



**Hamletianism
and unmasking in
german literature
of the XX century**

HAMLETIANISM AND UNMASKING IN GERMAN LITERATURE OF THE XX CENTURY

HAMLETIANISMO Y DESENMASCARAMIENTO EN LA LITERATURA ALEMANA DEL SIGLO XX

ABSTRACT

A large number of research works all over the world is devoted to the questions of Shakespeare study and reception of Shakespeare in Germany which once again proves high scale of his works and their influence on world artistic consciousness. The present article studies the change in the perception of the image of Hamlet in Germany in different historic periods whilst the main emphasis is put on the evolution of motives of self-condemnation and unmasking used by German writers of the XX century alongside with identification of the main character with the image of Hamlet. The basic research method is comparative contrastive method combined with the complex descriptive text analysis. Comparison of Germany with the image of Hamlet was formed in German artistic consciousness in the middle of the XIX century and was made public by the poet F. Freiligrath. This comparison simultaneously acquired morbid and self-accusing character. By the middle of the XX century Hamlet features of central characters are already acutely tied with sense of guilt both on personal crimes and on world evil. The culminating in this sense have become the novels by E. Weiss "Georg Letham: Physician and Murderer" (1932) and A. Doebelin "Hamlet oder Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende" ("Tales of a Long Night") (1946). Furthermore in the works written after World War II the motive of guilt has particularly historical interrelation. Later on Hamlet's motive of guilt transforms into accusations (M. Walser "The Black Swan" ("Der Schwarze Schwan", 1964)) and by the end of 1970s the central character identified with Hamlet diminishes and loses its former scale, tragedy of Hamlet's image, pathos of unmasking and humanistic vector of development.

KEY WORDS: reception of Shakespeare, reception of Hamlet in Germany, motive of unmasking, Hamletianism.

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RESUMEN

Una gran cantidad de trabajos de investigación en todo el mundo están dedicados a las preguntas del estudio de Shakespeare y la recepción de Shakespeare en Alemania, que una vez más demuestra la gran escala de sus obras y su influencia en la conciencia artística mundial. El presente artículo estudia el cambio en la percepción de la imagen de Hamlet en Alemania en diferentes períodos históricos, mientras que el énfasis principal se pone en la evolución de los motivos de autocondena y desenmascaramiento utilizados por los escritores alemanes del siglo XX junto con la identificación del personaje principal con la imagen de Hamlet. El método de investigación básica es el método contrastivo comparativo combinado con el análisis de texto descriptivo complejo. La comparación de Alemania con la imagen de Hamlet se formó en la conciencia artística alemana a mediados del siglo XIX y se hizo pública por el poeta F. Freiligrath. Esta comparación adquirió simultáneamente carácter morboso y autoacusado. A mediados del siglo XX, las características de Hamlet de los personajes centrales ya están estrechamente relacionadas con el sentimiento de culpabilidad tanto en los crímenes personales como en el mal mundial. El punto culminante en este sentido se han convertido en las novelas de E. Weiss "Georg Letham: médico y asesino" (1932) y A. Doebelin "Hamlet oder Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende" ("Cuentos de una larga noche") (1946). Además, en los trabajos escritos después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, el motivo de la culpa tiene una interrelación particularmente histórica. Más tarde, el motivo de culpabilidad de Hamlet se transforma en acusaciones (M. Walser, "El Cisne Negro" ("Der Schwarze Schwan", 1964)) y hacia fines de la década de 1970 el personaje central identificado con Hamlet disminuye y pierde su antigua escala, tragedia de Hamlet imagen, pathos de desenmascaramiento y vector humanista del desarrollo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: recepción de Shakespeare, recepción de Hamlet en Alemania, motivo de desenmascaramiento, Hamletianismo.

