and is tremendously popular. Digital culture offers other, local parodies of Shakespeare, yet these are less available to global audience due to the linguistic

barrier of such performances. Language becomes the most important obstacle. In this essay I demonstrate how one of Polish cabarets dealt with selected Shakespearean dramas. I present three sketches, parodies by the POTEM Cabaret, which performed between 1984-1999. I also translate three Polish texts: *Hamlet targany* [*Tugged Hamlet*], *Otello* [*Othello*] and *Szybki Makbet – życie za tron* [*Speedy Macbeth – Life for a Throne*] to make them accessible to an English-speaking audience.

SENSORY APPROACHES TO SHAKESPEARE

Sensory studies and the Mona Lisa of Literature, or *Hamlet* and the Senses

Usefulness of sensory studies

Introducing sensory studies into the field of cultural studies is a matter of transgression, one that has a groundbreaking impact on the apprehension of the senses. Transgression begins when cognitive boundaries are crossed, when disruption arises in the accepted and conventional approach to the senses. The study of perception belongs to both natural science and cultural studies. This is especially so in regard to the “sensual revolution” (Howes, *Empire* 1) that appeared at the turn of the twenty-first century, and which contributed to recovering perception from the laboratory (Howes, *Empire* 4). Bringing sensory perception into this field of studies is an opportunity to explore the human sensorium and its sociocultural functions, as well as to look closely at the history of the senses. David Howes explains the heightened contemporary interest in the senses when he elucidates:

The senses are now being investigated by historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and literary scholars among many others. This revolution in the study of the senses is based on the premise that the sensorium is a social construct, which is in turn supported by the growing body of research showing that the senses are lived and understood differently in different cultures and historical periods. (“Charting” 114)

But making sense of the senses also relies on our ability to use them. Therefore one should be alert to aesthetic and visual stimuli provoked by theatre, film and media; prick up one’s ears when experiencing one’s aural surroundings; avoid losing touch with the real world when absorbed by virtual reality; rely on one’s own taste regardless of mainstream preferences in our everyday socio-sensual engagement with the world. The manifold varieties of sensory experience become accessible when we intentionally begin to think through our senses and translate these experiences into meaningful acts of knowledge.

According to the contemporary and simultaneously revolutionary approach to the senses, human perception might be understood as an unstable cultural formation undergoing changes over time, which is “an ever-shifting social and historical construct” (Bull et al. 5). In her book *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (1993), Constance Classen reminds us that:

In the West we are accustomed to thinking of perception as a physical rather than a cultural act. The five senses simply gather data about the world. Yet even our time-honored notion of there being five senses is itself a cultural construction. Some cultures recognize more senses, and other cultures fewer. (2)

Furthermore, as it has been stated in the first issue of a the transgressive journal *The Senses and Society*: “The perceptual is cultural and political, and not simply (as psychologists and neurobiologists would have it) a matter of cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms located in the individual subject” (Bull et al. 5). Such an understanding of sensory perception renders possible a study of the cultural (and political) role of the senses in each epoch. For the purposes of this essay, some cultural functions of the sense of sight and hearing as well as gendering of the senses, and placing them in the sensory hierarchy, will be stressed in the context of the Renaissance period.

Western visual empire

Seeing and hearing fulfill many cultural functions, such as determining our cognition, serving as the tools of power relations, or conditioning our sensations. Both vision and hearing are considered to be the highest senses, and sight occupies “something of a hegemonic position in Western culture” (Smith Mark M., 2007: 19). Consequently, within this culture the role of vision, as far as sensory history is concerned, is tantamount to ruling the empire of the senses over the past centuries. Since the beginning of the modern era, all eyes have been focused on sight (this statement summarizes a tendency among scholars to pay attention to sight and its cultural aspects in their research while simultaneously ‘ignoring’ other senses.) This is not only because humans primarily experience reality through their eyes, but also because of the cultural implications of exploring vision surpass the social usage and the role of the other senses.

Visual perception greatly determines our sensory experience and knowledge of the world. It has been scientifically proved that eyes are very effective ‘gatherers and mediators’ of information, upon which people are almost exclusively willing to rely on. It is worth referring to Hanna Arendt’s observation on the association between cognitive activity and activity of the visual sphere: “from the very outset, in formal philosophy, thinking has been thought of in terms of seeing” (1987: 110). She also pays attention to the fact that: “The predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech, and therefore in our conceptual language, that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged, among things too obvious to be noticed” (111). The permeability of visual metaphors throughout Western languages shows how crucial sight is for framing the world and creating our perspective. Interestingly enough, the eye gained its importance when the modern conception of self began to be fashioned. In *Sensory History* Mark M. Smith argues that this modern self aspired to be “a spectator viewing the world, supposedly detached and observing” (2007: 23).

Early modern sensory world

In his analyses, Martin Jay concludes on the modern ocularcentric world, pointing out all the inventions, such as optical instruments, perspective in art, printing presses and surgical practices, which stimulated the eye during the Renaissance times and which afterwards contributed to visual primacy in the West:

Whether or not one gives greater weight to technical advances or social changes, it is thus evident that the dawn of the modern era was accompanied by the vigorous privileging of vision. From the curious, observant scientist to the exhibitionist, self-displaying courtier, from the private reader of printed books to the painter of perspectival landscapes, from the map-making colonizer of foreign lands to the quantifying businessman guided by instrumental rationality, modern men and women opened their eyes and beheld a world unveiled to their eager gaze. (1994: 68)

All these enumerated developments came during the Renaissance period, which renders it possible to describe this early phase of modernity as a transitional time (when looked at from the perspective of sensory studies). It

might be considered the liminal and therefore transgressive period when crucial changes concerning perception occurred, specifically the transition from an acoustically oriented reality towards a visually embedded perception of the world. If one takes into account McLuhan's notion that every culture generates and acts according to an "order of sensory preferences" (1995: 241), then Shakespeare's time escapes any rigid classification. Disruption in the sensory order, suspension of the hierarchy between the senses, and the emergence of subversive values characterizes the early modern period, unable to privilege either the eye, or the ear. To mention the ear as the rival organ to the eye requires a discussion of some aspects of auditory perception.

Cultural dialectics between the eye and the ear

Bruce R. Smith's assertion that "knowing the world through sound is fundamentally different from knowing the world through vision" (2004: 129) is not a banal suggestion to be ignored, but should rather provoke us to ruminate on the cognitive process as well as various pivotal functions of hearing in Western culture. Furthermore, aural perception cannot equal visual perception if intensity of academic research on hearing is taken into consideration. Mark M. Smith believes it is high time scholars challenged "their deafness to the aural worlds of the past" ("Listening", 2004: 137).

As a cultural formation, the sense of hearing has been associated with several rudimentary meanings in the West. One of the references attributed to the ear pertains to its vulnerability, particularly this organ being "always in operation, unreflectively accumulative, and naively open to even the most harmful of loud, high or concussive sounds" (Schwartz, 2004: 487). Absorbing uninvited sounds, that are elusive in their nature, the ear is traditionally considered to be a less reliable source of knowledge than the eye. In identifying truth, objectivity and capturing events, the status of hearing comes a poor second when compared to seeing. In aural/oral cultures, especially before modernity flourished, people had confidence in sounds, preeminently in the form of storytelling and everyday speech. But the transgressive time of the early modern transition embraced perceptive practices, values and brought changes into the sensory order. With respect to the sensual past, transgression touches upon a revolutionary shift in cultural paradigms, based on the revaluation of the role of the senses and subversion of the sensory hierarchy. This overthrow of the established order

initiates a gradual metamorphosis of the sensory order: from a world immersed in aural/oral practices into a visually-dependent reality. Since early modern ‘eyes and ears’ encountered entirely different images and sounds in comparison with contemporary perception, representations of seeing and hearing are encoded in cultural materials through/with the sensory ciphers of the past. *Hamlet*, being the focus of this essay, was written according to a sensory code of the early modern period. Perhaps the answer to Oscar Wilde’s question about whether critics are truly mad or only pretend their fixation over *Hamlet*, could be simply that they come very close to taking leave of their senses (somewhere between simulation and real state of insanity) as they attempt to reveal the sensory code of the play.

Representations of the senses in literature on the example of *Hamlet*

The representations of sight and hearing in literature, as well as Shakespeare’s plays, are laden with our presentist manner of apprehending. Our contemporary lenses of perception determine practices of obtaining knowledge about the sensory values and sensory life of the people of the Renaissance. Bearing in mind that we all use the presentist perspective, it is worth noting that “a focus on perceptual life is not a matter of losing our minds but of coming to our senses” (Howes, *Empire* 7). Moreover, making sense of the senses, as depicted in *Hamlet*, cannot escape the gendering and transgressing of sensual experience. Concentrating on the representations of female sight and hearing in *Hamlet* enables one to demonstrate that the manner in which Ophelia and Gertrude experience through their senses, differs from the sensory experiences of male protagonists in the play. In her article entitled “Perceiving Shakespeare: A Study of Sight, Sound, and Stage”, Jennifer Rae McDermott presents contrasting ways of perceiving on the example of male and female characters from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. To purport a gendered analysis, McDermott avails herself of early modern sensory theory. She inclines herself towards a belief that “the organs themselves are referred to again and again as subjects rather than objects. These senses actively do things.” Such perspective accords the organs of perception agency, although it still deprives women’s perceptive faculties of accurate and complete agency. In an article devoted to the senses in *Hamlet* Mark L. Caldwell takes a similar stand as he states that:

To the Elizabethan, the senses were active interpreters of reality not (as they often are for us) mere transparent lenses through which reality can pass unaltered. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scientific literature is full of controversy about how far the senses merely channel information to the mind, how far they mold and interpret that information. Thus, for at least the informed Elizabethan reader or playgoer, the play's preoccupation with the senses was closely allied with its often-remarked preoccupation with the interpretation of reality. (1979: 144)

As Caldwell analyses examples of seeing and hearing in the play, he does not introduce the gendering of the senses, which actually means that only male sensory organs are granted proper agency (men's perception and the male body was a model for any examination and description in early modern discourses). Nevertheless his sensory analysis, e.g. counting words, which refer to the senses in *Hamlet* and comparing them with statistics in other plays, is one of the most significant contributions to studies on Shakespeare and the senses.

Hamlet's sensory code, which delineates boundaries of human perception, like many other cultural codes, deprives female characters of their own audition and vision. Subversive perceptual behavior becomes the opportunity for female transgression within the space of Elsinore. My interpretation suggests that in this Shakespearean sponge-like play (Kott, 1967: 52), subversive representations of seeing and hearing serve as alternative ways of exploiting the senses. Both Ophelia and Gertrude are portrayed as breaking the rules that exist in Renaissance society by perceptual transgression.

In her study on sensory symbolism of Western culture, Classen investigates how "the senses are inflected with gender values" (*The Color*, 1998: 63). She also distinguishes how meanings attributed to the cultural constructions of the senses and gender, produce specific links (in other words – new cultural formations) between each sense and either masculinity or femininity e.g. the "male gaze" and "female touch." According to Classen:

Women have traditionally been associated with the senses in Western culture, and in particular, with the "lower" senses. Women are forbidden taste, the mysterious smell, the dangerous touch. Men, by contrast, have been associated with reason, as opposed to the senses, or else with sight and hearing as the most "rational" of the senses. The occultation of the sensory underpinnings of Western culture by the modern visual and rational world view may therefore be read as an occultation of certain feminine dimensions of that culture. (*The Color* 2)

This quotation, in which hearing and sight are presented at the top of the hierarchy of the senses, denotes how the significance of aural and visual perception contributes to the marginalization of other sensory receivers/transmitters. The sensory code of the play is manifested through the use of expressions that evoke the senses. It reveals how Shakespeare's elevation or demotion of sensory perception reflects the social meanings added to the senses. The eclipse of feminine sensory values contributed to the underpinning of the patriarchal system in Western culture, but simultaneously the reversal within the hierarchy of the senses of early modern culture, left some space for women's particular manner of seeing and hearing. This space opens up possibilities for subversive perceptual behavior, violating the rational/masculine usage of the sense of sight and hearing. Furthermore, the play shows how the tension between two rational senses arose in the early modern period. In his essay "Artifactual Knowledge in *Hamlet*" Howard Marchitello claims that within this play: "the organs of perception – eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin – are simultaneously the means through which one apprehends the material world and the loci of profound material vulnerability" (142). *Hamlet*, *ipso facto*, becomes involved in an early modern debate surrounding the senses, and might be even treated as one of the cultural texts that (sub)consciously takes up a mysterious issue of interconnection between the body, gender and the senses, their function and symbolic meanings.

