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Shakespeare's *Hamlet*/Hamlet, Shakespeare 3.0, and *Tugged Hamlet*, The Comic Prince of The Polish Cabaret POTEM

Abstract: Shakespeare's dramas are potentialities. Any *Hamlet* may be understood as the space in which Shakespeare's thoughts are remembered, as a reproduced copy of the unspecified, unidentified source, the so called original. Simultaneously, it may be conceived of as the space where Shakespeare's legacy and authority is tested, trifled and transgressed. Nowadays Shakespeare's dramas are disseminated in multifarious forms such as: printed materials, audio and video recordings, compact audio discs, digital videos and disc recordings. Since I am fond of the cultural phenomenon called *Hamlet*, not a single text or performance, but a continuum of human interaction with intermediated and transcoded versions of the drama, in this article I focus on the abovementioned single play. I accentuate the title character's profound meaning in Shakespeare studies and his iconic status in Western culture in different media. I exploit W.B. Worthen's concept of "Shakespeare 3.0." to demonstrate Shakespeare's presence in digital reality on the example of a comic rendering of *Hamlet* (*Tugged Hamlet*, 1992) by the Polish cabaret POTEM. Their cabaret sketch, although it was not created for the Internet audience, is available on-line via YouTube, constituting "Shakespeare 3.0." Furthermore, I pose several questions and attempt to answer them in the course of my analysis: to what extent does the image of a mournful and contemplative Hamlet pervade different dimensions of culture, especially our collective imagination?; what chances of realization has a cultural fantasy of challenging the myth of a witty and contemplative Hamlet when re-written and presented as a pastiche or satire?; was the Polish cabaret POTEM successful in their comic performance?

Keywords: *Hamlet*, cabaret performance, parody, digital Shakespeare.

What was prowling through Shakespeare's studies for ages, was an almost compulsive desire to explain "What Happens in *Hamlet*"¹ (through textual interpretations and performing the text) and dealing with "The Question of

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¹ John Dover Wilson, author of a classic *Hamlet* study, recommended strongly that it is the text itself that should be approached by a critic and a reader, and analysed scene by scene.

*Hamlet*² in terms of plucking the heart of its mystery. Therefore, what prevailed was cultivated criticism that enabled people to proclaim up-to-date explanations and interpretations. A desire to hierarchize and value each reading and adaptation seems to persist, although a wave of ‘turns’ in humanities (for example linguistic turn, pictorial turn, sensory turn) allowed for releasing myriad Shakespeares from the grip of the authorial text. The textual hegemony has also been broken, as non-textual iterations of the play have been growing in number.

The digital revolution in the last decades of the twentieth century and its multimedia consequences have allowed new production and re-production possibilities as well as innovative ways of engaging with Shakespearean dramas. The identity of Shakespearean drama has gained another dimension since, to put it metaphorically, one level of a multi-storey parking lot in the digital zone of culture has become reserved by Shakespeare. Digital culture changes the place of Shakespeare’s cultural presence and status of his plays through artistic as well as critical and innovative use of his dramas within new media contexts. The oppositional dualism between book and theatre, text and performance, page and stage has been refuted ever since.

According to W.B. Worthen: “With the onset of recording technologies, we have practiced Shakespearean drama across three platforms—the page, the stage, and recorded performance” (2007: 230). Worthen’s main concern is to contest the prevalent idea that Shakespeare’s dramas as texts are superior to performances. In his article “Shakespeare 3.0, or Text versus Performance, the Remix” Worthen urges us to reconsider “the ways in which we imagine the interface between writing and performance” (2008: 55). Worthen’s claims that “the rise of digital culture” serves as a stimulus to “engage more critically” with the abovementioned issue (55).

W. B. Worthen distinguishes three stages of evolution in the status of Shakespeare’s texts and their theatrical versions, which he describes in his book *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (2010). The three stages of development he introduces are referred to as: “Shakespeare 1.0,” “Shakespeare 2.0,” and “Shakespeare 3.0.” Worthen avails himself of the language of digital coding, finding an analogy to the way in which World Wide Web is still developing: from Web 1.0 (the past era of passive viewing of content), through Web 2.0 (the present era of user generated content), to Web 3.0 (the future era of data driven content). The notion of “Shakespeare 1.0” is intended to evoke Elizabethan culture, in which dramatic text was a material designed primarily for performance rather than print. Worthen reminds us that in Shakespeare’s times, dramatic texts circulated mostly as manuscripts, dispersed as hand copies and often unpublished. Not many plays from this period survived since they were