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INTRODUCTION

Works by Shakespeare have had great influence on intellectual life of Germany which revealed itself in various spheres from fictional and philosophical to political thought [1, 2, 3]. In German literature of XX century there is quite frequently observed the motive of German guilt, i.e. self-accusation or unmasking of the guilty. In a number of works the motive of guilt is tightly connected with the image of Hamlet to which German writers appeal not by coincidence. Reception of Shakespeare and Hamlet's image in Germany has had a long path beginning with XVI century when plays based on Shakespearean plots only started to be staged in Germany. S. Harwood writes about these plays and the first acquaintance of the Germans with Shakespearean Hamlet [3]. Translations made by J. Eschenburg and M. Wieland which gave an opportunity to German readers get acquainted with Shakespeare's works became an important stage in the XVIII century. During the Enlightenment when the problem of developing national drama principles, its forms, language, subjects and characters have become topical, Shakespeare became one of the literature masters as a counter to French writers. Merits of Shakespeare's drama were estimated by E. Lessing in his works [4]. During Storm and Stress (Sturm und Drang) the situation has considerably changed. Since this moment each literary epoch has always found something new in Shakespeare for itself and understood the image of Hamlet in its own mode. Representatives of Storm and Stress period appreciated Shakespeare and his works as the best master. Particularly during this period in Germany thanks to W. Goethe the cult of Hamlet starts to originate; he is thought to be a person of beautiful, clear, noble, highly-moral nature who died under exorbitant burden (of history and debt of honour). Goethe's representation of the Prince of Denmark as the basis with some or other changes would last in Germany within the whole of the XIX century. In Wei-

mar classicism literature interest to Shakespeare generally decreases but in the works by romanticists it picks up with new power. At that time as W. Kohlschmidt says Hamlet becomes an independent character not associated with the tragedy by Shakespeare. The image of the Prince starts to be reconsidered, it acquires more contradictions, inclinations to intellectual reflections, his doubts become the basis of mixture of facts and fiction [5]. At the end of the XVIII and first part of the XIX century great contribution of drawing together German culture and Shakespeare's works was made by A. W. Schlegel and J. L. Tieck translations which have become classical in Germany.

METHODS

By the middle of the XIX century there formed emotional identification of Hamlet with Germany which was declared by F. Freiligrath in his poem "Germany-Hamlet" (F. Freiligrath "Deutschland ist Hamlet", 1844). From now on the simile Germany-Hamlet is actively used as metaphor to characterize historical political situation of Germany. This idea is backed up by words of K. Larson: "Shakespeare is a valuable property (...) not just among publishers but among political ideologies and even nations (...). Writers like Shakespeare are valuable politically, both because of the prestige that attaches to them and because how we interpret and celebrate them helps to define our national values and identity" [6].

F. Freiligrath's poem reflects the notion of "Hamlet's disease" which is understood as suffering from one's own doubts and passivity. From the second part of the XIX century on the basis of this simile there increases tendency to overcome "Hamletism" of Germany and reach its opposition, i.e. identification with Fortinbras [8]. "Hamlet's disease" is actively criticized (especially after failed March revolution in 1848 and victory in Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871) almost till the outcome of World War I. Period of perceiving Hamlet as symbol of German inactivity and idle reflections ends by World War I; Hamlet's debt of honour transforms into the sense of specific German guilt which will quite frequently be revealed in German literature of the XX century on the basis of Hamlet's image.

Before the time national socialism wins power; there appear novels about Hamlet which express unhealthy atmosphere in so-

ciety and feeling of coming crisis (E. Weiss "Georg Letham: Physician and Murderer", 1931; G. Britting "The Story of Life of one Fatty whose Name was Hamlet", 1932 (E. Weiß "Georg Letham. Arzt und Mörder", 1931; G. Britting "Lebenslauf eines dicken Mannes, der Hamlet hieß", 1932). In these novels the image of Hamlet is presented to be sick, screwed up and with the feeling of guilt and obsession to death.

E. Weiss forms development of the main character Georg Letham (anagram Letham – Hamlet) as alternation of his acceptance and non-acceptance of existence as the consequence of uncontrolled sense of guilt. The scene of the novel evolves in the aspect of expiation of guilt. All sides of guilt are presented in the first part of the novel. The second part is devoted to the history of expiation of guilt. The guilt of the character is presented on three levels. The only personal crime of the main character is plot-forming murder of his wife committed by him. However the main character also takes inherited blame on himself. Firstly, it is the guilt of all-powerful father to his son for his mental destruction in childhood. Secondly, it is the world evil and catastrophes which the mankind is guilty of, but the main character put the blame on himself: "... who should I have blamed? Who unless me? ... Human nature itself is guilty" [8]. This idea of co-guiltiness of the world evil will become particularly topical in literal reflections after World War II.

