

Philosophy of Tragedy - The Writer and Hamlet (Poet and Philosopher)

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Abstract

This study is devoted to the investigation of the philosophy of tragedy, where a person is caught in a borderline situation. The philosophy of tragedy is interested in a person thrown by life onto the border of existence and non-existence. The poet Shakespeare and the writer Miguel de Cervantes, with their immortal works Hamlet and Don Quixote, allow philosophers to investigate the depths of the spirit. The tragic hero in the works of the analysed poets is the image of a person thrown into the whirlwind of life - to wake up in an instant from a dream to a tragic feeling. The one who looks into the depths of the spirit will understand that there is no return from there - as Lev Shestov expresses it - this road knows no volunteers, there we are always forcibly dragged and, so to speak, thrown by fate.

Keywords: *philosophy of tragedy, writer, poet, Hamlet, Don Quixote*

Introduction: The poet and philosopher - hero or coward?

A tragic poet often leads us, just like a philosopher, along the paths of his thinking to sources and beginnings. We are introduced to questions about which we do not know, or from which we run away in fear, so that we do not have to start *really* - thoughtfully living and thinking. Philosophy means thoughtful thinking, in the words of Heidegger (1996), *thinking* thinking, not superficial or scientific thinking - *calculating* thinking. In his work, the poet reveals a world where not everything is calculable, clear and problem-free, in order to bring us back to wisdom through mysteries and secrets - the *folds* of the soul - and thus instruct us.

The history of philosophy does not have its object of study in the present, in the most current present, but in the study of *what was, in the past...* However, the past that happened should not be only *antiquarian*,² smelling of mothballs and corpse mist, even if we must point out to the reader that even death and dying, suffering and similar things will be the subject of our reflections. We want to think here and now through returns to the past, through the works of poets about man, his nature, soul - caring for the soul, *mind and heart*, but above all about his *ups* and *downs*, and *tragic* mistakes and delusions.

A poet and philosopher were quite rarely a rebel and a warrior in the past. They usually fought with a song, a word and a pen, those were his weapons. They were never afraid to go into confrontation with power for the sake of truth, even if he did it only in extreme need and always with reluctance. Since the time of Socrates, we have been taught - we already know - that philosophy cannot win in a dispute with power. That is why a philosopher, an intellectual in general, always has an alibi-compromising attitude at hand, like a chameleon? We have already written several times about heroism, fear, resignation and courage, also in relation to the characteristics of the renowned Czech philosopher and phenomenologist Patočka.

A Philosopher in the time of trials

Patočka was, in Dahrendorf's³ book *Temptation of Freedom. Intellectuals at the Time of the Trials* (2008), marked as an internal emigrant, in the manner of Plato. Why? The answer is simple: the philosopher Plato, taught by a *tragic* fate, the tragic death of his teacher Socrates, refused active participation in politics, even more so a direct confrontation with power. Patočka himself often returned to this topic - the topic of tragedy, the tragic hero - in his texts and lectures. "The hero is a living question, posed from the depths of human helplessness in the face of the powers on which he depends and which alone can give him meaning..." (Patočka 1990: 31). According to Patočka, the question of life, the question about its meaning, was already asked in tragedy, "Socrates, for his questioning, the ultimate purpose of which is the meaning of life, therefore has the first, albeit non-explicit model, in the tragic man" (Ibid.). Therefore, we can consider Patočka as a philosopher *residing* in a time of lack of freedom and trials, a time recently passed, as an *academic* philosopher, detached from the problems of real life. In the words of Turgenev (1980) - for the *Hamlet* type of person who is a Nordic, cold-thinking, purely rational type, deeply sceptical, eternally doubting and prone to not acting and looking for an alibi in being, that is, a great *compromiser*...

Dahrendorf (2008) openly asked: "Is Patočka an 'internal emigrant' an Erasmite after all? He does not lack Erasmus traits either in his life or in his work. He spoke of himself as a person who 'experienced many conflicts in his life'" (Dahrendorf 2008: 113-114). According to Dahrendorf, Patočka not only tolerated them, but was able to reshape them and introduce "...them into a philosophy that primarily asked questions and sought openness. Nothing broke his faith in reason" (Ibid.). Did Patočka have the courage? "He never lacked the courage to stand his ground. All this certainly places him on a certain level among the Erasmites. He certainly wasn't just an engaged observer, he wasn't even engaged, if we ignore the last years of his life..." (Ibid.).

Wisdom says that only God should judge, not us mere mortals. According to Rozenfeld "[o]bjective reality, understandable through scientific methods and experiments, supported with logical apparatuses, among which mathematical formal logic is dominant, has not been able to produce comprehensive answers to multilayer questions of human existence" (2019: 123). For Nezník (2009)⁴, also based on the study of the life and texts of Patočka, his image is captured through the image of the Nordic Hamlet, his inner way of endless conflicts with his own reason, in conflict with his own conscience and heart, and constantly remaining in a state of procrastinating inaction...

Patočka is often like a *tragic* hero who always lacks something - sometimes the stage and the theatre, sometimes the audience. He constantly wants something, but at the same time, in the depths of his soul, he knows for sure that he does not have enough strength for this event, he is not yet ready enough to fight, and so he does not receive what is essential for heroism and fighting - he does not receive courage... He is too rational, too calculating thinking type. He fights mainly in his thinking and torn, eternally quarrelsome inside.

(Nezník 2009: 145)

Let us complete the picture of the *philosopher* Patočka, this '*after all*' Erasmite through *Hamletian* characteristics of the *tragic* hero. If a philosopher is hiding from power, Berlin (2001) characterized such a life attitude as withdrawing into an '*inner castle*'. However, Dahrendorf (2008), thinking about the behaviour, metamorphoses, and mistakes of

philosophers during trials, stated that even Berlin did not consider himself a hero or a warrior. Berlin often commented on his address ‘that he feels like a *coward*’.