² Harry Levin, who wrote “The Question of Hamlet,” suggests that the play is itself a question, but it cannot or should not be explained away (1959).

perceived as ephemeral artefacts of performance. “Shakespeare 2.0” sprang from the development of print in the seventeenth century. It refers to the treatment of text as a stable, real object that exists independently from performance. When Ben Jonson’s collected dramas were published in 1616 and Shakespeare’s in 1623 the practice of printing plays was still in its nascent stage. It was not earlier than in the nineteenth century that the focus on performance stimulated the progress of literary perspective. It valued stability, reproducibility, and preservation of a dramatic work. By introducing the notion of “Shakespeare 3.0” Worthen accentuates the presence of Shakespeare in digital culture which feeds on digital coding and distribution of texts across a range of mobile platforms. Not only printed plays but also performances have been transformed into electronic scripts that are accessible via the virtual network. To me, “Shakespeare 3.0” means that a putative textual origin meets its mediated iterations, even the most lampooning and subversive ones.

One of digital Shakespeare’s beloved play is *Hamlet*, according to different google search results in such fields as: images, films, or books. Not surprisingly, *Hamlet* studies is treated as a separate field within Shakespeare studies and Shakespeare scholars use such term in their publications (e.g. Levy 2008: 30-31; Lewis 2017: xiv).³ Even less so, Hamlet-centred studies revolve around its sun—the tragic Prince of Denmark. *Hamlet* is ranked first among other plays as having the wildest, most twisted, and intermediated afterlife. References to the drama—as a genesis of citations, allusions, concepts and motifs—can only be measured when compared to a number of references to the Bible. Both the protagonist and the drama’s title itself, has become a trademark: in high culture and popular culture, in real and cyber culture, as well as in analogue and digital one. The collective imaginarium dedicated to *Hamlet* is now multidimensional, multimediated and multicultural. But it also results in the evaluation of *Hamlet*’s/Hamlet’s status in contemporary culture as recycled and omnipresent, a pliable, but not always meaningful signifier.

Parody and pastiche have the potential and can alter our (stereotypical) perception of Hamlet-the melancholy prince. Tampering with the prototype of Hamlet can emancipate his alter ego or enable his “twin brother from a distant galaxy to land safely in his UFO” on the same ground where his mournful and dispirited brother (in the manner of biblical Job) ponders on man—the quintessence of dust. The first humorous adaptations of Shakespeare’s works date from the seventeenth century, and their number increased throughout the eighteenth century, but it was the nineteenth century that saw the rapid grow of travesties, burlesques and parodies. The cultural status of such texts and

³ There is only one journal, entitled *Hamlet Studies*, devoted entirely to a single play by Shakespeare. It was founded in 1979 by R. W. Desai, its editor, and is still published by the Oxford University Press.

performances was inferior to Shakespearean “master texts” and theatrical spectacles. Perhaps such attitude is still valid among conservative Shakespeareans or fans unwilling to support the view that parody, travesty, and satire constitute another cultural genre. They fall into disgrace only when compared with such a well-established genre as Shakespeare’s tragedy. Not surprisingly, for some people, it would be an aesthetic crime to lampoon *Hamlet*: “The most performed and most famous play in the history of world.” (R.S. White, 2015: 2)

The demon of a Hamlet-type haunts Western culture, being encouraged by ‘channeling sessions’ under the auspices of writers, poets, philosophers, artists and critics, to name a few. The serious profundity of Shakespeare’s tragic prince magnetized them and provoked to express their attitude towards Hamlet and the play itself. Attitudes have ranged from expressing praise and admiration to disappointment and disapproval. The rise of avant-garde movement in literature, and later, mushrooming of new interpretative attitudes and disciplines on the wave of subsequently proclaimed ‘turns’ and expanding criticism in humanities, paved the way for Hamlet’s twin brother’s ‘coming out,’ for a materialization of Hamlet’s double, the grinning prince (my own term).

Rumor (spread globally and via internet) has it that the tragic Hamlet has constantly been followed for years by his shadow, or his counterpart, the comic Hamlet. This hero, or rather anti-hero, was lying in wait or lurked only to announce his existence and mark his position as the significant Other, having no intention of reclaiming his power. Yet, it is the tragic prince, the prototype of Hamlet, who pays the price for letting go/freeing his Other, for not being able to freeze his image, to wit, Hamlet’s figure (his face, gestures and language) evokes earnedness, elitism, nobility, brilliance, sophistication. The iconic Hamlet suffers (or needs suffering to fulfill his catastrophic fate) and dies. Has Hamlet’s comic counterpart any chance to be equally valued and treated? Has he any chances not to be called the inferior one—the epigone, the jester, the imperfect copy?