Shakespeare's imagining of the senses

The imagery of the senses in *Hamlet* brings up a sensory issue – the 'wrestling between sight and hearing' in the Renaissance. These two senses compete as organs of perception for their scope of functionality, reliability, and therefore for mastering the empire of the senses. The transgressive character of early modern society – uncertain about the nature of its sensual experiences – becomes visible and audible on the textual level of the play. I also focus on the transgression pertaining to women's sight and hearing as portrayed by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*.

Literary representations of sensory experiences in *Hamlet* encourage to examine the feminine ways of perceiving during the opening phase of the Renaissance. It is possible to analyze the cultural construction of sensory perception and its reflection in the play through the examination of certain

passages of the text, while simultaneously putting them into the broader context of Shakespeare's times. In her book *Poetyka i antropologia. Cykl podolski Włodzimierza Odojewskiego*, Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik draws attention to the "mutual sensual perception," occurring between any fictional characters (2004: 338). She also highlights that within the literary text, there might be identified particular "states of the observed person," which allow for an "insight into the other" (339). Apparently, "the other" emerging from the dialogues is either a male or female protagonist. Curiously enough, the very first scene of the tragedy prefigures that "there is something wrong with sensory perception," leading each character astray and providing blurred visions or indistinct sounds. In the opening words of the play, Bernardo directs his question "Who's there?" into the night-time void. This male protagonist seems to be surrounded by darkness/deafness, which hinders his ability to see an approaching person clearly, or recognize his/her voice from a distance. With their eyes and ears wide open, all of Shakespeare's characters are portrayed as sensorially interacting with each other and the mysterious surrounding of Elsinore.

In *Hamlet*, the representations of women's sight and hearing form a sensory minority. Marginal sensory experiences of Ophelia and Gertrude become a potential source of information about cultural constructions of the senses in early modern times. Gendering of visual and aural perception in the transitional Shakespearean era, prevents us from universalizing and ahistoricizing the human sensorium. Gender-based distinction of sensory perception assumes that each of the senses has either feminine or masculine inclinations. Such a distinction was popular and prevailing in pre-modernity.

Philosophical 'splitting of the eye'

The modern concept of the embodied self came along with the idea of the gendering of the senses. David Hillman observes "the radical instability in the relations between mind and body," regarding it as an outstanding feature of Shakespeare's times (1). Since *Hamlet* is a liminal play – suspended between the pre-modern understanding of sensory perception and the modern cultural approach to the senses – it also reflects the clash between a 'unifying' pre-Cartesian and 'separating' Cartesian paradigm of subjectivity. The latter was practically just emerging and its reflection in the ext of the play was more of an

intellectual prediction than an actual mimesis of a deep-seated philosophical thought of the period. In Alison Thorne's point of view: "More than any other literary creation, Shakespeare's introspective prince has been taken to symbolize the shift towards an interiorized model of subjectivity we associate with the inception of the modern age" (2000: 106).

The shift in the comprehension of the self coincides with and influenced the change in the interpretation of the sense of vision. The emerging model of subjectivity introduces a body/mind problem, which divides the self into corporeal and rational parts. This dualistic notion of the self embraces the empire of the senses, affecting sight by discovering the split within visual perception. During Shakespeare's times vision begins to be apprehended both in its physical and mental modes. Seeing functions in two dimensions: inward – as a source of perception of the mind, or outward – passively operating as a channel, providing stimuli from the outside. It is vision that is deployed in *Hamlet* to signal the transition in conceptualizing the self as well as its resonance in the 'splitting of the eye' between the mind and the body.

In *Hamlet* seeing with the mind's eye is presented as the male privilege connected with: having the power to investigate and speculate, constructing knowledge about the world, being a reliable eye-witness and an active perceptual participant. Caldwell focuses on the acts of spying, watching and eavesdropping performed by men in *Hamlet*:

It opens with Barnardo and Francisco watching for the Ghost. We then shift to Gertrude and Claudius in council, watched by the ostentatiously silent Hamlet, who, summoned outside by Horatio and Marcellus, himself joins the vigil. When the Ghost reappears, Horatio and Marcellus follow, carefully observing the meeting. Polonius hatches the plot to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia, and Claudius employs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet [...] Hamlet devises the plot to stage a play, to be watched by Gertrude and Claudius, while he and Horatio in turn watch them. After the Mousetrap is sprung, Hamlet watches Claudius at prayer and is in turn overheard by Polonius during the closet scene. In company of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet then watches Fortinbras' army cross the stage. Immediately thereafter we see Horatio, Gertrude, and Claudius observing, but doing nothing, about the mad Ophelia. Hamlet returns from the voyage to watch Ophelia's funeral procession; Claudius and Gertrude watch while Hamlet and Laertes struggle in the grave, and finally, in an ironic parody both of this scene and the play-within-a-play,

Claudius arranges to watch a performance, the mock duel between Hamlet and Laertes, from which the bloody and precipitous denouement follows (emphasis mine, 1979: 138).

Men are given the leading roles, while women play supporting roles or sometimes even bit parts. Their sensory presence is either of secondary value, or trifled. The corporeal eye, that symbolically expresses women's sight, is characterized by the biological attribute of accepting external stimuli, passiveness and therefore the inability to transform observation into knowledge. Manifestation on the textual level of the play that the representations of visual perception in *Hamlet* differentiate in respect to gender, connects the sensory imagery of Shakespeare's drama with the gender symbolism underlying early modern culture. Undoubtedly visual perception might be exploited by each gender, which in the case of women – making use of this masculine sense – to some extent deprived them of their perspective and limited their ability to use sight in rational and contemplative ways, as men did. Classen (1998) contends that:

In the case of each sense, men would typically be associated with what were thought to be the nobler qualities of that sense, and women with the more ignoble. As regards sight, for example, men were ideally imagined to employ this sense for intellectual activities such as studying, while women made use of it for the sensual ends of acquiring gaudy clothes and admiring themselves in the mirror. Similarly, men were imagined to use the sense of hearing to listen to weighty discourses, while women employed their hearing to attend to frivolous gossip and love talk. (*The Color* 66)

Early modern perceptual paradigms accorded with the strictly patriarchal demands of the society, in which women's transgression were too portentous for recognizable standards of femininity. The culture of the transitional Shakespearean era considered specific sensory behaviors as transgressive. Therefore how women 'should use' their eyes and ears was of particular interest to the society. Limited in their 'perceptual field' of existence, through perceptive subversiveness women in *Hamlet* appear as expressing their anger and protest against the cultural confinements imposed on them.

Women and sensory transgression

The violation of the established modes of sensing by women becomes evident in the form of significant textual interruptions, that is to say, the representations of transgressive acts of perception within the play. A case in point is Ophelia's metamorphosis – from a submissive daughter and sister taking the perspective of men (or being forced to internalize such mode of perceiving), into a madwoman creating her own illuminating visions. Although throughout the play Ophelia is being manipulated by her father, brother and even Hamlet, who attempt to impose their point of view on the young woman's perspective – in my opinion – she finds perceptual freedom in the state of insanity. The submissiveness of the corporeal eye becomes clear when Polonius rebukes his daughter for being too naïve to believe Hamlet's declarations of love. Ophelia is left with pure observations but not allowed to transform them into confirming knowledge. When the father asks her: "Do you believe his 'tenders', as you call them?" (1.3.102), Ophelia replies: "I do not know, my lord, what should I think?" (1.3.103). Perhaps the cause of mental chaos that engenders the madness of Ophelia lies in impregnating her mind with too many representations of womanhood. Yet it is not until she loses her mind that she experiences the sensory transgression. With her somatic eyes boring into nothingness, through songs of an abandoned lover and prophetic speeches, Ophelia 'pours out' the excess of the images anchored in her mind's eye. Her visions seem to go beyond the imagination of the viewers in the touching performance of insanity.

In most of the scenes Ophelia's aural perception is also portrayed as passive. As Reina Green notices: "Polonius gives contrasting advice to his children about listening. [...] Ophelia must not listen to others, particularly Hamlet, because Polonius assumes that she cannot distinguish truth from guile, and because listening will prompt her to speak or 'parley'." ("Poisoned Ears") Ophelia was admonished by her father and obliged to listen to him. Polonius warned his daughter that her vulnerable organ of perception, usually unlocked and threatened with verbal penetration, might be abused by Hamlet. Ophelia's ears are treated in corporeal terms, similar to sexual bodily organs, exposed to potent corruption or violence. Female intimate parts were compared not only to gates or doors but also ears, being at risk of penetration or trespass.

Hearing is also portrayed as the sense which is used by Ophelia in a subversive manner. Nowhere is it more evidently manifested than through the lines which demonstrate the inattentive audition of the madwoman, focused

on the voices in her head. Ophelia offers ambiguous answers to those who interrupt her nonsensical speeches or bawdy songs. To the Queen's question: "Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?" she responds: "Say you? Nay, pray you, mark" (4.5.27–28), as if she was not paying attention to what has been said. By subverting the role of a woman as a passive hearer, she (un)consciously employs her hearing to 'shut her ears' to unwanted words uttered by other people. The refusal to take notice of sounds directed at her, attests to crossing the sensory boundaries. It leads to finding her own voice regardless of the voices that try to reach Ophelia. Contrastingly, before Ophelia takes leave of her senses, her depiction by Shakespeare suggests that she is the 'blind' eye-witness and the 'voiceless' hearer, left with pure visual and aural sensations but not allowed to transform them into confirming knowledge. Ophelia's reflections and judgments become shaped and verified by Polonius' and Laertes' opinions, by their incorporeal eye. Under the watchful gaze of men, Ophelia becomes powerless in speech and vision. Empowered by altered states of perception, the woman openly expresses her standpoint by drawing mental pictures that "would make one think there might be thought" (4.5.12) and pours "the poison of deep grief" (4.5.81.) into the 'ears' of the Elsinore court.

Queen Gertrude, the sensually/sexually subversive widow, is another example of the transgressive female character in the play. Her status in early modern society was to be measured according to certain constraints and norms. The figure of Gertrude falls into the category of a widow, who shortens her mourning period by remarrying her dead husband's brother. The eyes of the mourner should be closed to the physical attractiveness of the male body, and the ears should resist any verbal temptation as well, e.g. seductive men's voices or erotic allusions directed at the widow. Gertrude fails to fulfill the proper role of the mourning widow and as she hastily remarries, she rejects expectations surrounding the woman who lost her husband. However this refusal cannot be treated as a conscious transgression since Gertrude does not judge clearly. The Queen acts as if she was blinded in a literal and figurative meaning of the word, as if she was led astray by her eyes, which made her vision defective and therefore unable to detect that her husband's murderer was his brother – her second husband. Gertrude non-cogitatively absorbs seductive images from the outside world and yields her perspective to Claudius' worldview. The symbolic attributes of the feminine somatic eye such as submissiveness or disempowerment of independent judgment, become evident when Gertrude takes the perspective of her second husband.

Hamlet attempts to control Gertrude's mourning as he enumerates the stages she should be going through after the loss of her husband. Instead of performing a social role of a widow properly, manifesting sorrow through "windy suspiration of forced breath," "the fruitful river in the eye" and "the dejected behaviour of the visage" (1.2.79-81), Gertrude opens her senses to the visual and aural attractions of her second marriage. In a pivotal scene of the play, during Gertrude's encounter with Hamlet in her closet, two gendered ways of perceiving are contrasted. The Queen's visual perception dominated by the somatic eye is set in opposition to Hamlet's activation of his mind's eye. The gendering of the eye is revealed through the dialogue, which prioritizes a masculinized point of view of the prince. He endeavors to enlighten his mother about Old Hamlet's death. The son cannot believe that Gertrude chose Claudius as her second husband, therefore he uses a picture of him: "Here is your husband like a mildewed ear/Blasting his wholesome brother" (3.4.62-63). Hamlet takes advantage of being culturally allowed to express male supremacy over women by aggressively interrogating his mother: "Have you eyes?" (3.4.63), and aiming to undermine any reliability in Gertrude's visual perception.