‘I’m a coward’, he said repeatedly at various meetings. The great events of the time always found him at the port. He shared the problem with cowardice with Turgenev, whom he respected. Both were reproached that their social success was the result of constantly conforming to the great and good people - *the great and good*, as they say in England, which was considered a sign of a lack of courage. (...) ‘The topic of courage really bothered him.’

(Dahrendorf 2008: 56)

A poet's meditations on life and meaning

If we think about life, about its meaning, then the poet's *meditations* are about whether it makes sense in old age to waste the last years of life on something practical, or on the contrary, on something completely different. But what is that which will not be destroyed by time, and which can be beneficial not only to the author-creator, but also to others, the future? Rozenfeld underlines that “[co]ntemporary political and economic processes place a perpetual pressure upon all regions of the world, empowering homogenization processes that result in identical production, and consumption patterns becoming naturalized all around the world” (2019: 233).

Kazakhstan is a distant and relatively unknown country. It is she who leads us to the topic we would like to think about the national poet of Kazakhstan Abaj (1846-1904) wrote in the book *Forty Reflections on Life and People* (1959):

We lived to an old age; whether we lived well or badly, we lived a piece of life - we saved and fought many times, many difficulties had to be overcome. That is why we are now weakened and weary: we have known the futility of our activity and experienced all humiliations. How do we handle our lives now? I can't find an answer to that. Should I rule the people? No, I will not rule over people.

(Abaj 1959: 8)

When we read these words of the poet - rooted in the tradition of *akyns*, folk poets coming to us from a great distance and a distant time, we feel that we are connecting with something *great*, eternal, timeless, and at the same time familiar or close to us. Searching for the meaning of life is what repeatedly overtakes us in borderline life situations. The mundane things that occupied us until then will lose their meaning. The poet does not see the point in raising cattle, doing science and engaging in scientific research because he does not see anyone to whom he can impart a wise word and where to find it. He refuses to raise children because, despite his old age, he does not know the meaning of education and the mission to which he would raise them. In a moment of extreme despair, when his life was losing meaning and he could not come to any decision, he experienced enlightenment:

I will write down the thoughts that come to mind and enjoy the white paper and black ink. If someone finds a necessary word in it, let them write it down or learn it. And if no one finds anything, don't forget that I had to write for myself. So that was my decision. And now I have nothing else on my mind but to write.

(Ibid.)

Hesse (2013) wrote words about life and its seasons in the reflection *On Old Age*:

Old age is one stage of our life, and, like other stages of life, it has its own face, atmosphere and temperature", but also its own joys and worries. "We old people with white hair, like our younger brothers, have tasks that give meaning to our existence.

(Hesse 2013: 141)

The Czech philosopher Patočka (2006b) in his study *The writer and his thing (To the philosophy of literature)* in connection with considerations *about things, about the writer*, but also about the philosopher, the scientist, looked for what unites them and what is the difference between them. We know the old, age-old dispute between *philosophy* and *poetry*. Plato reproached the poets for having too low a concept of divinity and humanity - poems inconsistent with the true idea of being, truth, i.e., eternity. Nevertheless, even he himself was shown that the deepest ideas of philosophy cannot be expressed without poetry, myth, image, only with logos, only with abstract discourse. Poets, as Patočka stated, the greatest ones, took Plato's criticism to heart... and began to interpret (depict - describe) the world no longer as the work of *fate* (*fatum*) and *coincidence*, but of meaningful purposefulness, the human soul as immortal and eternally responsible for his deeds. According to Patočka, both Virgil and Dante are proof of this, because "Dante's work is a Catholic restyled myth about the cave" (Patočka 2006b: 889-890).

This note by Patočka is *fragmentary*, its continuation (perhaps on several sheets) is *unfortunately* missing. When we read this text further, Patočka (Ibid.) thinks about Nietzsche's solution to the problem of meaning through the moment and Dostoyevsky, about his insight into the depths of human life, through a different lens from Nietzsche's.

Patočka described Dostoyevsky - *the poet of human existence* - as the discoverer of a new *continent*, and that *new* continent was man infinitely interested in being precisely because he is a finite being. Dostoyevsky believed, like Columbus, that he "only found his way back to Christian theology of a mystical character" (Patočka 2006b: 891). With such an interpretation, Patočka claims, it cannot help us in our search for meaning. According to him, Dostoyevsky has indicated a lot and sees possible help in Heidegger in his *Sein und Zeit* (1927), where the concept of anxiety is analysed as something that is always present in our life and ready to emerge, as well as in the text *Was ist Metaphysik?* But despite all the reservations about Dostoyevsky, Patočka states that Dostoyevsky's analyses seem to go further from this point of view: the author of the turn is not a person, but something deeper in him - it is this that can then form the basis for the mystical interpretation of its author. It is important for our problem, emphasized Patočka "that the question of meaning is not posed correctly when a person treats meaning as its originator" (Patočka 2006b: 891).

Life drama: Hamlet and Don Quixote

In the beginning, we talked about the thoughts-meditations of the poet Abaj, or the philosophers Descartes and Montaigne, or writers, and it was not accidental. Our reflections on *man* will be in the spirit of returning to the works of poets, which are an inherent part of our cultural memory, the treasure house of European culture. It is strange that *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* were created *almost* at the same time. Yes, we can argue about it. There is no doubt that each of the two works has a different warmth, a different life, a different blood in it - because they were created under different suns - one under the sun of the cold *North* and the other under the

sun of the hot South. We will work with the texts of Shestov, who directly or indirectly influenced entire generations of not only Russian, but also Western, European philosophers, because many of them were lucky enough to meet and listen to the original, often provocative lectures of Shestov in Paris at the University of Paris - at the Sorbonne, where, after emigrating from Russia, he worked together with Berdjaev and many other emigrants to co-create the present-day form of Europe and European humanity. It is the two of them who are associated with the emergence of existentialism, which was also close to them through Dostoevsky and Russian spirituality.