Most people are familiar with the themes and the tragic story of Hamlet mainly through its circulation in popular culture, Hollywood films, BBC productions, and educational system. I wonder how many people have engaged in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, be it through reading a text or watching and hearing a play/watching a performance, forgetting that it is culturally acknowledged as a tragedy, or perhaps with more historical precision, Elizabethan revenge tragedy. And what it really meant to them? How many times has the scenario, beginning with uncertainty (“Who’s there?,” asks Bernardo in the opening line), been repeated?; the tragedy opening with a question mark, and ending with corpses being carried off or being ready to be removed from sight? How often did people re-create events being part of this iconic narrative in the history of drama, the story of Hamlet, who scripted and staged his scenario of revenge?

And does iconic mean being recognized, like a branded drama, because Hamlet's soliloquies, especially issues they touch upon, convey his own eschatological wishes, desires, fears, concerns and fears, which we all share? Do people evoke a particular representation of Hamlet, a certain image amidst thousands of his cultural embodiments, be it in analogue or digital form? These intrusive questions on their thematically enhancing trajectories are orbiting the planet (I would call) Death. Yet Hamlet gives them a poetic form, which makes them so unique, refine, and elaborate. In my opinion, *Hamlet* surpassed other plays in popularity because cultural fascination and fear of death is the strongest *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—that is, a mystery before which a human being both trembles and feels mesmerized; people are both repelled by it and attracted to it.

Perhaps another reason for rendering Hamlet emblematic is his reliance on suspension of avenging his father, suspending execution of a militant revenge at the Elsinore court up to a time when death becomes so infectious that its 'transmission' leads to another. Hamlet does not have to take his own life, it becomes part of denouement. The tragedy of the prince of Denmark falls naturally as night falls on earth. He leaves neither descendants, nor living antecedents, which makes his union with death even stronger. The term/brand iconic entails cultural greatness and, as far as I am concerned, all great pieces of literature are informed by a certain sorrow and tension. And all great protagonists like Sophocles' King Oedipus, Goethe's Werther or Miller's Willy Loman are tormented by their psyche and their choices are paid with either their social existence or real lives.

Tragic literary figures are also destined for distinguished objects of criticism and constant rebirth in culture. As Samuel Crowl claims in his book *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet: The Relationship Between the Text and Film*:

For at least the last two hundred years Hamlet, and to a lesser extent *Hamlet*, has been shaped by the currents of the age. To the nineteenth-century Romantics (especially Goethe in Germany and Coleridge in England) Hamlet was a brooding, passive figure, with a soul of a sensitive melancholy poet. Goethe imagines Hamlet's sensibility as 'lovely, pure, noble, and most noble' but without 'the strength of nerve which forms a hero.' [...] Coleridge envisioned a Hamlet struggling to find "an equilibrium between the real and imaginary worlds . . . he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve.' [...] The image we inherit of Hamlet as a melancholy passive poet, despite strong alternative conceptions delivered in performance by modern and contemporary actors as diverse as Richard Burton, Nicol Williamson, Kevin Kline, Kenneth Branagh and Jude Law, comes directly from the Romantics.

One version of the influential cultural stereotype of the Danish prince presents him as a person diagnosed with melancholy, not a murderer type, left with an overwhelming revenge mission. Some early twentieth-century writers did not follow this Romantic path, for example George Bernard Shaw (1961: 82), who regarded sentimental Hamlets as “bores,” while James Joyce decided that his Stephen Dedalus should have a Hamlet-like alter ego. Freud, one of the continuators of the Romantic view of Hamlet, with his reading of the play in terms of the Oedipus Complex, also saw in Hamlet a clinical patient to-be. In his seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud explains:

The play is built up on Hamlet's hesitations, and an immense variety of attempts at interpreting them have failed to produce a result. According to the view which was originated by Goethe and is still the prevailing one today, Hamlet represents the type of man whose power of direct action is paralysed by an excessive development of his intellect. (He is 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought'). According to another view, the dramatist has tried to portray a pathologically irresolute character which might be classed as neurasthenic. The plot of the drama shows us, however, that Hamlet is far from being represented as a person incapable of taking any action. . . . Hamlet is able to do anything—except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish (1976: 366–7).