Expiation of all aspects of guilt goes step-by-step from personal to general. Personal guilt of the murder of unloved wife is expiated by the main character's sufferings who is like a doctor had to observe painful death of a teenage-girl from yellow fever, the girl to whom he felt sense of love for the first time in all his life. The guilt of his father is embodied in the idea of terrible world and as consequence fear to give birth to one's own children Georg expiates by symbolic aid in obstructed labour. The sense of guilt of the world evil is relieved due to doctor Letham's discovery of yellow fever treatment. Getting rid of Hamletianism is spirited by Christianity and follows the path of relieving of the feeling of chosenness to de-personalization of the main character and his happy dissipation in the crowd.

Since 1933 and till the beginning of World War II some writers of polar political views

address to Hamlet subject. G. Hauptmann avoids political actualization of his works and speculates on the accuracy of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" structure (e.g. novel "In the Whirl of Calling" ("Im Wirbel der Berufung", 1936)) and writes prehistory of the tragedy's plot (e.g. drama "Hamlet in Wittenberg" ("Hamlet im Wittenberg", 1935)). His novel about Hamlet written in neoromantic style gives an idea of Hamlet close to the XIX century with more exaltation, mysticism, belonging to secret forces which thrill to the core.

The novel "Amleth" by G. Wenz-Hartmann (1936) may be called the illustration of Hamlet's image represented in national social practice which applies to Shakespeare as to the chanter of German heroism. In the novel Amleth becomes a fighter for blood purity of his northern people. Moreover in the text there is used traditional language of Hitlerite Germany. Antifascist novel "Mephisto" by Klaus Mann (1936) is ideologically opposed to the novel "Amleth". Here transcendental image of Hamlet begins a dialogue with the main character who plays the role of Nazi Hamlet, denies its genuineness and stresses features of genuine Hamlet who has to possess corporal elegance, delicacy and genuine nobility of nature, must be a sufferer not dancing after usurper's pipe.

After World War II the motive of guilt in the image of German Hamlet is complicated by the search for truth about the past and understanding of responsibility to history. Because of his inactivity and search for justice Hamlet enters into a conflict with history and sufferings which it has caused. K. Jaspers was the first to announce these peculiarities which will soon become the topic of many works of fiction. In his book "The Question about Guiltiness" (1946) (K. Jaspers „Die Schuldfrage“) the philosopher highlights responsibility of Nazi for committed evil. It is particularly important that K. Jaspers touches on the theme of metaphysical guilt of every person and mutual responsibility for injustice. Consequently the philosopher brings up the subject touched on by E. Weiss (Weiß) which got its further development in postwar literature.

In literature the motive of guilt and genuineness is also developed on the basis of Hamlet plot. "Hamlet" in this case may exist as composition in composition but first and

foremost it is a full or partial borrowing from the main plotline of "Hamlet", i.e. search for the guilty of the crime where there are such main figures as son, father/stepfather and mother. The main character may identify himself with Hamlet (A. Doebelin "Hamlet oder Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende" ("Tales of a Long Night", 1946)) or this identification results from the plot (M. Walser "Der Schwarze Schwan" (The Black Swan", 1961-1964)).

In A. Doebelin's novel in the course of plot development there comes an answer to the main character's (Edward Ellison's) question: who is guilty of the fact that during World War II he has become a cripple. Feeling certain guiltiness of the public the main character starts investigation which leads to revealing genuine nature of guilt. The truth searching process starts with the global war problem reflected in a particular case on Edward, then it passes on to resolving family drama and through revealing hidden family conflicts it again goes global to common to all mankind guilt of wars existence. So in this way A. Doebelin at one time with T. Jaspers applied to the problem of mankind's guiltiness of world evil: "The whole drama is Hamlet's search for truth. But truth is the answer not only to a narrow question about crime components, it is much more. The whole order of the world is that it could have happened, it could have remained a secret, and now it tries to avoid detection" [9].