Another source and source for us is the Spanish philosopher, aesthetician, and essayist Ortega y Gasset. It was he who, in the book *Meditations on Quixote* (1914), captured the tragic nature of human life through *love* and *hate*, creation and destruction, joining and dividing. "Inside every thing lies the germ of possible fullness. An *open* and noble *soul* feels the interest to develop it to perfection, to be helpful to the cause so that it reaches this fullness. And that is love - love for the perfection of the beloved" (Ortega y Gasset 2007: 8). Love, wrote Ortega y Gasset, is *the divine architect who descended to earth* (Ibid.).

Patočka (1907-1977), like Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) who is a generation older than Patočka and a contemporary of Heidegger (1889-1976), liked to return to ancient Greece, to the beginnings and European roots. "Tragedy, no matter how paradoxical it sounds", emphasized Patočka, "with all the emphasis on fateful necessity, dictated by divine forces... is nevertheless a tragedy of freedom" (Patočka 1990: 30). A tragic action, a tragic life takes place in an atmosphere of *suffering*. Patočka was very well equipped with languages, as he was, so to speak, not only a talented philosopher, historian of philosophy, but also a philologist, and he had very good contacts with Russian emigrants in Czechoslovakia and could also read Russian philosophers whose works he translated.

Solovjov in the work produced at the end of his life, *The Drama of Plato's Life*⁵ (1898), when he concluded after a long philosophical-historical analysis of the *Socrates Case* - the philosopher Socrates, who found himself in a dispute with Athens, with his hometown, in his old age, that Socrates had to die as a criminal, which was a tragic blow right at the beginning of Plato's life.

However, historical reality is much deeper and more expressive than poetic fantasizing. Let's take e.g., Shakespeare's work. In the play *Hamlet*, the robber murders the father of the young Hamlet thanks to the compulsion of his base passions. Hamlet's natural feeling and natural commitment to his family compel him to punish the murderer and avenge his father. However, it is not so easy for him, because his mother also participated in the murder. The hero of the drama is trapped - he is trapped in a circle of fratricide, husband murder, regicide, usurpation of the throne and double or triple infidelity. His psyche falls into an irresolvable split. He finds in himself a contradiction between consciousness and will, between feeling and temperament. But, this is undoubtedly a magnificent example of a *tragic situation*, which is worthy of the greatest poet.

(Solovjov 1997: 51, emphasis by the author)

Solovjov (1997) immediately added that such a situation has meaning and justification in a pagan society, where the moral obligation to avenge the father applies - where *blood feud* is decisive. For a heathen, this is, as Solovjov expressed it, a completely natural law, it is the law of blood, the law of *blood revenge*. For a Christian, however, this law does not apply at all. In this context, Solovjov stated that Hamlet, in order to have drama, had to believe in the law of blood revenge and at the same time be unable to fulfil the command of any law... "so that this

man is only a thinker, or if he likes a passive and not at all active man” (Solovyov 1997: 55, emphasis by the author). Soloviev did not want to analyse the character of Hamlet, because it would be useless to repeat what has already been done, by this he meant Turgeneev's well-known and excellent analysis of this character in *Hamlet and Don Quixote* (1980). And here I put in italics a word that may not seem strange to us at all - *thinker*. However, it is not just such an ordinary word at all.

If Solovyov (1997) was pointing to an ancient tragedy, then there the family came into conflict with the fact that the old laws of the family way of life were being broken; the essence of the tragic was that the law was bifurcated. Rod is omnipotent, but who is its representative? Who is the representative of the family - mother or father? Which natural union is truer - matriarchy or patriarchy? Father Florenskij (1994) and later psychoanalysis will also build on this in a certain way. However, for Solovyov, neither Orestes nor Hamlet was the supporting and determining factor. He focused his attention on Socrates and Plato, on the dispute between Socrates and Athens, where the whole tragedy lies in the fact that “Athens - the best social environment in all of humanity at that time - could not bear within itself the simple and pure embodiment of the principle of truth and justice” (Solovyov 1997: 60). Solovyov pointed out the dramatic turn of the life of the society, when *evil* engulfed the whole society - and so for the saint, the servant of the truth - there was nothing left but death.

How is it even possible to live in such an evil realm in which a saint must die? Well, let's see what this "to be or not to be" is about, which Plato inevitably had to begin to solve over the corpse of the legally and publicly poisoned Socrates, deeper and more significant than the Hamletian «to be or not to be», which was caused by the illegal, i.e., the criminal, secret and essentially accidental poisoning of his father. It is clear that only a mature and internally rich personality like Plato could consciously experience and feel the full burden of the tragedy of this state.

(Ibid. 60-61)

Hamlet, after the violent death of his *biological* father-king, asks ‘to be or not to be’ - what he means is - should I Hamlet *be or not be*? This is a purely *personal* question. But when Plato asked, after the death of his *spiritual* father-philosopher - so his, Plato's question ‘to be or not to be’ - was not a personal question, but ‘to be or not to be’ was a universal question – “can or cannot truth exist on earth?” (Ibid. 61).

Although Hamlet considered it necessary to avenge his father, his indecisive nature did not allow him to fulfil this apparent duty. However, this case is unique, because “a person who professes a religion that forbids him to take revenge, does not have to observe the customs and laws of revenge in any case” (Ibid. 52). In the same way, the whole plot of the tragedy - the hero's father was killed in the most disgusting way, he was deprived of his mother, he was expelled from the succession to the throne - would become dysfunctional if the hero was, say, not a Christian, but at least a Stoic, a Buddhist, or a follower of the modern Tolstoian principle of non-harming, non-violence. In that case, there would be only one option left - *resignation*. Solovyov writes, yes, he could be silent, he could grumble, but there is no counter-action at all - and thus no *tragedy*.

If Shakespeare wanted to create a great tragedy from Hamlet's painful situation as we know it today, he had to create *special* conditions that do not follow from the essence of the given situation. This means that, first, it was necessary that all the horrors that occurred at Elsinore should fall on a man who, despite the fact that he actually considered

himself a Christian, sincerely recognized the necessity of bloody retribution. If this blind faith were not there, i.e. j. if Hamlet had begun to doubt his apparent duty, or if he had thought even for a moment that enemies should be forgiven, the whole tragedy would have been lost.