If Gertrude's hearing is considered, her aural sense is mostly employed to listen to opinions given by Claudius, and thus it remains under the control of male voices. As the plot unfolds, the Queen either appears along with Claudius, or faces his entrance within each act. Such textual strategy imposed by Shakespeare might implicate that Gertrude's audition is exposed to male speeches, which results in abating her voice and weakening the power to affect men's hearing. In the closet scene, for example, Hamlet dominates as he uses violent, abusive and ear-piercing words, intending to drown out Gertrude's voice. Her verbal reactions are mostly provoked by Hamlet's offensive manner of speaking. The opportunity to exploit audition subversively appears within the last scene of the play, when the Queen disobeys Claudius's command not to drink wine from the cup.

Ultimately the Queen also transgressively exploits visual perception in order to trespass its passiveness and fleshiness. First, Shakespeare portrays this character as enchanted by what her bodily eyes communicate about the world, and follows the passionate scopic drive, which leads her into "incestuous sheets." Gertrude's sensory transgression is a moment of illumination, expressed by her refusal to obey the command of Claudius in the final scene of the play. She decides to produce knowledge independently of any masculine point of view. Before she dies, after drinking the poisonous drink – in my

interpretation – her eyes meaningfully express her motherly love for Hamlet and disappointment with her relations with men. She willingly activates her mind's eye and, consequently, autonomously perceives the events taking place in Elsinore. She passes away as a transgressive character who crossed boundaries surrounding women's perception.

Sensuous Shakespeare

It is apparent that Shakespeare was not 'sensorially indifferent.' The representations of sight and hearing highlight their masculine attributes and reflect certain sensory preferences of the early modern period. Numerous references to ears within the play have been discussed by critics and, among others, recent publications include: Peter Cummings' article "Hearing in Hamlet: Poisoned Ears and the Psychopathology of Flawed Audition" (1990), an examination of the sense of hearing in connection with its infection; Kenneth Gross' study on the relation between hearing, slander, manipulation and injury, presented in *Shakespeare's Noise* (2001); Wes Folkerth's examination of early modern ways of hearing and representations of aural perception in Shakespeare, described in *The Sound of Shakespeare* (2002); or a book entitled *Drugs and Theatre in Early Modern England* (2005) by Tanya Pollard, who considers the impact of language on early modern ears, both playgoers and characters in Shakespeare. It is also worth mentioning several publications devoted to the sense of vision in Shakespeare, namely: Carol Banks and Graham Holderness's article, "Mine Eye Hath Play'd the Painter", claiming that Shakespeare's plays to a large extent contributed to a development of early modern visual culture; Alison Thorne's study arguing that Shakespeare used connections between vision, space and language in order to construct rhetorical equivalents for visual perspective, presented in *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (2000), including a chapter entitled "Hamlet and the Art of Looking Diversely on the Self"; Richard Meek's book that accentuates the visual dimension of *Shakespeare's Dramas in Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (2009), encompassing a chapter devoted to *Hamlet* - "'The Painting of a Sorrow': *Hamlet*". Moreover, Holly Dugan presents an overall analysis of critical approaches to Shakespeare's sensory archive in an essay entitled "Shakespeare and the Senses" (2009).

Gendering of the sensory experience in *Hamlet* pertains to the textual coding of the play. Linguistic images of transgressive female perception emerge from juxtaposing them with depictions of male sensory experience. Analyzing the early modern distinctions of sensing between men and women demonstrates existing gender differences and inequalities in accessibility and exploitation of the senses existed. Sensorially symbolized gender has a specific code referring to cultural methods, by which men and women use their senses in social life. The ear and the eye are significant cultural carriers in Renaissance, conveying metaphorical and literal meanings. Transgression that occurred during Shakespeare's times revealed that: "The way a society senses is the way it understands" (Classen, *Empire* 161). Not only did Shakespeare portray early modern society's suspension between two modes of sensing and thus thinking, but he also created gendered representations of the senses of sight and hearing, which become visible and audible on the textual level of *Hamlet*. Howes comments on the system of sensory values, explaining that it: "is never entirely articulated through language, but it is practiced and experienced (and sometimes challenged), by individuals as culture bearers. The sensory order, in fact, is not just something one sees or hears about; it is something one lives" (*Empire* 3). Yet a text uses only the written word to reveal the sensory order of the culture that generated it. Written texts provide representations of the sensuous dimension of a particular culture, hence they reflect the sensory model and values, (re)created by the lived experience of human beings in certain spatiotemporal conditions.

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SUMMARY: An important purpose of literary studies is to bring to light the sensory values encoded in written texts. Sensory values are produced and espoused by different groups in society, conveying competing cultural paradigms and ideologies. A scripted text does not allow for immediate contact with past sensory practices and experiences, for the purpose of any written text is to mediate between our contemporary experience and bygone perceptual practices. Through analyses of cultural materials the study of the senses becomes a sensorially-conditioned challenge. As David Howes precisely puts it: “Sensorially speaking, the past is a foreign country, and it needs to be explored with senses wide open” (“Can these” 450). Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* belongs to this “foreign country” and it is also open to being scrutinized from the point of view of sensory studies. In my essay I address the issue of ‘sensing’ *Hamlet*. I claim that the Mona Lisa of literature (T.S. Eliot’s term) has not been analyzed, in Shakespeare studies, with critical attention from the perceptual point of view. I focus on sensory imagery in *Hamlet* to discover that the play is also the tragedy of the senses – cultural dialectics between the eye and the ear.

Sight as an Exclusively Male Sensory Domain: Speculations, Suspicions and Visions about Femininity in Olivier Parker's *Othello* (1995) and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996)

Sight in Western culture

According to the contemporary and revolutionary approach to the senses, sensual perception might be understood as an unstable cultural formation undergoing changes over time, that is “an ever-shifting social and historical construct” (Bull et al., 2006: 5). In her book *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures*, Constance Classen reminds us that:

In the West we are accustomed to thinking of perception as a physical rather than a cultural act. The five senses simply gather data about the world. Yet even our time-honored notion of there being five senses is itself a cultural construction. Some cultures recognize more senses, and other cultures fewer. (1993: 2)

Furthermore, as it has been stated in the first issue of a journal *The Senses and Society* (2006): “The perceptual is cultural and political, and not simply (as psychologists and neurobiologists would have it) a matter of cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms located in the individual subject” (Bull et al. 5). Such an understanding of sensory perception renders possible a study of the cultural role of the senses in each epoch. For the purposes of this essay, some cultural functions of the sense of sight as well as the gendering of the senses and placing them in the sensory hierarchy, will be stressed in the context of two cinematic productions of Shakespeare's tragedies: Olivier Parker's *Othello* (1995) and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996).

Seeing fulfills many cultural functions, such as determining our cognition, power relations and conditioning our sensations. While both vision and audition are considered to be the highest senses, sight occupies “something of a hegemonic position in Western culture” (Smith Mark M., 2007: 19).

Consequently, as far as sensory history is concerned, within Western culture the role of vision is tantamount to ruling the empire of the senses. Since the beginning of the era of modernity, all eyes have been focused on sight. This is not only because of specific biological facts – humans primarily experience reality through their eyes, but also because the cultural implications of exploring vision surpass the social usage and the role of other senses.

It is worth referring to Hanna Arendt's observation on the association between cognitive activity and seeing: "from the very outset, in formal philosophy, thinking has been thought of in terms of seeing" (1987: 110). She also pays attention to the fact that: "The predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech, and therefore in our conceptual language, that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged, among things too obvious to be noticed" (111). The permeability of visual metaphors throughout Western languages shows how crucial sight is for framing the world and creating our perspective. Interestingly enough, the eye gained importance as the modern conception of self developed. In *Sensory History*, Mark M. Smith argues that this modern self aspired to be "a spectator viewing the world, supposedly detached and observing" (2007: 23). The Western concept of the self traditionally belonged to men, being part of their cultural identity. Women were ontologically as well as practically (in an ungentlemanly way) prevented from entering this exclusively 'male club of beholders.'

In her study devoted to the sensory symbolism of Western culture, Classen investigates how "the senses are inflected with gender values" (*The Color*, 1998: 63). She also distinguishes how meanings attributed to the cultural constructions of the senses and gender, produce specific links (in other words – new cultural formations) between each sense and either masculinity, or femininity – e.g. the "male gaze" and "female touch." According to Classen:

Women have traditionally been associated with the senses in Western culture, and in particular, with the "lower" senses. Women are forbidden taste, the mysterious smell, the dangerous touch. Men, by contrast, have been associated with reason, as opposed to the senses, or else with sight and hearing as the most "rational" of the senses. The occultation of the sensory underpinnings of Western culture by the modern visual and rational world view may therefore be read as an occultation of certain feminine dimensions of that culture. (1998: 2)

This quotation shows that sight and hearing are placed at the top of the hierarchy of the senses. It also denotes that the significance of aural and visual perception contributes to the marginalization of other sensory receivers/transmitters. In addition to the gendering of the senses, the eclipse of femininity from the model of the self contributed to women's exclusion from significant exploitation of the sense of vision in Western culture. In this essay I will demonstrate how the cinematic representations of the sense of sight confirm its status of the most powerful tool of exercising power, execution of law, and exclusion of women.

Male sight (ab)used by the green-eyed monster

In Olivier Parker's production of Shakespeare's *Othello*, the sense of vision really matters. The director's "editing shows a talent for telling a story visually" (Rothwell 224). Consequently, in his screen version, the casting of Laurence Fishburne as Othello was particularly effective. The electric Othello is "the most prominent eye-catcher of the play" (Baumbach 145). He attracts with his body: an exotic, black and muscular surface covered with tattoos, additionally stimulating the protagonists' and the viewers' eyes. Shakespeare's drama's texture, hidden in its potential to evoke images, is so powerful and emotional that it is particularly suited for a film adaptation. In her article "Shakespeare on Screen: Threshold Aesthetics in Oliver Parker's *Othello*" (2000) Patricia Dorval describes the essence of the play:

Othello is a huge trompe-l'oeil and its aesthetics baroque with its opaque transparencies, its curves and counter-curves, its initiated visions, its sombre recesses, its intricate and baffling entanglements of by-paths and blind alleys, which altogether form a vast labyrinth in which the Moor, as much as the other characters, all too readily lose themselves. At the heart of the dramatic structures lies the theme of vision, of perceptual aberrations or curious perspectives, by which Iago turns the play into "a pageant / To keep [the characters] in false gaze." (I.3.18–9)

The dominant scopic economy of the play marginalizes woman's existence on screen; they usually appear either as companions to men, or as targets of their fantasies. Paradoxically, women's perceptive ability to distinguish between lies and the truth, authenticity and falsehood appears better developed than that

of the men. As much as Othello is in control of his perceptive faculties at the beginning of the play, he gradually becomes obsessed with sex and sexuality, which, in turn, weakens his sensory ability. His fantasies focus on Desdemona's bodily encounters with Cassio, the lieutenant whom Othello abandoned unjustly. Speculations are systematically being built around the figure of a wife, and initiated by Iago, "the Machiavellian schemer" (Baumbach, 2008: 154). In Parker's version of *Othello*, the wrong-doer is played by Kenneth Branagh, who finds a special relation with the audience – at many occasions he directs his eyes and thoughts at the viewers as if he was aware of their presence. Iago's soliloquies/speculations are part of this cinematic method as he reveals his manipulative plans.¹

One of the definitions of the verb "to speculate" is to "meditate" or "think," which is connected with an activity of the mind. Another definition suggests that it is synonymous with "hypothesize" or "theorize", which also involve an intellectual activity. According to Martin Jay, the author of *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (1994: 29), the word "speculate" is partly entangled with the concept of vision. He refers to Greek differentiation between speculation – understood as seeing with the mind's eye, and seeing with the bodily eyes, which signifies observation.