For Freud, Hamlet—disgusted at his mother's sexuality and her hasty remarriage, loathing his uncle, a would-be father figure—was blocked in his attempt to revenge his father because he unconsciously identifies with Claudius. His uncle has enacted the Prince's own repressed Oedipal desire to murder his father and marry his mother. Freudian re-readings in literature and film hardened this attitude, burdening Hamlet with traumas and psychoanalytical explanations for about 50 years. It is not an exaggeration to say that the play was tantamount to the prince and his family relations. Later, Harold's Bloom main concern was the private life and inner self of the Danish prince. In *Shakespeare: The Invention of Human* (1998) the author draws a parallel between Hamlet and Jesus, pointing to influence of these two figures on humanity: “After Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness; no one prays to him, but no one evades him for long either” (xix). Bloom contents that “the enigma of Hamlet is emblematic of the greater enigma of Shakespeare himself: a vision that is everything and nothing, a person who was (according to Borges) everyone and no one, an art so infinite that it contains us, and will go on enclosing those likely to come after us” (xix). Hamlet is the most eminent and introspective of

Shakespeare's characters, and in Bloom's opinion: "No other single character in the plays, not even Falstaff or Cleopatra, matches Hamlet's infinite reverberations" (384).

After Freud came a critical and interpretive shift resulting in a discovery of other characters' potential (as individuals laden with their own stories, each one of a kind). Another discovery was the play's polisemantic offer to bring into light other aspects than private and psychological ones; to contemporize Hamlet and examine social and cultural conditions in different locations via Hamlet. The flourishing of new interpretive models and approaches such as: deconstruction, feminism, postcolonialism, materialism, and New Historicism, led to secure *Hamlet's* status as a globally recognized play. Attention was directed from the prince to the play, from introspective Hamlet to a wider concern with the play's culture and politics. With the rise of Internet culture, the main protagonist returned with a vengeance, becoming part of Web community, sharing his cultural capital with professionals and amateurs. All in all, is it not that all everybody wants from Hamlet/*Hamlet* is to mean by it/him?

Interpretative tradition in philosophy and art, literary and performance criticism, as well as educational imperative to copy the concept of Hamlet as a highbrow, are of paramount importance in making this myth so alive. Imagining Hamlet as a figure in high spirit, for whom Denmark is not a prison, and does not wish his 'solid flesh would melt' would be against the grain, like breaking the waves. Violation of the traditional construction of Hamlet as the dramatizing prince, who almost lost the faculty of perceiving and expressing or appreciating what is amusing or laughable may be intolerable to some critics or viewers.

In a reverse gesture, Hamlet, being the target of mockery, can find his abandoned and forgotten twin brother by turning himself into the comic prince of Denmark. Perhaps, in the past (in pre-digital era) it was required to explain such endeavor. With the arrival of 'Shakespeare 3.0' contemporary users of digital media not need justifications for their (provocative) actions. They can eagerly in a new media fashion (i.e. through the internet) announce the arrival of Hamlet, who cordially welcomes 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' and often kills them with laughter.

In the following section I want to focus on an embodiment of a resourceful and merry prince proposed by the Polish cabaret POTEM. I came across their performance sketch, doing one of my Google searches. It is noteworthy that POTEM'S very short (less than 4 minutes) comic rendering of *Hamlet* was not initially intended for the WWW community. It belonged to a series of sketches to be performed on stage, forming an artistic cabaret show entitled *Różne takie story* [Different Kind of Stories]. Fortunately, their performances were recorded and released on DVDs. Later it was uploaded to YouTube by the platform's users. This is how I discovered intermediated Hamlet, or I should say, a parody

of Hamlet, entitled *Tugged Hamlet* (1992), which intertextually connects the sketch with its spectral ancestor—Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. POTEM's Hamlet seems to question not only Shakespeare's authority but also the authority of Hamlet's criticism, focused on the princes' complicated personality, his ethical dilemmas and moral choices. With productions like *Tugged Hamlet*, the myth of Hamlet as melancholy prince is deconstructed, ruined and transgressed. The power of parody lies in its inherent ability to contest authority, legacy and lay bare cultural myths.

POTEM was a group of young people, who performed between 1984-1999. It 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.

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.⁴ 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 and developed a philosophy of artistic cabaret. Sikora used the themes of classic literature to introduce multifarious characters and stories to the cabaret scene.

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

⁴ Władysław Sikora, http://www.sikora.art.pl/teoria_kabaretu.html

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 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 POTEM'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, POTEM's performances could not disappoint.