(Ibid. 53).

While thinking about Hamlet, Patočka (2006b) was interested in the opinion of the writer Mann, who was trying to understand the *tragic* hero through a philosophical aspect - thinking. The poet puts himself into his own creations, that it is he himself who is captured in them, and yet I conclude that in essence Mann (1976) is far *beyond* the theory of empathy, that he expresses through his own means the idea of the meaning of life, the idea of reflection of life in fantasy (Patočka 2006b: 289). I believe that the solution here is provided by Husserl's concept of the life world.

Through Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of phenomenology and his teacher, Patočka shows that what we originally live in “is not a ‘world in itself’, to which we gradually elaborate by eliminating anthropomorphism, but something completely other” (Patočka 2006b: 289). With that ‘deviation’ from the mundane and the everyday, the voice opens up. They come from far away, even though it is very important to be able to hear this sound of the world. The poet collects and reveals, he goes back from the world to the origin, to the sources - the echoic character of the world, i.e., an *echo* in which, as Patočka stated, he constantly hears life through voices coming from afar, but also our voices - that very one the echo of the world is, however, constantly revealed and shown by the writer-poet. Therefore, it does not complete, complete, or add meaning, but simply collects and reveals it (Ibid.). The poet, according to Patočka, in his relationship to the world, that is being between life practice and philosophical reflections, stands in the middle, so to speak. Until now, we only had philosophers' opinions about the *writer and his cause*. However, we will reach for how the poets themselves understand it and how they are often close to philosophers and their ways of understanding.

According to Kudrova (2016), the poet Tsvetaeva (1892-1941) was close to the philosopher Shestov (1866-1938), as both of them had a knack for uncovering, exposing, “revealing the tragic, hiding behind the usual” (Kudrova 2016: 138, emphasis by the author). Tsvetaeva's image - the characteristics of a poet, an artist, a genius, is a matter of the poet's inner self, inner pain and torn soul. It is a matter of a deep rejection of the real world, governed by reason and strict rules, counts, numbers, measures and weights. This world is determined by strict causation and what is inherent in the poet's blood, internal, *spiritual* physics - where the everyday, the mundane, rules not at all - i.e. not the horizontal, but the vertical as what is determining in the world of the poet. In 1923, Tsvetaeva had three poems dedicated to the theme of Hamlet - *Dialogue of Hamlet with Conscience*, *Ophelia in Defence of the Queen*, and *Ophelia - to Hamlet*. For Tsvetaeva, Hamlet – the Danish prince, as well as for Shestov, is a portrayal of coldness and reasoning. Where there should be a place for weeping and repentance, Hamlet only makes long-winded empty speeches. Hamlet is cold, and as if he is not even capable of love and human-warmed compassion, he is separated from other people by something like a glass wall, a dead coldness radiated from him. All this is as if a mirror image of a person of that time, the time of the modern world, which is just beginning to form and gain strength. It is about the *modern world*, where the *calculating*, *scientific* and *experimenting* reason and the coldness of the petrified heart have become decisive.

Shestov devoted himself to the topic of Hamlet for a long time because Shakespeare was particularly close to him. Even the initial, early works of Shestov⁶ in newspapers, signed

only with initials or pseudonyms, e.g. *Black, Reader*, or *L.Š.*, from the period 1895-1898 can tell us a lot. His article *Georg Brandes on Hamlet* (1895) is actually a reaction to parts of the book on Shakespeare by the Danish critic Brandes published in the magazine *Russian Mind*. Shestov was convinced that the tragedy, the 'cross' of Hamlet, is that he lacks the essentials - faith and love. These words may seem strange, but they have a deep meaning both in relation to Shakespeare's Hamlet and Shestov. In Hamlet he saw and revealed a great sufferer who is aware of his guilt, his insides, his heart is constantly *torn* by remorse.

After this article, Shestov began to work on other texts by Shakespeare, and the book *Shakespeare and his Critic Brandes* (1898), signed by Lev Shestov, was created. However, there has already been a certain shift in the evaluation of Hamlet. Hamlet continues to be a child of scepticism and eternal doubts, but his father's will is not what hangs over his head like a sword of Damocles... The *tragic* hero is not supposed to be just an executor of what the voice of his ancestors tells him - the laws of blood. We can say that Shestov, started to fight for an important and essential thing - the ability - *to see, read and understand*, hermeneutically - well ahead of how Gadamer only started to build hermeneutics, to grasp the mysterious, alive and addressed to contemporaries and the future, which the poet put into the work, into the words and lines, into the soul of his heroes. Shestov's searches are full of controversies, where arguments and passions combine, because philosophy, especially for Shestov, is about, in the words of Plotinus, '*the essential*' (Shestov 1890).

Ortega y Gasset: Surface and depth

Surface and *depth*, *depth* and *surface* - these are the two things that Ortega y Gasset thought about in *Meditations on Quixote* (2007). These are two things that are inseparable from each other. In this context, he asked *how many trees make a forest?*

The forest and the city are two essentially deep things, and the deep is fated to become the surface if it wants to show itself. If I have two dozen stout oaks and massive ash trees around me. Is it a forest? Of course not: they are the trees I see from the forest. A real forest consists of trees that I cannot see. The forest is invisible from the beginning - that's why its name retains an air of mystery in all languages.

(Ortega y Gasset 2007: 28)

The forest is something natural, original, deep, mysterious. The forest is a depth, a hidden mystery that can be revealed, revealed to show, to reveal what is invisible. The Greek name *alétheia* originally "meant the same as the later *apocalypse* - discovery, unveiling, literally the removal of a veil, a covering. If someone wants to teach us some truth, let him position us in such a way that we discover it ourselves" (Ibid.). The forest was supposed to teach us that there was a first plan of reality, and it forcibly imposes itself through colours, sounds, sensual pleasures and pains. But behind all that, it is different, higher, deeper, something which requires effort, attention, struggle and will.