Jay states that ancient Greek philosophers verged on writing eulogies on vision, although they were also suspicious of its illusionist capacities. A case in point is provided by Plato's praise of vision, which upon closer scrutiny signals an ambivalent attitude towards sight. To prove Plato's ambiguity in regard to the power of the eyes, Jay contends the following: "For in his philosophy, 'vision' seems to have meant only that of the inner eye of the mind; in fact Plato often expressed severe reservations about the reliability of the two eyes of normal perception. We see *through* the eyes, he insisted, not *with* them" (Jay, 1994: 27, emphasis in the original). Such distinction privileges speculation over observation, yet simultaneously it favors male usage of the sense of vision. Not only does speculation become the highest form of (self)perception, but it is also traditionally circumscribed to the male sphere of action. Thus, a speculator is

¹ The hegemonic position within the field of vision that Iago holds temporarily might also be interpreted from a racial point of view, in other words, as the supremacy of a white man's faculties over the 'weaker' perceptions of a black man. However I avoid a postcolonial re-reading in my article.

a man who meditates on a given subject or constructs a theory with the power of his mind's eye. Yet in *Othello*, the patriarchal discourse that privileges light, reason and the intelligible, and also devaluates and represses the feminine, is put to the test.

The more Othello speculates, the more suspicious he becomes. With the help of Iago he establishes a basis for the theory of his wife's secret life, or her second – unknown nature, and he looks for facts that could prove the validity of such reasoning; since every proof, be it a spontaneous occurrence, or a prearranged event, needs interpretation. Othello, who searches for truth, also needs an advisor and an interpreter, whom he can trust. During the first 'poisoning session' (act 3, scene 3), located in the tiltyard, Desdemona's choice of Othello as her husband is beset by doubts. Iago is allowed to enter Othello's doubtful mind while simultaneously the Moor reveals his inner fears, particularly that of being deceived and betrayed. His awareness of being different, black and culturally distant from other countrymen, strengthens Othello's insecurities.

In *Shakespeare in the Cinema: Ocular Proof* Stephen M. Buhler notices that: "When Branagh's Iago first addresses us, he is poised over a set of overdetermined symbols: a chessboard upon which the black and white pieces stand in for Othello, Desdemona, Cassio" (2002: 28). Whenever Iago appears between the two lovers (be it in the flesh, or as 'Iago's effect'), he distances them and uses vision as a manipulative tool. He destroys magnetism and instead, he introduces jealousy. Visual encounters between the two do not resemble admiring looks; rather the interrogative and dominant eye of Othello contrasts with his wife's weeping and submissive eye. The Moor's speculations immerse him in doubt. As he becomes more and more insecure over his own observations, memories and reflections, he begins to rely on somebody else's perception. Unfortunately, he rejects facts, e. g. those provided by Emilia, choosing fiction instead.

Visual perception greatly determines Othello's sensory experience and knowledge of the world. He treats the organ of sight as a very effective 'gatherer and mediator' of information, upon which he is mostly willing to rely on. Visual testimony becomes the most important aspect of collecting proof in this play. The eye's potential lies in Othello's belief: "I'll see before I doubt" (act 3, scene 3), which renders the body's eye even more reliable than the mind's eye. That seeing is deceiving is a lesson that will cost Othello his life.

Parker's *Othello* time and again promotes both the privilege of the visible and male dominance within this sensory field. Concurrently, sight becomes a battlefield for dominance among men, to the detriment of those who do not manipulate vision. To combat the opponent means to make him blind to his own visions. Whereas "Othello's response to the characters around him are glares, grunts, or lapses into feverish sexual fantasy" (Royster, 1998: 66), "Iago's clear dictation of the lens through which Othello is to perceive things identifies him as a version of an internal cinematographer" (Buchanan, 2005: 214). The latter takes advantage of the fact that Desdemona cannot be within the Moor's field of vision, therefore unable to ensure him of her faithfulness. He wakes "the green-eyed monster" that feeds on her visual absence. It is Othello's 'right-hand,' or rather his 'right-eye' man who undeniably orchestrates most of the scenes:

Under Iago's impulse, the stage becomes a catoptric set-up, engendering all sorts of fallacies or chimerical visions, alternately multiplying, substituting, inverting, enlarging, reducing, dilating, contracting shapes, which eventually connects to the themes of teratology and the grotesque. Pertaining to baroque poetics and a major feature of (mis)perception is Iago's strategy of liminality, by which he conducts his victim(s) to the door of perception, whether visual or verbal. (Dorval, "Shakespeare on Screen")

Parker's adaptation demonstrates how Desdemona's body-in-parts (shown during the alleged sexual betrayal with Cassio) haunts Othello's imagination as he sleeps. Even when his physical eyes are closed, his mind's eye still produces harmful visions. Parker emphasizes how the poisoned mind works at its best when dreaming, trying to deal with its daily anxieties and grief. In this production Desdemona's adultery becomes very vivid and supported both by imaginary and factual memories: her flirtatious dance with Cassio, Desdemona's and Cassio's passionate sexual encounter in Othello's bed, and Brabantio's warning to "look to her" since she might deceive the husband as she deceived her father.

Visual perception serves as a tool in gaining an advantage over other men. As Sybille Baumbach notices in her book *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy* (2008):

Before scrutinising Desdemona's fair paper, Othello's vision has been blurred by Iago's manipulative eye, which prompted his first fatal misreading. On hearing Desdemona accused, Othello demands the 'ocular proof' (3.3.365), which Iago can present: making physiognomy his accomplice by drawing from the already ambivalent reaction of laughing, the 'manipulator of signs' blurs Othello's vision and sets a snare for him. Adequately prepared with his visual senses attuned to treachery and deceit, Othello misinterprets Cassio's laughter and in 'his unbookish jealousy' takes his 'smiles, gestures and light behaviours / Quite in the wrong' (4.1.99–101). (146)

In this cinematic rendering of *Othello*, the pivotal where-the-truth-lies-scene is set in the armory, with Othello behind bars (Iago pushes him into the cell before the abovementioned episode involving Cassio occurs). The Moor is not only able to watch, but also to hear, which engenders a doubly shocking effect. Previously, within the same scene Othello is almost 'electrocuted' when he envisions Desdemona's betrayal and his body reacts with spastic movements.

As the cinematic plot develops, Othello's epistemological appetite for knowing and seeing is partly fulfilled by the appearance of "the play's most famous expressive object, the handkerchief" (Buchanan 226). First a love token, the most precious gift to Desdemona, then unintentionally lost, handed over, the handkerchief becomes 'a dirty cloth,' an ocular proof of the highest significance. No other evidence is more convincing of Desdemona's adultery. The handkerchief functions as 'a missing link' to the story of Desdemona's deceitfulness, being the last testament to her impurity, pushing the blinded Othello to a murderous deed.

Culturally being more susceptible to vision, women are attributed the qualities of objects: passiveness, stillness and submissiveness. Being objects of contemplation they are (over)substantial/material and thus visible (but insignificant), yet as somatic entities, they are (according to one of the definitions of an object) to be seen or touched. Women's power to see is limited to domestic space and by lack of credibility. Albeit in Parker's adaptation Othello starts interrogating Desdemona, demanding that she look him in the eye, he quickly gives it up, bearing in mind that female eyes might be full of deceptive and seductive potential. Female sight is totally denigrated until the last scene when Othello admits that his commanding eye (physical and mental) lost its power, which led to the tragedy.

Gendering of vision: the mind's eye is male

The second Shakespearean adaptation I analyze is Kenneth Branagh's four-hour-long *Hamlet*. The melancholy Prince is played by the director himself, who is a crafty orchestrator, both of the script (following Shakespeare's Second Quarto and First Folio, and therefore paying tribute to Shakespeare) and of the plot. Rejecting the Oedipal nature of Hamlet, this British Shakespearean actor presents the tragedy uncut, making it the longest cinematic *Hamlet* in film history. On the one hand, the director seems to be fascinated with Shakespeare's words, but on the other, he surrenders to the power of cinematic image. Although Branagh finds and holds the balance between the narrative and visual layer, his presentation of sight renders it the focus of attention.

His cinematic strategy might be labeled 'the strategy of reflecting.' Branagh decides to locate the play in the Victorian period with "Blenheim Palace, its grand hall-of-mirrors court and its grounds" (Magnus, 2012: 489) as a monumental Elsinore, immersed in a winter setting. This *mise-en-scene* provides almost ideal conditions for an exploration of the motif of gazing, i.e. watching and spying. A key moment that demonstrates Branagh's directorial strategy, is the scene of Hamlet's contemplation of himself in the mirror as he delivers the "to be or not to be" soliloquy in the most dangerous space in the palace – the specular and spectacular great hall. According to Samuel Crow the abovementioned moment within the play

[i]s the film's most stunning merger of text and technique. The mirrored doors pick up and extend the play's many mirror images, from Ophelia's "glass of fashion" to the "mirror [held] up to nature" that Hamlet places at the heart of the actor's craft and the "glass" into which he intends to transform himself in order to show Gertrude her "innermost part". (2006: 142)

Branagh's arranges the space of Elsinore as an almost unbearable mirroring surface, from which there is no escape, given the fact that, paradoxically, even though most of the rooms are really capacious, they create an atmosphere of claustrophobic tension or even panic. Everyone becomes a prisoner of somebody else's vision, forced into eye-to-eye contact, either intentionally, or through a hidden, invisible wall. In this version of this most interpreted drama, characters are doomed to encounter and confront each other visually, which becomes

even more complicated when the architecture of the palace facilitates spying (e.g. a usage of binoculars) and setting visual traps (e.g. double-mirrored doors).

Interestingly, Sean McEvoy makes a suggestion that there is a parallel between Branagh's interpretation of *Hamlet* and contemporary British monarchy of the 1990s, going through the crisis (2006: 107). Branagh exposes the life of the Royal Family, revealing its most intimate secrets as if the camera was a kind of an eyehole. McEvoy emphasizes a correspondence between the figures of Princess Diana and Ophelia:

subjecting her to a series of voyeuristic intrusions: for example, the reading aloud to the court of Hamlet's love letter to her (an action she is initially forced to undertake, her father stepping in only when her own voice falters) and the self-conscious spectating of her mental disintegration in a padded cell. (108)

The Danish court are all subject to vision, deprived of intimacy or privacy, where the dominant rule comes down to being subjugated to the male perspective and the managing of sight, both in its physical and mental dimension.

If the immense space of Elsinore is to be treated as the empire of sight, then scene after scene, it turns out to be an exclusively male domain. The viewer sees in the opening scene whose land and property they are about to enter. First the camera focuses on the word "HAMLET" inscribed in stone, which is at the base of a monumental statue of Old Hamlet, placed on the threshold of Elsinore. Apart from one visit to Gertrude's closet as a ghost, Old Hamlet does not cross these limits by appearing on the other side of the gates. The image of this gigantic and frozen figure, which unexpectedly comes alive, foreshadows his permanent and immanent presence within the film's structure, similar to that of an all-seeing and all-knowing god. Hamlet's father statue, portentously and mysteriously casting his eyes over his territory and gazing into the camera's eye, is a prelude to Hamlet's preoccupation with speculations, suspicions and visions, the most obsessive and uncanny of which pertain to Elsinore's female minority, Ophelia and Gertrude.

Before Hamlet begins to speculate intensively, he remains unaware of the ghost's revelations about his uncle's murderous deed and his mother's lustful nature. Speaking with the ghost outside Elsinore's safe environment is like

crossing a Rubicon, in which Hamlet becomes committed to his father's command. His perception of past and current events transforms his way of thinking into permanent suspicions and addiction to ruminations. Branagh uses close-ups to emphasize the influence of Old Hamlet's narrative on his son as well as his unnatural appearance, particularly the demonic eyes, which try to put the viewer into a trance. The director repeatedly changes focal point in order to show Hamlet's facial reaction to the ghost's hypnotic appearance and articulation. In L. Monique Pittman's opinion: "It is no accident that the scene most laden with cuts to interpolated material is also the one most burdened by the imprint of the father's authority." ("A Son Less...")