POTEM exploited absurd as a strategic weapon. They used the themes of classic literature to introduce multifarious characters and stories to the cabaret scene. They made something totally new from the wealth of Shakespearean dramas. POTEM did not adapt Shakespeare into their sketches, they created new pieces, innovative pastiches which could exist independently. Numerous sketches were also recorded on DVDs, which obviously makes them part of digital culture. POTEM's performances are also available on-line (via YouTube). Curiously enough, POTEM did not participate in digital culture in our contemporary understanding of the complexity of the term. They did not have access to "Shakespeare 3.0" in full swing, yet in some way they made a minimal contribution to Shakespeare's presence in digital culture.

I see a similarity between POTEM's parodic construction of Hamlet/*Hamlet*, an absurd commentary to the master text, and contemporary user-generated *Hamlet* productions. It is the agency, so popular in digital and participatory culture, that they share with POTEM's performers. POTEM experimented with Shakespeare years before active users of the Internet discovered their "Bardic function." The term was used by John Hartley in "Uses of YouTube: Digital Literacy and the Growth of Knowledge" (2009). Performing one's own "Bardic function" suggests the possibilities of individual agency within the culture industry. The "Bardic function" as applied to Shakespeare can denote the appropriation of a cultural token that is powerful precisely because its high culture associations merge so readily with its increasingly popular cultural manifestations. They created their own Shakespeare content before the rise of Web 2.0 culture and the cult of (amateur) agency.

POTEM partly imitated the narrative of *Hamlet*, simultaneously inventing their own comic Prince of Denmark, who is not going to die. In POTEM's 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.

TUGGED HAMLET

Dramatis personae:

Hamlet – tugged prince

Father's ghost – duralex-like figure

Uncle – close family

Hamlet's Mum – 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, mum 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*) – Hamleeet, Hamleeeeeet (*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 had threw into the grave is not necessary. It's warm there.

(*damn stiff*)

Hamlet: – Well, are you on furlough?

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

(*stiff*)

Hamlet: – ...You know, mum 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.

(*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 mum: (*she is sleepy*) – What noise is this?

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

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

Hamlet: – Now! Blood, blond, 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 Mum: (*she tugs on Hamlet’s ear*) – Hamlet, what is lying here?

Hamlet: – It’s uncle, mum.

Hamlet’s Mum: – Who killed him?

Hamlet: – I did.

Hamlet’s Mum: – Damn, you’d better clean up!

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

Authors: We – Władek and William

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 taste 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 just 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 mum to intervene as Hamlet and his uncle ruined her deep sleep. By separating the two for no more than three 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 the simulation 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.

POTEM's modification of the prototype of Hamlet and cabaret's unfaithfulness to the plot, especially the ending renders the treatment of the play subversive. It is an invitation to re-shape Shakespearean plays and transgress the myth of the master text. Paradoxically, in POTEM's parody there is a hidden pull towards the identifiable source, towards Shakespeare—the author. Shakespeare and his tragic prince return as POTEM exercise the "Bardic function" and compete with Shakespeare by imagining Hamlet's alter ego, the comic prince of Denmark—Tugged Hamlet.

I have always thought, that Hamlet is revered, with almost a religious nimbus surrounding him. Hamlet—the most famous fictional Dane—he untouchable suffering hero, tormented by hyperactivity of the ruminative center of his mind, whose destiny is to live short and die in the name of the father. Fortunately, he does not experience mourning and trauma after the loss of his mother. Now I may regret my prejudiced opinion and unfavourable impression of Hamlet, yet then (when I was in high school) Hamlet was the embodiment of a tragic hero, a miserable young prince, who dies prematurely. I thought it was a pity that he never wears the king's crown nor tastes popcorn. Within the development of digital culture, Hamlet not only eats junk food, but stays alive on stage, in a performance. My intention was to demonstrate that "There are more things to do with Hamlet, Than are dreamt of in our 'pre-Shakespeare 3.0' philosophy."

I continue to discover *Hamlet*, each time finding my own experience, making me realize there is no authorial intention, no abstract meaning, no hierarchy between manifestations of the drama. Hamlet's twin brother—why not a grinning prince, a comic "tugged Hamlet?" Sill, I do not know *Hamlet*. There is no reason why I should. I can appreciate the play, unattached to any particular cultural register. I can be under the spell of a drifting Hamlet; of those myriad adaptations, spinoffs, derivations and fragmentary allusions in contemporary media that have in some sense drifted free from anchorage in the master discourse of Shakespeare's texts.

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