Science, art, justice, decency, religion, these are the spheres of reality which do not barbarously take possession of our person, as hunger and frost do; they exist only for those who care for them". According to Ortega y Gasset, the book *Don Quixote* is an ideal forest. "It's another case of depth: the depth of a book, the greatest of books. *Don Quixote* is a book-escorzo par excellence. There was a time in Spanish life when they refused to see the depth in Quixote.

(Ibid. 34-35)

The digital age means the rise of artificial memory. Paper is our homeland. What cannot be put on paper, it's as if it does not even exist for us. Flusser in the book *Die Schrift. Hat Schreiben Zukunft? Does writing have a future?* (2007) stated that we are simply bookworms. We chewed paper for so many millennia, while this paper-mâché was fed by our saliva.

We live from books and for books. It can be seen that the book forms an intermediate stage on the way from the forest to the land of artificial intelligence. There is always a piece of forest in it: The German word for book Buch is the name of a tree Latin *libre* means tree bark and comes from the Greek *lepis* (peel) which in turn comes from the ancient word *lep* (to peel) the book was plucked from the forest and its leaves say what they're talking right now. But the book also represents a piece of artificial intelligence, because it is an artificial memory support and contains information computed from bits (letters).

(Flusser 2007: 98)

Yes, the *depth* of Don Quixote is not obvious, it is necessary to have what is necessary for that, which certain people, other times, and times (including ours) may not have at all. The ability to *see*, the ability to *hear*, the ability to read - this is what Ortega y Gasset had in mind when he previously mentioned Nietzsche, who was close to him, who pillaged an age in which everything great and noble was denied and clarity could not captivate the heart. Such an age cannot be characterized as an age of barbarism and dullness.

Just as there is guidance, which is insight, there is also reading, which is the reading of the interior, thoughtful reading, *intelligere*. Only to such a person will *Quixote's* deep meaning be revealed (...) Meditation is a movement by which we leave the surface like the shores of the land and feel thrown into a finer element without material points of support. At the same time, we rely exclusively on ourselves, thanks to the rise of our own forces, we float in an ethereal sphere inhabited by forms without weight and gravity.

(Ortega y Gasset 2007: 38)

We are like a tightrope walker - tense and worried because it only takes one step, a mistake, sometimes a small inattention - and we fall down. But at the same time, during this intellectual voyage, perhaps rather like aerial swimmers, when flying up to the heights, in the words of Ortega y Gasset, *intellectual dizziness* seizes us.

Is there any deeper book than this low, mocking novel? Finally, what is *Quixote* to us? Are we sure what he wants to tell us about life? The brief flashes of light that fell on him so far came from the souls of strangers: Schelling, Heine, Turgenev... Momentary and insufficient clarifications. For these men, Quixote was a curiosity, not a matter of destiny for them as it is for us.

(Ibid. 58)

Ortega y Gasset (2007) constantly works with a purely Spanish perspective, referring and pointing to the ancient past. His returns are interesting and his views of ancient Greece returns to origins and roots and the national characteristics and peculiarities between Greek and Roman, German, French, Spanish and Russian or Italian mentalities, past and present. If we were to reach out to other authors who devoted themselves to the analysis of Don Quixote, perhaps their point of view would be diametrically different. I am referring to the Russian-American writer Nabokov (1899-1977), who expressed, in his lectures about this novel, many original and provocative opinions that went beyond the usual ideas, schemes and statements about this 'book of all books'. Nevertheless, none of them denied the *genius* of Cervantes and his immortal hero - the ingenious knight Don Quixote de la Mancha, this old rough book, a great fairy tale that enchants, entices and constantly amazes its readers.

Ortega y Gasset (2007) commented on the writer Turgenev and his text dedicated to Quixote, albeit with recognition, but at the same time, also as a not entirely satisfactory treatment of the topic, nevertheless it is necessary to recognize that before him, this text *Hamlet and Don Quixote* (1860), written by Turgenev, was expressed by several, not at all insignificant, philosophers, poets-writers and critics. It is enough to mention Tolstoy, and above all the philosopher, poet and mystic Solovyov (1853-1900), a younger contemporary of the German poet-philosopher Nietzsche (1844-1900). It will also not be unimportant if we realize the different approach and the overall intention with which Ortega y Gasset worked and Turgenev fifty years before him. Therefore, it is necessary to see and not to underestimate the time and the time of creation of the work, to have the ability to grasp the topic and problems through time and contexts. However, they were certainly united by the same thing - the effort to understand the poet, which Turgenev expressed through Goethe's idea: "*Whoever wants to understand a poet must enter his domain*" (Turgenev 1980: 330). If we want to understand the poet, we have to discover his world and share it - stay in it for a while - be in it together with him.

Turgenev: sketches of the antipodes of Hamlet and Don Quixote

The Russian writer and poet Turgenev (1818-1883) had an interesting text called *Hamlet and Don Quixote*. The speech was delivered on 10 January 1860 at a public reading organized for the Society for the Aid of Writers and Scientists.

The first edition of Shakespeare's tragedy "Hamlet" and the first part of Cervantes' "Don Quixote" were published in the same year, at the beginning of the 17th century. This fortuitous event proved to be of great importance to us; it was the convergence of the mentioned works that led us to a whole range of ideas. We ask for permission to share these thoughts with you, counting on your kindness in advance. 'He who wants to understand the poet must enter his area,' - said Goethe; - the novelist has no right to similar demands; however, he hopes that readers - or listeners will want to travel with him, to be pilgrims in his search.