The following perceptual interactions result, for the most part, from the ghost's power to affect the mind of Hamlet, to be more precise, his mind's eye. Since "the mind's eye" as a human steering mechanism of thinking has driven many people insane, it is worth remembering how this expression was used in Shakespeare's times. The expression "mind's eye" appears twice in Shakespeare's most interpreted drama. Horatio introduces the term as he comments on the ghost's materialization at the beginning of the play: "A mote is to trouble the mind's eye" (1.1.111). The second usage belongs to Hamlet when he admits to seeing his dead father in his mind's eye. Hamlet's father is alive in the protagonist's wild imagination, imbibing all of his stimulating visual impressions. The Prince's (un)natural predilection of the mind is to think. And, not incidentally, Hamlet has become the symbol of speculative activity of the intellect. According to Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, the editors of *The Arden Shakespeare Hamlet* (2006: 159), Shakespeare's usage of the 'eye-minded' phrase was the first ever recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Hamlet-the speculator is the chief literary model of the Western respectable mode of perceiving, that is, with the mind's eye. Seeing as expressed by this powerful metaphor – the mind's eye – suggests that visual perception cannot be confined to the organ of sight. The activity of the mind attempts to intercept the eye for its own solitary (or even solipsistic) uses, in other words, for mental purposes. That is exactly what Hamlet indulges in and even devotes to, especially in his soliloquies.

Hamlet-the tragedy serves as a prototype of early modern drama in which one of the most pivotal "cultural splittings" within the sensory field of vision occurred. Particularly the splitting of the eye,² can be seen by reading between the lines. This splitting of the eye between the mind and the body influences the way visual

² My own expression.

perception exists in (dis)embodied terms. Connected in part to the material dimension of the self, the eye is forced to share its existence with the incorporeal ego. The division of the eye lies behind the pivotal dualistic foundations of Western culture such as mind/body, knowledge/feeling and reaching even further, it becomes responsible for the subject-object position.

In Branagh's version of the wordiest Shakespearean drama, the Western divided self is ideally represented by Hamlet, who remains the lost prince within the realm of sight. The eye as flesh had to be tamed and investigated by the higher form of sight, that is, the mind's eye. The scopic economy of the play appropriates vision for the purposes of disembodied thinking, objectifying and subordinating the corporeal. Male visual perception is represented by such attributes as: being a privileged source of information, having the power to investigate and speculate, having the capacity for apprehension and reliability as eye-witness, as well as being an active participant in any cultural event.

Branagh portrays the women in *Hamlet* as excluded from active and culturally significant exploitations of the noblest of the senses. Their visual experiences remain either only their own sensations, which do not count as unquestionable pieces of evidence, or interpretations imposed by men. On occasion, their visual presence works only as attraction or a bait. Nowhere is this more evidently manifested than in "the nunnery scene," which in Branagh's *Hamlet* takes place in the grand hall. As Carroll Chillington Rutter comments on the image of this reflecting space in her book *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (2000):

Walled floor to ceiling with mirrors, the hall where most of the action is set becomes a self-regarding looking-glass chamber, where, it turns out, the mirrors anachronistically function as doors into through-the-looking-glass spaces. Improbably, Hamlet's apartments lie directly behind one of these doors; Ophelia's bedroom and later her padded cell, behind others (46).

Branagh situates Claudius and Polonius – two cooperating spies – behind one of the double-mirrored doors. Their task is to diagnose Hamlet's state of mind and 'measure' the level of knowledge he acquires. As the point of view shifts from Hamlet's and Ophelia's to Claudius's and Polonius's, it becomes obvious that Ophelia is being doubly abused: firstly – by Hamlet's rage directed at the girl after she returns the love letters (dragging her along

the mirrored wall, opening and slamming one door after another in search of palace's snoopers, and pressing Ophelia's face onto the glass as if it was smashed), and secondly – as they invigilate the whole scene from hiding. Although Hamlet does not catch the spies red-handed, and Ophelia falsely confirms that her father is somewhere else, the suspicious prince has sensed their docile presence. Ophelia is no more just the suspect, whose actions and love are not trustworthy, rather she becomes a two-faced beauty, whose distorted image in the mirror reflects her inner self. Initially being an object of Hamlet's affection and visual admiration, after a face-to-face confrontation with Hamlet, Ophelia is left with her memories of the sexual relationship with her lover (presented as flashbacks in Branagh's adaptation), without any chance for her to become "the fair Ophelia" again in Hamlet's vision.

At this point Hamlet's imaging of women as frail, deceitful and lascivious, not being able to command their perceptions actively and properly. After "The Mousetrap scene", the 'perceiving mind' encounters the 'obedient flesh,' in other words when Hamlet visits Gertrude in her closet, Branagh decides to circle the questioned Queen with the camera, making her charged with accusations of being 'guilty of a crime.' In his article "We are the markers of manners': The Branagh Phenomenon," Burnett notices that:

This resonant deployment of the camera has several implications. At once it adds to the sense of a court dominated by tawdry secrets and political espionage. In the same moment, it sharpens an awareness of the ever increasing danger of Fortinbras's army, a force that will eventually encircle the castle itself. (2002: 93)

The Queen is interrogated by her son, who suggests that her eyes led her astray, in the sense that they non-cogitatively absorbed images from the outside world. She is faced with Hamlet's perspective of what happened to Old Hamlet and who the real murderer was. Gertrude is depicted as if she was blinded in a figurative and literal meaning of the word. Hamlet's question: "Have you eyes?" (3.4.63) aims at undermining any reliability in Gertrude's visual perception. Hamlet tortures his mother with two images of her husbands and convinces the woman (and himself) that her re-marriage was nothing more than a choice made by her body and sexuality, not based on solid, visual and reasonable facts. The closet scene entrenches Hamlet's vision of corrupted femininity.

Female sight is mostly characterized by its material ability to accept stimuli from without, consisting of pure sensation, deprived of speculative power and therefore unable to transform observation into valid knowledge.

Cinematic representations of sensory experiences on the example of Parker's *Othello* and Branagh's *Hamlet* allowed me to examine the ways male protagonists exploit their sight, how they interact with each other, and how they extend their hegemony on this sensory domain. Camera movements, the setting for each scene, and most importantly – the way protagonists interact with each other visually, renders the viewer's eye more attentive to the web of speculations, suspicions and visions of femininity, which situate them on the margins of ocular culture they exist in.

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SUMMARY: Two of Shakespeare's tragedies in their cinematic renderings, Olivier Parker's *Othello* (1995) and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996), exemplify capturing vision on screen. Within these two adaptations, women are reduced to visual attractions, yet, at the same time, they evoke visions, speculations, and suspicions about femininity in general. It is the male eye – embodying the sense of vision – that desires (engenders speculations), then devours (engenders suspicions), and finally digests images (engenders visions) on the cultural level. Therefore, sight acquires the cultural status of an exclusively male sensory domain, hidden behind certain thoughts and actions of male protagonists in each of the films under discussion. The main issues are concerned with the complexity of the sight-mind relation with regard to Shakespeare's text and its subsequent adaptations. In my essay I seek to explore cinematic representations of the sense of sight, both in its mental and physical dimension, and their influence on the unfolding of plots. Both Parker and Branagh deal with the 'ocular evidence' and try to solve the problem of seeing in the mind's eye. The directors also raise the problematic issue of women's passive participation in visual culture as objects.

POPCULTURAL APPROACHES: SH(WEB)SPEARE

NecrOphelia and the Strange Case of Afterlife¹

The Ophelia phenomenon – the strange case of afterlife

Of all ‘God’s real creations,’ such as playwrights, Shakespeare made it big time. Of all Shakespeare’s fictional creations, Ophelia has top billing. The Ophelia phenomenon has flourished in the World Wide Web. Is she still Shakespearean? If she is no longer Shakespearean, whose Ophelia is it, anyway? She has grown into a popular e-icon belonging to the Web community inasmuch as she belongs to the non-virtual one. It needs to be highlighted here that the singular name of Ophelia has been superseded by the plural, which entails a diversity of representations, both real and virtual. Taking into consideration the on-line/off-line dualism, the term “strange case” of afterlife seems to be helpful and applicable here. It was Robert Louis Stevenson idea to demonstrate how the “strangely” Jekyll/Hyde syndrome functions, while it is the metaphorical potential of double nature which inspired me to show how constructions of cyber images of Ophelia add an alter ego dimension to the existence of this Shakespearean creation. In a non-literal sense it entails doubling Ophelia’s nature to such an extent that in a postmodern age, ‘the darker,’ thanatophilic part of her image – NecrOphelia – dominates the collective consciousness of Internet users.

With regard to the four-hundred-year-old character, “to be or not to be a globally recognized icon” means ‘to be constantly present (and re-presented) in digital space.’ The number of results after entering anybody’s name into the Google browser accounts for (a real or imaginary) person’s popularity. Smooth proliferation of Ophelia’s cultural representations in new media environment leads her to achieving indubitable fame among Internet users. Possibilities to engage with Ophelia are numerous. One can write about Ophelia in a non-

¹ The article is a reprint from: Monika Sosnowska, „NecrOphelia and the strange case of afterlife,” <<http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/stap.2013.48.issue-2-3/stap-2013-0010/stap-2013-0010.xml?format=INT#aff1>>; *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 48, vol. 2–3, pp. 103–123, ISSN (Print) 0081-6272, DOI: 10.2478/stap-2013-0010<<http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/stap-2013-0010>>; February 2014.

academic way, generating a personal, non-literary critical text, for example by blogging. Furthermore one can comment on an optional theatrical, cinematic, or pictorial reincarnation of that female figure, generating a non-professional review, for example by joining a forum on a website dedicated to film. In addition, one can be inspired by one of these reincarnations and even create one's own Ophelia as an image – be it a photo, a painting, or a story – and become an author of an unprofessional work, an example of this activity is publishing one's work on a photo-sharing site – Flickr being most popular – or on one's own homepage. One can, at last, become an embodiment of Ophelia by creating a video clip and posting it on a video sharing platform like YouTube; however, this is perhaps the most challenging task.

Ophelia for an e-generation knows how to accommodate to new cultural environment in order to prolong; to lead an ever-flourishing afterlife. To be more precise, it is her image that is adapted and manipulated, being in the hands of Internet users. On the one hand, when her representations appear on different websites, she is used as a portal to play with Shakespeare's legacy, on the other – Ophelian images become portals to the selves of e-generation, reforging itself by means of toying with her iconic representations. Encountering Ophelia in pieces – limited to cyber-portions measured in bytes, generated by digital semiotic codes – and analyzing Opheliac digital afterlife, an individual may assure oneself that new interpretations of the Shakespearean dead/sleeping beauty emerge.

Before Ophelia became one of the favourite literary figures incorporated into popular culture of the Internet, she inspired different 'interpreters of culture,' namely, critics, artists, directors and performers. Although crystallized under different socio-cultural and spatio-temporal conditions, multifarious interpretations have one thing in common – specified by Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams in "Introduction: The Afterlives of Ophelia":

Ophelia is a screen on which a culture projects its preoccupations and reflects its values back onto itself. In this sense, analyzing an example of Ophelian representation at a specific historical juncture is, thus, also a neat, shorthand way to examine the workings of ideology more broadly. Reinvented for every age, Ophelia tells us more about ourselves at whatever instance we feel compelled to tell "her" story. Moreover, she has become an endlessly adaptable symbol for the universality of the feminine and, more broadly, the human psychic condition in any era, across cultures. (Peterson and Williams, 2012: 2)

Representations of Ophelia build an archive of cultural texts which may serve as a source of understanding cultural paradigms, and therefore ways of perceiving reality (e.g. Newtonian world-machine) and its inhabitants (e.g. Cartesian body/mind dualism). Ophelian renderings are indicative of both aspects: culture's existence and existing in culture. I wish to precede the proper analysis of images of dead Ophelia in Web culture and their cultural significance with a general reflection on the long history of this Shakespearean figure's afterlives.

Ophelia's afterlife in Western imagination

In his article devoted to the feminist cultural story of Ophelia, entitled "Ophelia's Sisters," Robert S. White observes that

[f]or an apparently empty vessel ("her speech is nothing"), and one who is given the acquiescent line "I do not know, my lord," Ophelia has unexpectedly generated a richer, more varied, and even perverse *afterlife* than almost any literary figure. (White, 2007: 93, italics mine)

He is in tandem with those scholars who have been addressing the long tradition of pathologizing, devaluating and distorting the contours of her character. Especially feminist critics have been sensitive to these matters. Some of them even end up concluding with the question about the constituent substance or quality of Shakespeare's creation, which might be the source of the open and flexible signification of Ophelia's death. Does it (the constituent substance or quality) really have to be either her mad body or her dead body from which erotic meanings spring? The insight into Ophelia's textual, visual and even acoustic afterlife persistently proves that culture's fascination with this figure focuses on her embodied quality to mesmerize, bewilder and transgress.