In A. Doebelin's novel the image of Hamlet starts to be reconsidered, his mental activity and search for truth transform him into a vibrant character. Edward imagining him to be Hamlet carries out an investigation uncovering the reasons of internal and world misfortunes. According to A. Doebelin actions of some people and family conflicts are peculiar reflection of world events.

In the middle of the XX century perception of the image of Hamlet as someone sick and distorted continues to develop: "Let's bring an end to indecision and vacillation, to this devilry" [9]. It should be mentioned that A. Doebelin also had a variant of novel ending when the main character appealed to Christian religion in common with E. Weiss's character which was gradually losing Hamlet's traits and acquired features of Christ and Job. With the uncovering of the essence of guilt and finding the guilty Doebelin's main character recovers from indecision, concentration on himself

and like Weiss's main character fuses with people.

Works by E. Weiss and A. Doebelin made it possible to interweave naturally Hamlet's image as a prototype of Germany with the motive of guilt of world catastrophes (typical for spiritual consciousness of Germany after two World Wars), which appeared in literature during the tuning point of the history.

In 1960-1970s the motive of guilt gradually goes into the background, and the idea of remembrance and responsibility to history steps forward. There is no search for guilty any more – they are already known; the aim of the character who takes on Hamlet's role is to make people repent (M. Walser "The Black Swan"). In some novels there shapes a tendency when characters acting Hamlet's role or being in Hamlet's situation start to grow small. There is no traditional elevated and noble nature, no deep reflections and sense of responsibility before starting an action, motivation of actions becomes mercantile and trivial (G. Kunert "By the Name of Hats" ("Im Namen der Hüte", 1967)). The tendency of decaying of the character performing the role of Hamlet is observed (W. Jens "Herr Meister", 1963; H. Müller "Die Hamletmaschine", 1978). Hamlet's name emerges in disconnection with Shakespeare's plot. Traditional characteristics of Prince of Denmark transform into impromptness, actions inadequate to traditional logics, and loss in the alien world. It is another dangerous part of Hamlet's image which was described by S. Critchley in his article [10]. In drama by H. Moeller there is already no Hamlet's painful sense of guilt. Hamlet of late 70-s of the XX century is not only incapable of fulfilling Hamlet's tasks (e.g. expiation of guilt, unmasking and punishment of the guilty), but he himself chooses criminal path which proves the loss of humanistic ideals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hamletianism in German literature was changing from accusing intelligentsia of passivity and inaction in the middle of the XIX century to painful self-accusations of generalized world evil between two World Wars. After World War II Hamletianism evolved firstly in unmasking the guilty and their punishment, and in 70-s it turned out to be a dehumanized and dangerous side of the complicated image of Hamlet. Such evolution of

German literal Hamletianism marking definite side of Hamlet's image is directly tied with the changing historic situation in Germany of the period under review full of tragic, radical social political changes.

SUMMARY

The research proved that German association with Hamlet was formed by the middle of the XIX century and through understanding Hamletianism to be a disease led to the reflection of a specific sense of guilt. The most vivid manifestation in German literature of Hamlet's sense of guilt as self-accusation and its realized interconnection with definite historic events comes on the middle of the XX century as the consequence of social understanding of World War I, apprehension of the danger of national socialism and reflection on the personal involvement in the tragedy of World War II. As a result the motive of guilt is complicated by the idea of responsibility. In postwar literature Hamlet's character gets away from self-accusation to unmasking and punishment of the guilty. Later on the motive of guilt loses its German specific character connected with the appealing to the subject of World Wars and acquires general human qualities with key problems of catastrophic state of the world, violence, power and humanity. At the same time the image of Hamlet stops to be the bearer of humanistic ideals.

CONCLUSION

The article reflects the change of characters Hamletianism in German literature of the XX century in the aspect of motive of guilt from self-accusation to unmasking and punishment of the guilty in humanistic clue to dehumanization of Hamlet character.

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