(Turgenev 1980: 330)

If we talked about the fact that the opinions of writers or poets can cause disagreement, then Turgenev expected it and was well aware of it. Such is the fate of a genius, Turgenev stated, that his work, the words of his heroes, are understood and accepted in different ways, or strongly rejected. We have to agree with Turgenev that many commentaries have already

been written on Hamlet. But it is equally true that many more will be written in the future. And how different were the opinions and criticisms of these ideas and also the assessment of the work itself. Perhaps, according to Turgenev, the situation with the work of *Don Quixote*, which was created under the hot sun of the south, the glow of its rays, is quite different.

Hamlet and *Don Quixote* were created at the same time. In these *two* figures, it seems that two *types* of people are depicted, in which the opposite peculiarities of human nature are captured. There is, as it were, an axis, the opposite ends of which are represented by these two heroes, who are, in a sense, antipodes. Russian poet and philosopher Ivanov (1866-1949), Hellenist, historian and symbolist, in the text *Crisis of Individualism* (1905) made a note or correction to Turgenev's text:

Three hundred years have passed since the writing of the admirable work of Cervantes: for three hundred years Don Quixote travels the world. Three centuries do not know the glory and the brilliant martyrdom of one of the first 'heroes of our time': the one who is connected to us in body and soul. *Turgenev was amazed at the coincidence*, but it turned out to be a chronological error. Turgenev thought that in the same year that the first part of *Don Quixote* was published, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was also first published. Today we know that the English tragedy was most likely published already in 1602. On the other hand, the whole group of deeply thought-provoking works of Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*) in their entirety bring back our memories to the era of popularization of Cervantes' work. If we are to immediately attach the name of the Danish prince to the anniversary of the knight de la Mancha, let that name be *King Lear*, or *Macbeth*. The whole host of their great shadows is present with us at the great anniversary of the new work. These eternal human types do not look only to eternity. They also look at us in a strange and penetrating way, even though we are separated by three centuries.

(Ivanov 2010: 38)

Turgenev compared *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*, - to offer us these two types of human nature, where they are, as it were, two ideals, two possible orientations in the direction of life. One of them is comical, ridiculous, swarming, *Don Quixote* - he is the prototype of a person who, according to the poet, will never come to terms with the existing state of the world. *Quixote* will forever fight against disorder, evil and injustice, even if he himself gets into difficult situations and conflicts many times. According to Turgenev (1980), the world needs *Don Quixote*, despite his ridiculousness and naivety, it needs his goodness, patience, the warmth of his heart, it needs his naive faith in man.

What does *Don Quixote* represent above all? Faith above all; faith in something eternal, unshakable, in the truth, in a word, in the truth, located outside of any individual person, which is difficult to achieve, but which requires service and sacrifice. *Don Quixote* serves an ideal, and for that he will sacrifice anything, undergo all kinds of hardships, even lay down his life.

(Turgenev 1980: 331)

His life has the value of how and with what it can be realized - ideal, truth and justice here on earth. If he were to live only for himself - to *care* only for himself - he would consider such a thing shameful. The action of *Don Quixote* is linked by *one and essential*.

What is *Hamlet* like? – asks Turgenev – what does he himself represent? *Hamlet*, for him is the typical analysis: egoism, and inability to believe. *Hamlet* finds nothing, no starting point on which to lean, to hang his soul, his Self. *Hamlet* is very educated, he has a sharp mind,

but his mind is in constant doubt, he is a sceptic. According to Turgenev, Hamlet “doubts everything, does not spare himself at all; he has a mind too developed to be satisfied with what he finds in himself: he is aware of his weakness, but all self-awareness is strength; hence the irony, the opposite of Don Quixote's enthusiasm” (Turgenev 1980: 332-333). Hamlet curses himself with pleasure, with exaggeration, constantly observes himself, and just as constantly looks inside himself. Hamlet knows his own shortcomings to the smallest detail, “he despises them, he despises himself - at the same time, we can say, he lives and feeds on contempt. He does not believe in himself - and he is vain, he himself does not know what he wants and why, for what he lives - he does not know why he is attached to life” (Ibid.).

Turgenev's thoughts are deep and interesting. The initially jagged, uncertain contours of these two *antipodes* - Hamlet and Don Quixote - become more and more certain and clear under his hand. According to Turgenev, Don Quixote expresses the ability to find and discover that

The Don Quixotes are founders and the Hamlets - they are the ones who elaborate. They will ask us, and perhaps the Hamlets can, are they able to work something out if they only doubt everything and *everything*? We will answer this question that there are no complete Don Quixotes, it is only a borderline expression of two directions, they are paths outlined by poets of two different directions, paths. Life moves towards them in its efforts, but it never reaches them. We must not forget that, as the principle of analysis is brought to the tragic in Hamlet, so the principle of enthusiasm is brought to the comic in Don Quixote, but in life the completely comic and completely tragic meet very rarely.

(Ibid. 345)

Hamlet's realization of Horatio's importance does him credit. This is the testimony of the fact that he recognized the high dignity of man, his noble efforts, which even scepticism could not prevent him from doing. I want to believe that potential interested parties will be happy to reach for this great text of a Russian-European writer who was so philosophical that he influenced many philosophers and even Heidegger, thinking about the philosophy of Nietzsche and nihilism, could not but mention Turgenev as the originator of nihilism, except another with his novel *Fathers and Children*.

Hamlet gains a great deal in our eyes from Horatio being attached to him. This figure-character is wonderful, and it occurs quite often in our time. In Horatio we have a type of follower, a disciple in the best sense of the word. A person with a stoic character, a hot heart, but a little limited in reason, he himself is aware of his deficiency, he is modest, which is very rare among these people, limited people; he longs to receive advice, guidance, and therefore honours and respects the reasonable Hamlet, is devoted to him with all his honest soul, and does not expect the same reciprocity. One of the most important merits of Hamlet/s is that they create and develop people like Horatio, people who are able to further develop the seeds of ideas they have received in their hearts and spread them around the world.