As far as Ophelia's textual presence is considered, it is worth mentioning a few critical observations, which contribute to imagining her as either a dying beauty, or a dead, eroticized feminine body. Yet in both cases she has become the icon of the sexually-attractive female corpse. For centuries the brotherhood of critics contributed to what Valerie Traub (1988: 216) describes as the "fetishization of the dead, virginal Ophelia," which she simultaneously recognizes as "a strategy of containment." Traub claims that in certain plays by Shakespeare, in *Hamlet* among others, male characters suffer from anxieties

associated with female erotic power. In order to control women's sexuality perceived in categories of chaos and disturbance, after Ophelia's drowning she is transformed into "a fully possessible object" (1988: 220), into a corpse devoid of movement, instability and mutability. Like Hamlet's and Laertes' discovery of a perfect deadly beauty, of a lifeless female body, the critics' opinions about Ophelia betray their necrophiliac imaginative inclinations. I wish to refer to a few critical opinions about this heroine.

Samuel Johnson notices the "untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious" (2008: 95). Samuel Coleridge remarks upon "the affecting death of Ophelia, who in the beginning lay like a little projection of land into a lake or stream covered with spray-flowers quietly reflected in the quiet waters, but at length is determined or loosened, and becomes a fairy isle, and after a brief vagrancy, sinks almost without an eddy" (2007: 129). A. C. Bradley notices that "the picture of her death, if our eyes grow dim in watching it, is still purely beautiful" (2004: 165). The above mentioned interpretations are just a segment of the traditional criticism pertaining to Ophelia, which might be tantamount to a refrain, a kind of repeated opinion about the inseparability of her bodily eroticism and her corpse being an object of beauty.

In Arthur Rimbaud's imagination, in his poem "Ophelia" (1870), Thanatos (embodied in the watery element) and Ophelia form a deadly union:

I.

Where the stars sleep in the calm black stream,
Like some great lily, pale Ophelia floats,
Very slowly floats, lying in long veils...
– Up in the woods, dogs bark, men shout.

For thousand years or more, sad white phantom,
Ophelia has moved down the long black river.
A thousand years or more her sweet song
Of madness has charmed the evening air.

II.

O pale Ophelia, beautiful as snow!
Yes poor child, downstream you died.
– Because great Norway mountain winds
Moaned their message of harsh freedom.

A breath that twisted your heavy hair
 Brought strange sounds to your absent thoughts,
 Your heart heard Nature's song
 In the trees' laments and the sigh of night.

III.

And the Poet says that when the stars come out
 You come looking for the flowers you picked.
 He says he's seen, lying in her long veils,
 White Ophelia, like some great lily, float by. (Rimbaud, 2001: 29–31, italics mine)

The images of drowned Ophelias that recur in 'traditional' criticism and poetry have the connotation of the disempowered, objectified woman and beauty in death. Simultaneously, it is the interpreter's attitude towards Ophelia's body which makes her figure readable in these terms. Such renderings are firmly rooted in the textual layer, thus one of the transfigurations of Ophelia, particularly the pre-digital version, remains Shakespearean, belonging to the story depicted in Hamlet. It needs to be highlighted here that for many centuries Ophelia was invented predominantly according to men's vision. My intention is to demonstrate that Ophelian image changed through its citation into a recognition of women's subjection in postmodern culture, especially with the usage of virtual images created by amateur users of the Internet. Nowadays Ophelia's body opens up a territory for female identification in an act of self-fashioning as Ophelia. I shall return to this concept and develop it in this essay, preceding my argument with the contemporary aspects of Ophelia's role in popular culture, particularly her postmodern afterlife. Although the term "postmodern," which will frequently appear in my essay, cannot be defined in a straight forward way, I exploit John Storey studies on postmodernism and popular culture. He claims that one of the characteristics of postmodern culture is the collapse of the division between high/low culture since "there are no longer any reference points that will automatically preselect for us the good from the bad" (Storey, 2005: 140). Adapting such attitude, my analysis is far from evaluating amateur works, being target of my examination, and classifying them as either culturally productive or not.

How much of Ophelia is there left in postmodern Ophelia?

Embraced by death, the speechless and immobilized Ophelia became the target of sexual fantasies. Although the history of criticism centred around Ophelia is not the focal point of my analysis, I cannot escape engaging with a particular problem. It was a feminist perspective that changed the sexual, objectifying orientation towards the “Rose of May” (as Laertes calls his sister), offering innovative interpretations. Feminist analysts (e.g. Elaine Showalter; Gabrielle Dane; Leslie C. Dunn; Martha C. Ronk) bring her story to life – in a manner similar to systematical excavations – by bringing to light a fact that Ophelia is not, as L.L. Schücking claimed in *Character Problems in Shakespeare’s Plays* (1992: 172), “a beautiful luxury ... superfluous to the playwright’s main design.” In Jacquelyn Fox-Good’s opinion: “Feminist critics have tried to tell Ophelia’s story, or maybe to invent her story – if it is true – in Lee Edwards’s (1995: 217) words, that ‘Ophelia ... has no story without Hamlet.’” Feminist criticism discredits Ophelia’s supplementary role in Hamlet as well as her being a supplement to Hamlet’s story.

Even though most critics, Shakespeare editors and theatre directors tried to reduce her to a shadowy figure (Romańska, 2005b: 488–490; 493–494), her visual presence becomes a portent of Ophelia’s ‘fight for independence.’ It is also a suggestive piece of evidence to the statement that a reciprocity between beauty and death as well as between aesthetical pleasure and the feminine body exist and might be found among many visual representations of Ophelia. She became a fixation of the nineteenth century painters and was immortalized on canvas by Delacroix, Millais, Waterhouse or Hughes, just to name a few. For that fin-de-siècle generation of artists, Ophelia became almost an obsessive pictorial motif: “Usually depicted as pale and fragile, with dishelmed hair, semi-naked or in a white dress to symbolize her purity, Ophelia’s morbid beauty, enhanced by the beauty of the surrounding nature, set the standard of the nineteenth-century feminine ideal” (Romańska, 2005a: 36).

In our postmodern climate, the mythological figures of Eros and Thanatos are still effectively operating on cultural basis. The popular appropriation and domestication of the inseparable couple of the god of love and the god of death has led to the mass production (understood in terms of the large-scale generation of cultural artifacts) of real or virtual materials and objects – dealing with erotic and mortal fleshiness – that circulate around the globe

via technological devices. In its attempts to achieve a balance between the desire for sexual excitement and the desire to destroy, the postmodern culture of sex and death turns to (pseudo)artistic activities. These would include references to contemporary amateur and professional art works on the subject of Ophelia's corpse. The point at which death and eroticism are in equilibrium is the point of creation from which the dying or dead body is born. Ophelia, whose death is regarded as one of the most often recreated thanatotic moments, still remains the inspiration. Her afterlife in postmodern times differs from, for example, Ophelia's modern thanatotic reincarnations inasmuch as the cultural attitude towards "neco-eroticism," the term borrowed from Romańska's (2005b: 501) article has changed. Neco-erotic impulses and fantasies have become tamed for the purposes of popular culture, where sex and death – when embodied by women – are less anchored in cultural sphere of the taboo; they are less forbidden. From such reasoning a paradox grows. On the one hand, it entails the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes (woman as passive, beautiful and sexually attractive), while on the other – the stereotype is subverted, being manipulated by women themselves in an act of self-fashioning as unpossessible and ungraspable (but corporeal) thanatotic figures.

Popular culture of the twenty-first century is obsessed with appropriations and re-makings of Shakespeare's plays and characters, both on local and global scale, and both by professionals and amateurs. The easiest way to disseminate them is via cyberspace. Materials uploaded to Web 2.0 sites create a global pop-archive, predominantly consisting of visual elements. That is why, the clones of Ophelia happen to be less and less anchored in Shakespearean Ophelia's story and more frequently they refer to common/social/widespread narrative that is also truncated, mangled and cut off, yet recognized, understood and still alive. The proliferation of Ophelia-like images within popular culture during the last twenty years has – on the one hand – rendered her figure 'ophelia-less.' That is to say, the famous 'seductively dying creature' has been taken away from any detectable original source and displaced from the context of the play. On the other hand, her representations also remain 'ophelia-ful.' The latter term includes all Ophelias up to the present, accumulating pieces of this female necro-figure into one, yet paradoxically, defragmented (sometimes deformed) Ophelia. As Peterson and Williams state:

Plays and novels taking a sensationalist approach to the same topic have been written in her name (*The Secret Love-Life of Ophelia*); her rather more chaste and innocent girlhood story told; her French face profiled; her neoclassical, Romantic, Victorian, expressionist, surrealist, symbolist, modernist, cubist, postmodernist iterations depicted in the plastic arts; and her avatar created by online Ophelias to fit the “sim skin” of virtual reality communities. She has been analyzed by structuralism, deconstruction, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and new historicism. She has been revived. (Peterson and Williams, 2012: 1)

Our contemporary ocularcentric reality allows us to generate many more representations of Ophelia than in the past, when “pre-digital” technical development provided very limited means to translate the existence of this literary figure into the language of another art such as painting, or music. More importantly, there are an increasing number of people engaged in recreating and refashioning practices, which culminate in joining the Web 2.0 community and sharing materials with other users. I would like to present a few examples of Ophelia’s floating dead body, partly accounting for postmodern thanatophilic imagination, reflecting the strange case of afterlife on the Internet.

E-Ophelia is voguish, so ‘be in fashion and fashion yourself as Ophelia’

Social media has intensified the need to fashion and express oneself, which might also be stimulated by competitive motives. Since one of the major functions of both traditional and new media is to make visible and promote, active consumers of popular culture wish to participate in it through an act of self-promotion. Therefore a profile on a photo- or video-sharing site also becomes a virtual place useful for self-discovery and publicity. The concept of self-fashioning, understood as conscious self-creation through many forms of shaping one’s own social image (dress, gestures, voice), is discussed by Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Greenblatt (1980: 2) suggests that: “in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulability, artful process.” If cunning and deceit are part of an image creation, then postmodern culture, to which a metaphor of a wide-open and well made-up eye fits like

a glove, is definitely patterned on its forefather – Renaissance culture. It played a pivotal role in laying the foundations for Western visual culture. Within this culture, the gradual making/managing of one's own image is inseparable from being visually appreciated.

In addition to the limited number of former means of artistic imagining that were mainly based on the medium of painting, especially portraying or self-portraying, social constraints pertaining to gender were in force. Women could not fashion themselves to the same extent men were allowed; for example, they did not paint themselves like professional painters did. Consequently, Ophelia remained the fulfilment of the male imagination. Postmodernism introduced innovative forms of self-representation and its dissemination, unimaginable for the people of the Renaissance. With reference to creative possibilities, the cyber-dimension extended the traditional dimensions of visual (auto)representation, transforming professional images of Ophelia into digital amateur user-generated representations, allowing both men and women to participate.

It should not be surprising that in the culture which feeds on permanent news (reporting) in the media, introducing new products in the market, and constant innovations (refreshing) of existing images, the self should not lose its novelty. Since we live in the age of the cult of the self, and Internet becomes the battlefield in this field of human expression, it is not an easy task to compete with other selves, understood in terms of self-representations:

Translated to cyberspace, users introduce themselves through alternative cues. Some may be textual, including diary-like entries or lines of poetry. But many incorporate self-portraits snapped on digital cameras or even homemade videoclips, while others include more allusive imagery, constituting a composite self-portraits. (Ferrato, 2010: 360)

A set of images, in particular photographs and films, present appropriations of Ophelia in the form of self-portraits and video clips. Google images, photo-sharing sites like Flickr and video-sharing systems such as YouTube offer a wide range of both, professional and non-professional representations of Ophelia. The images give a possibility to ponder on popular cultural constructions of the self, female identity and significance of women's corporeality based on the story of the body that is constantly revived in the process of iteration.