(Turgenev 1980: 345)

Turgenev ended his speech, poem, composition with the words of the apostle, who said that ‘everything passes - only love remains’. Yes, love—a word so ringing and sweet to the human ear and heart, and yet still as unknown and mysterious. The basic directions of two essential, diametrically different, and opposite directions of the human spirit. Turgenev, an

excellent and recognized writer, a great rhetorician, fulfilled his goal - to address the listeners, to evoke the birth of an idea through his own reflections, to restore the ability to think - so that they would think not only about what he said wisely, truthfully and profoundly, but also - and above all in true philosophy goes - to think about time and us - about ourselves and our life, the meaning of our life. In this, Turgenev saw the meaning of the legacy of tragic poets for us and our present.

His followers followed up on his ideas, in agreement or with reservations. According to Ivanov (2010), if Hamlet and Don Quixote stand against each other, then in a certain interpretation we can see here the new and the old, where Hamlet is closed in his solitude, in solitude he hesitates before the new, as yet unknown, but also reveals a threat of unknown and untested, unmarked sidewalks. Hamlet hesitates whether to marry (or is the old one present in him, long lived?, as some interpret him), and Don Quixote, this opposite of Hamlet, "it may be said that no new action is born in him, but the old rises from the dead" (Ivanov 2010: 41). There is something indomitable and stubborn about Don Quixote, despite all the hardships, he is unbreakable and impossible to subdue. He bends, lays down on the ground like a blade of grass, only to rise again after a while and straighten his old, sore back. Thus, he is a partaker, this Prométheus de la Mancha, of something great and sublime, mysterious and eternal, much higher and greater than man.

We also found a dedicated interpretation of Shakespeare in Herder (1744-1803) in his texts, where he devoted himself especially to literature, and here he also invites us to read and think about the aforementioned plays by Shakespeare. Herder (2006) began his interpretation of Shakespeare in the text *William Shakespeare* with these words:

William Shakespeare was born in 1564, a man who did not know Greek, he knew little of the Greeks, and if so, then only in translations, but he himself was a happy son of a good destiny. From the former wool merchant he became an actor and dramatic poet to such a far-reaching extent that if we call the Greeks *the poets of the Hellenic heroic cycle*, we must call Shakespeare the poet of the world cycle. *Shakespeare* wrote the tragic play Hamlet. Hamlet is his Orestes. They were deeply mistaken in his character, who passed him off as a *fool* (Hamlet), a creature who is usually called a good man; Shakespeare's subtle, deep-thinking drawing clearly refutes this. A crime has occurred; the father was maliciously murdered. Hamlet's clairvoyant soul senses something.

(Herder 2006: 101)

Likewise, Schelling (1755-1854) in the *Philosophy of Art* (1802-1803 Jena, 1804-1805 Wurburg), which is a set of his lectures which the philosopher himself processed into a book, wrote about modern dramatic poetry:

I now approach the interpretation of tragedy and comedy by modern authors. In order not to get lost in this vast sea, I will try to focus attention on a few main moments (...) The first thing we have to start with is that the foundations of modern drama lie in the mixture of opposites, that is, above all, the very mixture of the tragic and the comic.

(Schelling 2007: 608)

It is very rare for a poet to be a master of both - comedy as well as tragedy, and that is exactly what Shakespeare is. According to Schelling, the poet Shakespeare

he is at the same time gentle in the comic, exciting and funny in *Hamlet*, and rough (in the scenes with Falstaff) without ever becoming down-to-earth; but [can be] tragically torn (in *Lear*), punishing (in *Macbeth*), delicious, moving and propitiating in *Romeo and Juliet* and in several plays of a mixed nature. If we examine the fabric of modern tragedy, it would have to have a dignity at least worthy of mythology in its most perfect expression.

(Ibid. 609)

Shestov appreciated the same delicacy of 'pen drawing' in Shakespeare, when he compared his work *Macbeth* with how roughly, almost with a hammer and a carpenter's chisel, Dostoevsky worked when he addressed a topic close to him - murder, the psyche of a murderer and the relationship between a fallen hero and a poet. Here we would like to mention that Shestov was convinced that if someone wants to understand Russian literature more deeply, he should read and study the best, which are the works of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy. Shestov in the work *Potestas clavium - The Power of the Keys* in the section *Vyacheslav the Great (On the Characteristics of Russian Decay)* wrote: "I think that every Russian writer can be best understood through his relationship to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy" (Shestov 1993: 247).

Let's go back to our topic, which is tragedy and the tragic hero. Shestov in the book *Shakespeare and his Critic Brandes* (1898) stated that "to unravel the mystery of Lear's soul is impossible if you have not lived through his tragedy" (Shestov 1911: 43). Well, this tragedy happened in the soul of Shakespeare.

The one who lived through the feelings of Lear, who, together with Shakespeare, was able to enter that dark, impenetrable cloud, where suddenly, after many years of safe joys, the unhappy old man ended up - that's why this big question "зачем - why? – for what?" will never cease to exist. Weak, small people run away from him, try to forget him, cover themselves from him with everyday worries and joys. Great people, however, look directly into the face of the resurrected ghost - and *either die or clear up their lives*. Shakespeare was not afraid of the fateful role. What it cost him, we will never know. But there can be no doubt that he bought the immortal fame of a great tragedian at a terrible price. He himself experienced the horror of the tragedy. He understood it and explained its meaning to us - he explained how it all happens and what it will do to a person.