The art of dying in a bathtub: photographs in necrOphelian style

Although Shakespeare leaves the reader with uncertainties surrounding Ophelia's decision to die or not to die, he also leaves the reader with unlimited possibilities of re-creating this offstage tragic event. Ophelia's drowning has become an invitation to the erotically-skewed interpretation captured by the camera eye. Many contemporary participants, belonging to the popular culture of photo-sharing sites, decide to measure their "ophelia-ness" against their predecessors' quality to imitate her. I limited my photo search to one of the most popular photo sharing site, Flickr, which allows every Internet-user to create their own account and produce their own cultural artefacts. Photographs cannot be copied without the author's permission. This social medium enables non-professional models to stylize as Ophelia, to share some characteristics of "ophelia-ness": "mermaid-likeness," "incapability of one's own distress," and finally surrendering oneself "to muddy death."

New followers choose to radically alter the natural setting that Shakespeare prescribed in Hamlet, consisting of three constituent elements: the willow, the brook and fantastic garlands.² They try to re-design the landscape of Ophelia's drowning, which leads to the domestication of the act of drowning, that is to say, dislocating Ophelia by 'uprooting' her from the "weeping brook" into a room containing a vessel used for washing. Photos usually show Ophelia lying with her eyes closed, although some women decide to remain 'alert,' in a half-dying pose. As a result, postmodern Ophelia is placed in a bathtub, so that the claustrophobic space of a bathroom replaces the open space of a streamy landscape. It is worth noting that a far-famed story about one Victorian model, who almost died while sitting for a portrait, also involves a bath. Hanna Scolnicov refers to the account in her article "Intertextuality and Realism in Three Versions of Hamlet: The Willow Speech and the Aesthetics of Cinema":

The natural setting of stream, leaning willow, foliage and flowers, is a painting of the Hogsmill stream in Surrey. The model for Ophelia was Elizabeth Siddal, who posed in an antique embroidered gown, in a bathtub filled with water.

² http://www.flickr.com/photos/gaiaart_photomaniac/4091393196/sizes/z/in/pho-tostream/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

This part of the painting was executed during winter and the water was warmed by placing candles under the tub, which, at least on one occasion, burnt out and left the model freezing and ill. (Scolnicov, 2000: 230)

Such an idea belongs to Millais, whose Pre-Raphaelite Ophelia seems to drift along the brook, with her hands out of the water. In addition, she appears to consubstantiate with the watery elements. Various features of Millais' treatment of Ophelia's death, be it her flawless garments, or "her inertia and passivism as if she had been turned into another plant in the scene" (Mesa-Villar 2004: 228), remained an inspiration for contemporary models posing for photographs in necroOphelian style. I discovered pictures described as "Lady Siddal"³ or "Lizzy, being Lizzy Siddal,"⁴ which make a direct reference to the Victorian model, replaced by a contemporary immature model.

The majority of photographic renderings of Ophelia – the target of my analysis – bring her closer to an ideal of a sleeping/resting dead woman, whose meeting with Thanatos might be an erotic experience, thus turning her death into a desirable event.⁵ In Elisabeth Bronfen's opinion:

Transforming the real body experience of death into an objectified form mitigates the violence posed by the real. Hence such a transformation can be seen as a personal or cultural strategy of self-preservation. The threat that real death poses to any sense of stability, wholeness, individual uniqueness or immortality is antidoted through representations that "exteriorize" this real by transferring it onto an image/signifier. (Bronfen, 1992: 46)

Such change pushes aside the hideousness or even monstrosity of death and locates it on the margins of popular culture. To die pretty, stylishly or even thrillingly, becomes possible only if death 'robes in' young femininity. Yet these images, either of girls, or young women, usually clothed in a dress (sometimes

³ http://www.flickr.com/photos/nokitas_black_shoes/8218087993/lightbox/ (accessed 10 June 2013).

⁴ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/essers/2528613975/> (accessed 15 May 2013).

⁵ http://www.flickr.com/photos/nic_temby/4175014585/sizes/z/in/photostream/ (accessed 15 May 2013).

wearing only underwear),⁶ lying in their watery graves decorated with flowers, introduce uneasiness and concern. The very intimate act of washing oneself, brought to mind by the image of the bath full of water, is destroyed by the impression of a girl resting in a fixed position in a bath. A key characteristic of all these selected Ophelias is a beautiful passive female body with erotic overtones. Posed as a mortal Shakespearean heroine, models practice the art of dying inside their homes, or any other building furnished with a bath. Popular images of “mermaid-like” creatures refrain from exposing Ophelia’s nudity, being in accord with the long tradition of representing her figure clothed in a dress, still, however, emanating deadly eroticism.

More attempts to express oneself characterized as Ophelia, yet not in a bathtub, are not exceptional. I discovered an outstanding collection of pictures by Merle Pace, a multimedia artist, who posted her works on a website. As she explains her fascination with the tragic figure, she incorporates autobiographical references:

I am not sure what it is about this character, but I have been taking photographs of my friends and self-portrait of myself as “Ophelia” from Shakespeare’s famous play “Hamlet” for many years now. I never have thought that she is dead though. Since I grew up the daughter of life guard parents who taught me how to swim before I could remember, I never really understood how she could drown from her heavy gowns. I was always thinking, “Just stand up in that water! Why didn’t anyone teach you how to swim?! Run away! That is one messed up situation! Smack your brother out of it and run away together!”. Or, I thought that she was playing “dead” by floating in the water so she could sneak away like Juliet in “Romeo and Juliet”, well we all know how that turned out. Again, I was equally frustrated.⁷

Pace’s Ophelia is romanticized and sentimentalized. The composition of four images makes an impression of a chronological disorder as if the viewer was to read the events in a reverse order. It begins with the close-up of a face belonging to a floating dead woman, surrounded by flowers, then one sees a picture, resembling a painting, where the woman is pulled into the stream, desperately

⁶ http://www.flickr.com/photos/noretta_imma/4409115266/sizes/z/in/photostream/ (accessed 14 Apr. 2013).

⁷ <http://merlepacearts.com/2012/09/17/ophelia-ophelia-ophelia/> (accessed 13 Feb. 2013).

trying to hold on to the ground. The picture is reminiscent of Eugene Delacroix “The Death of Ophelia” (1853), yet this time she is portrayed while she turns her back at the viewer (which I find unique), contrary to the nineteenth century pictorial representation of the drowning Ophelia. The next image presents Ophelia washed up on the rocks, lying immobilized in a sleeping pose. Perhaps this should be the last fragment of Pace’s illustration of the final moments and the death of the tragic heroine. If one moves forward, in a clockwise direction, suddenly one encounters Ophelia decorated with red flowers, wearing a red lipstick, which add a sensuous atmosphere to the last picture. Confrontation of female sexuality with death locates Ophelia in the portentous, liminal space, where her corporeal self is forever suspended.

YouTube: mass production, mass participation, mass reaction

New media seem to stimulate innovative interpretations of Shakespeare and YouTube is abundant in non-professional material, exploiting motives and figures that dwell in Shakespearean imaginary worlds. For the purposes of this article I had to narrow the data down, since my choice is to interpret postmodern versions of Ophelia’s death scene. My intention is to put these representations into a broader context of our understanding of popular culture, especially Web 2.0 culture, from which YouTube phenomenon sprouted. Ophelia appearing in YouTube window might serve as an example of cyber Shakespeare and such representation, if compared with her cinematic former sisters, is not identical with them (e.g. Zeffirelli’s or Branagh’s creations of Ophelia). In her article “iShakespeare,” Laurie Osborne states that:

The explosion of YouTube Shakespeare videos suggests that his plays provide a useful starting place for do-it-yourself video production. From stop-action Claymation to musical performances of Macbeth, Shakespearean YouTube hosts more than rare performance recordings like the summary film of the Wooster Group Hamlet. “Canonical” films prove useful, even recyclable, for example, in the mini-boom of YouTube Ophelia music videos – such as Ophelia’s Immortal and Hamlet’s Immortal, which set clips of Kate Winslet’s performance in Branagh’s Hamlet to an array of pop songs. (Osborne, 2010: 48)

The outcome of such amateur practices is ‘Shakespeare made in YouTube,’ in other words, Shakespeare made of bits and pieces. Yet simultaneously

this YouTube Shakespeare becomes *signum temporis* that adjusts to our hipervisual culture, along with its aesthetics of mass production of images. They become accessible almost with the speed of light to render them more tempting and competitive. This interdependence is fuelled by a simple detail and an easily forgotten fact that YouTube does not require the high costs of video production and allows mass participation due to the Internet culture being reachable globally (Strangelove, 2010: 27).

Some characteristics of YouTube material are worth mentioning here: its quick dissemination, much shorter existence than typical film material, and its fragmentation in comparison with the duration of the material itself (understood in terms of the material's edition). YouTube window's architecture becomes another issue. Christy Desmet explains that the notion of transparency does not harmonize with the YouTube window, being "a layered composite of different frames" (Desmet, 2012: 548). She notes:

The actual video is a small screen embedded in a Web page that includes other kinds of information, from the submitter's description, and metadata to viewer comments and suggested videos for further viewing. Sometimes even an advertising intervenes between the viewer and the video's virtual reality, so that the viewer of a YouTube page moves constantly from looking at and looking through the screen. (Desmet, 2012: 548)

Web 2.0 culture with its global tool – YouTube, arrange and put the (virtual) world in a new frame. New media offer totally original and hi-tech modes of mass production, mass participation, mass reaction, unfamiliar before 2006, that is to say, when YouTube originated in its embryonic stage. YouTube window or an amateur picture on Flickr are often an invitation to somebody else's world, e.g. homemade videos and self-portraits. Users of photo- and video-sharing platforms avail themselves of the medium's broadcasting tools. Finding a way of personal fulfillment in the net is not only trendy but also one of the cultivated forms of self-expression. Self-presentation in the virtual world allows for a self-discovery with the use of many a mixed images. Some of them place a female body in the limelight. Visibility in Web 2.0 enables, in the case of Ophelia – particularly female users, to fulfill their wish to be culturally meaningful. Interestingly enough, the tradition of digital self-expression does not span over three decades:

Allowing any user to present information to others, with few intermediaries or censors, the Web permits amateurs to fashion personae and provides an audience to both receive and respond to them. Such self-fashioning began before images were incorporated into the Web; e-mail, chat rooms and MUDs introduced a performative element to digital self-presentation. (Ferratno, 2010: 361)

Our on-line identity might be invented through identification with a fictional character. This establishes Ophelia as a figure for an ideal juvenile womanhood or girlhood. Using her image or a reference to her name or story in order to reveal one's own psychological and bodily condition, an individual reaches the very existence of the self – its sensitive spiritual and corporeal part. Internet users have a possibility to perform themselves with the help of innovative digital code and recent technological tools of expression. Masses of people voluntarily and without previous training join Web 2.0 community, wishing to leave a trace in mediascape, with an intention to 'materialize' in the most intangible universe.

Drowning like Ophelia: amateur video scenes on YouTube

Especially the over-sexualized culture of postmodern times needs an icon living on the verge of perverse necro-eroticism and acceptable aesthetics of visual pleasure. The twenty-first century is greedy for images. They remain almost invisible for the viewers, being part of our visual landscape, yet the outcome (the image itself) is hyper-perceptible to human sight. Cases in point are ubiquitous logos that attract with representations, being a result of manipulation or compilation as they take part in an intertextual game of 'cut, copy and paste.' The viewers more or less consciously absorb these images, and as a consequence, mass consumption and mass production become interdependent. With regard to Ophelia's cyber representations, a re-creation of the amateur video scenes on YouTube is the epitome of the postmodern frenzy of: reinterpretations, remixes, reproductions, reworkings and requotations. I would suggest a category 'drowning like Ophelia' since her death by immersion in water has become a recurring theme among the video scenes posted on this website. YouTubers have changed how Ophelia's death is created, circulated and consumed. I have decided to exploit exemplary scenes, picked out from the material prepared by "YouTube's global army of amateur videographers" (Strangelove, 2010: 29).

Lois Potter observes that: "In fact, the cyber-media are still exploring Shakespeare's potential, with YouTube, for example, allowing anyone to

perform Shakespeare at virtually no cost, and transmit the result to an invisible but potentially enormous audience” (Potter 2012: 430). The figure of Ophelia remains one of Shakespeare’s literary bombshells and each time it (she) explodes, the effect gives a real shock. The cultural representations of Ophelia in YouTube culture are widely disseminated and they derive from works by visual artists and writers, from interpretations of her character in theatrical productions of Hamlet, revealing her as a nexus of the struggle for the female body’s subjugation. The analysis of Web 2.0 amateur materials, especially images (of women) that women (Internet users) produced, encouraged me to put forward that Ophelia functions as a figure whose story crossed traditional media and entered the cyberspace of YouTube. This article yields insights into the most visited video-sharing website while its aim is to reveal associations among gender, death and amateur techniques of performance.