(Ibid. 43-44)

Conclusion

How should we proceed with Shakespeare? Which is the 'Right Way'? Should we go through the reading of his works, without the biography, or should we go the other way around - through the reading-study of his biography and only then by reading his works in detail can we understand what this great poet-playwright was thinking about and what he was working on? Sometimes they choose a quite strange, even unique approach. Then, as they have their own life experiences, they begin to read and 'study', to think about his works, so that through them, through the thoughts of this poet, who was long ago identified as the greatest among all poets. Such is the procedure of an amateur, taught by life and his own life experience. "Cabinet people have always stood and will always stand far from what was happening in the soul of the great poet who threw himself headlong into life" (Shestov 1911: 46). These cabinet people, which is quite possible, will be the only ones in the role of interpreters of Shakespeare for some time, Shestov wrote, but what is much worse, they will end up smoothing everything so much that the full spontaneity of life, its storminess and unrestrainedness, which is portrayed to us in the

way they confuse the poet's dramas with their 'looming on the surface' as a confirmation of the 'unity of the composition' (Ibid. 46-47). Shestov has no desire to lay down his arms and resign himself to the scholarship' of the cabinet people, these fools. Criticism of Brandes, who, like many others, does not want to learn from Shakespeare because he himself knows *everything* beautifully. Brandes writes his book only to "show that 300 years ago, the greatest of poets knew exactly the same 'everything', and that therefore his, Brandes' understanding of life is the most correct" (Ibid. 47)

According to Brandes, it is precisely in Hamlet - this first philosophical drama of the modern age - that a typical contemporary man appears for the first time with a deep sense of the contradiction between the ideal and the harsh reality, with the awareness of a deep gap between his own powers and the task. According to this statement, the modern man is smart, he has a very nimble, nimble mind, but he does not have his own gaiety at all. He has cruelty and tenderness in him, he constantly postpones, delays things, and at the same time he is unusually impatient. According to Brandes, this is the contemporary person who is embodied in Shakespeare, in the poet who merged with his hero, with Hamlet. Not only did he join him in an inseparable unity, but he also felt the same as Hamlet. How does critic Brandes know all this? He asked Shestov's question in order to answer it immediately: "Brandes learned this not from the poet's biography, but (...) He read everything in the poet's dramas, thanks to the fact that he read them with an open receptive ear with common sense and a soul accessible to the understanding of genius" (Ibid.). Critics like to believe in their learning that they can uncover the most secret depths of a genius's thinking. Shestov showed the naivety not only of Brandes, but of many so-called connoisseurs of Shakespeare. Scientific reason fails before the philosophy of tragedy because there neither logic nor the usual arithmetical numbers $2 \times 2 = 4$ apply. Dostoyevsky's paradoxist clearly showed that reason shows man's desire to reason and find order, but wanting is a manifestation of the whole of life, and life sometimes has strange mathematics where $2 \times 2 = 5$.

This is the plot of the tragedy *Hamlet*. Not for fun, not for psychological experience, Shakespeare in *Hamlet* threw a weak man on the open sea, as a prey to all contradictions and problems, just as in *King Lear*, the poet did it not at all for the effect, although tragic, to force the king to support his poor, grey, proud head under the raw blows of heartless daughters. The characters of Hamlet and Lear were not the cause of their miseries, nor did Shakespeare look for the causes at that time. 'Why' didn't satisfy him anymore. He asked himself: 'For what?' Already in the first act we have a sad Hamlet in front of us.

(Shestov 1911: 61-62)

This is no longer something like abstract sadness, he - Prince Hamlet - is troubled by his mother's hasty marriage, and he is the one who made the prince's poor heart sad... We see that here Shestov is very close to the analysis of the German classic by Herder in the text which we stated. It is worth mentioning the ideas of Hegel (1968) in *Aesthetics*, where he noticed *characters* - the depiction of individual characters in Cervantes and Shakespeare. Despite the comical delusion

is preserved in Don Quixote what we highlighted earlier in Shakespeare. Cervantes also created his hero as an originally noble character, endowed with many-sided gifts of the spirit, which at the same time constantly interests us. Don Quixote is a soul who in his madness is completely sure of himself and his thing, or rather madness is only in the fact that he is and remains so sure of himself and his thing.

(Hegel 1968: 398)

The novel *Don Quixote de la Mancha* was an object of deep respect for Dostoevsky. Such books are sent, Dostoevsky claimed, to mankind once every few centuries. What particularly amazed Dostoevsky was the relationship between Sancho and Don Quixote, where Sancho, the embodiment of ‘common sense’, cleverness and the ‘golden middle road’, doubted many things, but at the same time sincerely believed, with the greatness of his heart, in the great intellect of his knight. According to Dostoevsky, in this book the “fatal secret of man and all mankind” is shown (Losskij 1946: 120). The cold calculating mind of science, the professorial philosophy obsessed with the pursuit of scientific credit, are subject to the power of numbers and statistics, which provide an alibi and a safe armour against the essential, which is life and thought. Millions of Hamlets came to life in the souls of us and our contemporaries. The tragic rupture of time periodically repeats itself and throws us before the question *How to live in the name of what should we act and suffer?* The hope of salvation is not given by Hamlet with his cold reasoning, but by the madness of Don Quixote, who, despite his madness, beatings and naivety, did not stop believing in the goodness and justice of this world with a childlike sincerity.

Notes

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² Nietzsche, F. 2005. O užitku a škodlivosti historie pro život. In Nietzsche, F. *Nečasové úvahy*. Translated by Krejčí, J. and Kouba, P. Praha: Oikúmené 2005, pp. 77-147.

³ Dahrendorf, R. 2008. *Pokoušení neslobody. Intelektuálové v časech skoušek*. Translated by Zoubková, J. Praha: Nakladatelství H&H, 2008, pp. 112-113.

⁴ Nezník, P. 2009. Patočka, Leibniz a dejiny filozofie. In Tholt, P., Nezník, P. (eds.): *Patočkova a subjektívna fenomenológia*. Košice: UPJŠ 2009, pp. 124-147; see also Markov, B. 2017. Obrazy Evropy u Nicše, Dostojevskogo, Shestova i Patočki. In Nezník, P., Markov, B. et al. *Dostojevskij a Nietzsche. Apoteóza nezakorenenosti. Za a proti...* Košice: UPJŠ, 2017, pp. 57-76.

⁵ See also Solovjov, V. 2002. *Zmysel lásky*. Translated by Komorovský, J. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2002.

⁶ See also Achutin, A. V. 1993. *Odinokij myslitel'*. In Shestov, L. *Sočinenija v 2-x tomach*. T. 1. Moskva: Nauka, pp. 3-14.

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