The popular postmodern imagination of YouTubers contributed to many reinterpretations of Ophelia’s dying scene recreated as an aestheticized pop-form. Selected films focus on the last moments of “the green girl’s” (as Polonius calls his daughter) fictional life. Certain videos shorten Ophelia’s story to the dramatic moment of her drowning. Others let the viewers watch as libidinal energy emanates from this female figure – an archetype of a madwoman – as she treads the path in the field or walks in the forest looking for (sexual) fulfilment. Yet it turns out to be destruction that she encounters. Many amateur actresses who decide to play the role of Ophelia make their bodies vehicles through which the spectacle of feminine mortality is enacted and made available to millions of other Internet users. The mood and perverse aesthetics of snuff movies is brought to mind.

Some films illustrate Ophelia’s fusion with water as well as her connection with flowers. Simultaneously, the performers might deliberately cite Ophelia’s lines from Hamlet, like in the short film by Mary Jo Lombardo (2010), who even explains her choice:

Drowning in flowers while a voice over repeats lines from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, this work references classical theatre, flower symbolism/imagery, the pre-Raphaelite painting “Ophelia” by John Millais, and funeral wreaths in an attempt to re-imagine the flower in contemporary art.⁸

⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBemxuuBJHc&feature=related> (accessed 15 May 2013).

The authors might also intentionally avoid Shakespeare's text. Instead of it, they insert pieces of contemporary music into their works (e.g. "Honey, Honey," a song by Feist) and use, for example, 'a dancing body' to tell the story of a drowning girl.⁹ Such is the choice of Harlore, who declares that she prepared the video clip (2009) entitled "Ophelia Drowns (Feist – Honey, Honey)" as her class project for advanced cinematography. Moreover, one of the extended versions (over 7 minutes) by Bella1951 (2011) includes a commentary by the YouTuber, explaining her fascination with Ophelia.¹⁰ This interpretation, entitled "Ophelia Drowns," is a combination of acoustic elements such as Gertrude's report (delivered by the actress) or Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," and of visual components, which let the performer play out the role of Ophelia in an isolated, natural (unaffected by the city life) setting. Such scenes available on YouTube allow the viewer to watch videos repeatedly, to fast forward or rewind, to reduce the volume or 'louden' it, or even to change or close a YouTube window. According to postmodern cultural standards, Ophelia may die at any moment and momentarily rise from the dead, 'on demand,' from the viewer.

The popular responses to Ophelia's death (sometimes deliberately entitled "Ophelia's Suicide") still imitate the convention of acting out the eroticized body, uniting with Thanatos (un)consciously. The Ophelian style of dying seems to be the most desirable way of parting from this world, since the dying beauty, on the one hand, becomes the object of desire, while, on the other, she might personify death. Most death is done by elderly people, rendering death invisible. In contrasting, the death of a young person, especially a woman, is exposed and visually longed for. From the author's description to one of the NecrOphelian videoclips entitled "The Death of Ophelia ('Dead in the Water' – Ellie Goulding)," one may find out that:

The video's concept is about a modern-day Hamlet. Ophelia is contemplating her suicide as she has flashbacks of her relationship with Hamlet. At first, she is numbed by the memories, but slowly she begins to lose her mind as she remembers her father's death, Hamlet going crazy, and Ophelia herself beginning to lose her mind. Ophelia decides to drown herself in her bathtub.¹¹

⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDlGJMhKdE&feature=related> (accessed 14 Apr. 2013).

¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmq3ylfVJ3Q&feature=related> (accessed 14 Apr. 2013).

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXLv83_Mfx0, (accessed Apr. 14 2013).

Music becomes an important vehicle for the female performer to embody Ophelia and express grief since this almost six minutes long video clip attempts at telling a tragic story of a girl who lost her father and was left by her lover. As the girl performs the dying scene, she is shown lying in the bathtub full of water, lip-syncing to the words of “Dead in the Water” by Ellie Goulding, an English pop singer and songwriter. Dressed in black, holding a photo of herself and Hamlet, she engrosses in singing and allows the water to cover her body completely and paralyze her in a sleeping pose. Another example of a realization of the thanatophiliac phantasy to create a YouTube film and to fashion oneself as Ophelia is a short film called “Ophelia’s death.”¹² Using a contemporary bathroom, the female performer drowns like Ophelia in two places at the same time. As she unites with Thanatos, the girl whispers Gertrude’s report about the drowning from Hamlet and she envisions the scene in her mind’s eye. Somatically immersed in water in her own bathtub, she plays out the role of Ophelia’s madness and drowning in her imagination. The sophisticated montage faces the viewer with two Ophelias: one being a juvenile woman, who commits suicide by slashing her wrist in a bath (which is a common method suicide amongst women), while the other resembles Shakespearean Ophelia, dressed in white, disheveled hair, collecting flowers, drowning in a forest stream. Ophelia’s drowning happens in two realities (or perhaps in three realities – in virtual world as well): postmodern and in an unidentified past. Both Ophelias are touching, the atmosphere is thrilling, evoking intense emotions while watching a young and pretty girl die.

In Strangelove’s opinion: “YouTube is home to all forms of sexual fetishes and marginal or underground sexual practices” (Strangelove 2010: 87). Amateur necro-eroticism that exploits Ophelia’s theme leads to keeping cultural fantasies alive. Activity of Web 2.0 users results in prolonging her afterlife, yet more and more distant from her prototype and even gradually more deviant. A YouTube male viewer finds pleasure in watching a beautiful woman die, while a non-professional actress who plays Ophelia’s (last) part – through an act of self-expression – discovers unknown forms of taking pleasure in acting with their bodies, in dying like Ophelia. Female part of e-generation may discover a connection with Ophelia’s corporeal image. It may serve as a mirror for themselves since it enables powerful, visual self-expression. As they connect with

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXLv83_Mfx0 (accessed 14 Apr. 2013).

the figure, they recognize some critical features in the young woman's body: an alienation, a suspension of an order, a break in the structure of completeness. Constructing their own identity, they turn to Ophelia and her body that is recreated and reinterpreted for their own needs in an act of self-fashioning.

What seems paradoxical about the culture of non-professional pop-performers, is that many of them (ab)use immortal motives from Shakespeare, without any deeper knowledge of his literary output. In metaphorical terms, it might be stated that YouTube videos produced either at home, or in any other place, become as far from the stage or professional setting for the film as the Earth is from the Sun. Additionally, one should remember that each entering the internet culture is not innocent since it will undoubtedly leave a trail in our virtual universe. The more considerate is the trace, the better for the user.

The search for Ophelian video clips and photos proves that adolescent girls and young women find inspiration in Ophelia's bodily story. The self-fashioning they become engaged in is not equivalent with being familiar with the Shakespearean play, the source of Ophelia's afterlife in the net. It is rather an emanation of erotic power and Ophelia's iconic status that encourage female users to imitate her dying poses. Sexual attractiveness of Ophelia's young and mysterious body, on the one hand, helps female Web 2.0 community to identify with bodily mesmerizing attributes, while on the other – it entralls male viewers. Iteration propagates the iconic image of Ophelias and propels the pursuit of visual pleasure. According to Joanne Finkelstein popculture “functions as a toolkit for shaping identity while our everyday life requires from its participants to ‘perform an identity’ in different forms and renders this process natural” (Finkelstein 2007: 12). She accentuates that acting against this cultural obligation, individuals are “passive, blank or hesitant”, or even “break social rules” (Finkelstein 2007: 12). Pre/maturing women avail themselves of an abundant repository, which creates Ophelia's representational story, discovering a current tendency to reinvent oneself and distinguish from others in rapidly changing technological times.

Ophelia's death on exhibition

Additionally, the Ophelia-type death scenes are the leitmotif of some recent gallery exhibitions. Contemporary art works on the subject of Ophelia were presented at Gallery Stratford, Canada, opened from January 17 to April 4, 2010.

“Drowning Ophelia” is the title of the exhibition, whose authors explain that it “delves into the timely and timeless allegory of Ophelia’s loss of judgment and her subsequent watery demise in an exhibition of new media, video, photography, painting, and sculptural works ...” (Garnet 2010).¹³

Recognizing the popularity of necro-aesthetics, organizers of another exhibition appreciated the cultural role of Ophelia as a thanatotic icon. The exhibition entitled “Ophelia. Desire, Melancholy In the Death Wish,” held at the Arnhem Museum of Modern Art, Holland, from February 21 to May 10, 2009, was devoted only to the necro-figure of Ophelia, who according to the curators:

is a contemporary metaphor for the modern romantic who wrestles with conflicting feelings of reciprocal incomprehension, unrequited love, and desperate longing, and who seeks ultimate release in death. Not only does she represent the deeper layers of the feminine being, but also the indefinable desires of this side of life, to which nature ascribes symbolic meaning. (“Museum”)¹⁴

As she travels in time and space, it would not be an exaggeration to state that:

Ophelia will never die...

She will always haunt cultural imagination. In my article I suggest three derivatives (two adjectives and a noun): ‘ophelia-less,’ ‘ophelia-ful’ and ‘ophelia-ness.’ I treat Ophelia’s oxymoronic life after death as a source from which also linguistic forms spring into being. To my mind Ophelia’s inspirational status might even grow to the point that she becomes the eponym for the dead feminine beauty. Among numerous embodiments in Ophelia’s afterlife, one of the most recent is being a pop icon designed and created for and by the postmodern generation seeking fulfilment of its necro-Ophelian fantasies: young women find

¹³ <http://www.gallerystratford.on.ca/exhibits/drowning-ophelia> (accessed 13 Feb. 2013).

¹⁴ http://www.artdaily.org/index.asp?int_sec=11&int_new=29209#.UR6O-F6UbevQ (accessed 13 Feb. 2013).

satisfaction by self-fashioning in digital space as dead/sleeping beauty and male Internet users immerse in visual pleasure.

If academic research is taken into consideration, Web 2.0 Shakespeare is still a neglected aspect of Shakespeare studies. Cyber Shakespeare has just started to spin its global web. Partly, it might be explained by the fact that the history of the discussed websites, YouTube and Flickr, is limited to seven (from 2005) and eight (from 2004) years, respectively, and thus YouTube/Flickr Shakespeare is still its nascent stage, perhaps it is not even crawling on all fours yet. It is also noteworthy that only certain Shakespearean characters, perhaps those with a rich representational history, have inspired YouTubers/Flickr-users to adapt them to the needs of this practical and globally accessible social medium. Undoubtedly, Ophelia has acquired another dimension of cultural existence: she is now beginning to fit into her cyber body with the help of Internet performers. She has become a post/pop/necrOphelia and a prophet of her own words: “We know what we are, but know not what we may be”. The future of Ophelia-the virtual bombshell will definitely be shaped by the contours of new media and the creativity of the users. The case of Ophelia afterlife remains as strange and unpredictable as Dr Jekyll’s experiments with his hidden self. Perhaps an evil alter ego of Ophelia (and pop-performers) will astound and freeze the virtual as well as the real world of the future.

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SUMMARY: Drawing on Allan Edgar Poe's provocative statement that "The death ... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world" (1951: 369), I focus on the pivotal role of Shakespeare's Ophelia in attesting to this assertion. Ophelia's drowning is probably the most recognizable female death depicted by Shakespeare. Dating back to Gertrude's 'reported version' of the drowning, representations of Ophelia's eroticized death have occupied the minds of Western artists and writers. Their necrOphelian fantasies materialized as numerous paintings, photographs and literary texts. It seems that Ophelia's floating dead body is also at the core of postmodern thanatophilic imagination, taking shape in the form of conventionalized representations, such as: video scenes available on YouTube, amateur photographs in bathtubs posted on photo sharing sites, reproductions and remakes of classical paintings (e.g. John Everett Millais), and contemporary art exhibitions in museums. These references demonstrate that new cyber story – digital afterlife – is being built around the figure of Shakespearean Ophelia, unearthing the sexual attraction of the lifeless female body.

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