

“IS WHISPERING NOTHING?”: ANTI-TOTALITARIAN IMPLICATIONS IN GRIGORI KOZINTSEV’S *HAMLET*

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Introduction

In May 2016, Cultura.ru, a popular internet portal, released a video-lecture dedicated to the film adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* directed by Grigori Kozintsev (1964)¹. This 20-minute video is aimed at introducing the contemporary Russian teen audience to this masterpiece of the Soviet cinema. The lecturers are Sasha Frank, a renowned contemporary filmmaker, and professor Boris Lyubimov, an authoritative Russian theatrical expert. As an integral part of an ambitious project *One Hundred Lectures. The History of Native Cinema*, specifically designed for school students, this video lecture popularizes both, the most famous Shakespeare’s tragedy and its successful screen version made by the prominent Soviet film-maker. The lecturers see Grigori Kozintsev’s *Hamlet* as a powerful instrument of stimulating the young generation’s interest in Shakespeare.

Appealing to the cinema in the process of teaching literature has become a popular strategy within the contemporary educational paradigm. As M. T. Burnet points out in his monograph with a self-explanatory title *Filming Shakespeare in Global Marketplace*, “Shakespeare films are widely taught in schools, colleges, and universities; indeed, they are increasingly the first port of call for a student encounter with the Bard². R. Gibson offers convincing arguments about the effectiveness of using the so-called ‘active, critical viewing’ of films and videos in teaching Shakespeare. The scholar also outlines the purposes of this approach which “involves close study of particular scenes, actions or speeches”: “Student inquiry should focus on how a Shakespeare film has been constructed, how its meanings have been made, and whose interests are served by those meanings. It should identify the underlying values and

¹ <https://www.cultura.ru/movies/3082/gamlet-grigorii-kozincev-1964>.

² Burnet M. T. *Filming Shakespeare in Global Marketplace*, Edinburgh, 2012. P. VII.

ideology (or more simply, point of view), and the film techniques and forms of representation used”³.

Thus, the very concept of the video-lecture made by Sasha Frank and Boris Lyubimov is worth of high appreciation. Yet, the explicit educational vector of this project calls for special consideration and attention to details with respect to the image of Grigori Kozintsev created in the lecture and the interpretation of his film. Some important aspects of the video should be looked at through the prism of the aims and the consequences taking into consideration the hidden covert influence of ideological issues on the axiological priorities of the authors of the lecture.

The lecturers are retelling the story of how the film was conceived and created with sincere admiration, paying particular attention to praising the director and the actors as well as to some interesting or even amusing details of the shooting process. The verbal narrative is interspersed with several episodes from the film, mostly those that should intrigue the viewers and stimulate them to watch Kozintsev’s film. The semantic palette of the video-lecture is based on three interconnected messages that represent the answers to the following questions: why we should watch Kozintsev’s *Hamlet*; how it correlates with the text of Shakespeare’s tragedy; and last, but not the least, what makes this film a real masterpiece of the world screen Hamletiana. Obviously, the interpretation of Kozintsev’s film is worth looking at.

The first idea, which is distinctly articulated by the lectures, is that Kozintsev’s film is the best screen version of *Hamlet* to teach students about the plot of the tragedy with the help of the language of the cinema. But what are the main reasons? According to Boris Lyubimov, *Hamlet* by Kozintsev is clear and understandable (quite unlike Shakespeare’s text, I should add!), “no halftones, no ambiguities”⁴. The lecturers emphasize that the film accurately reproduces all plot collisions, and consider the main achievement of the filmmakers to fully preserve the plot of Shakespeare’s play. They do not even mention the complicated existential problems raised by both genius thinkers, Shakespeare and Kozintsev. As it seems, this interpretation completely overlooks the conflict zones created by the complex interaction of various motives within the tragedy

³ Gibson R. Teaching Shakespeare. Cambridge, 2008. P. 200.

⁴ <https://www.culture.ru/movies/3082/gamlet-grigorii-kozincev-1964>.

and ignores all the nuances which made Kozintsev's version a vibrantly social reading. Just the plot!

The numerous successful directing decisions and interesting finds of Kozintsev and his cast, the set of impressive cinematic metaphors and acting as a powerful means of forming implicit meanings do not come into focus in this video-lecture. The commentary on the specificity of visualizing chronotope, which is surely worth speaking about, is replaced here by the funny story about the Elsinore Castle being made specifically for the film from metal containers for milk transport⁵.

The idea that Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is very close or even precise in reproducing its literary source is repeated several times in the video and evaluated as the main positive characteristic of this screen version. Although Sasha Frank reminds us about Kozintsev's book *Nash Sovremennik Viliam Shekspir (William Shakespeare, Our Contemporary)* the contemporaneity of the film is not being elucidated by her and her collector. Moreover, there are three remarks by Boris Lyubimov accentuating that the whole film deals only with medieval Denmark in which, as all of us know, something is rotten. Following this interpretation, one may start to think that Kozintsev's *Hamlet* had nothing to do with the life experience of the director himself and the tragic destiny of his generation. But that is not true. On the contrary, it is well-known that Kozintsev himself considered his *Hamlet* to be a direct response to contemporary Soviet reality⁶.

It is, indeed, evident that the lecturers carefully avoid even the slightest hints at the political implications or anti-totalitarian messages in Kozintsev's *Hamlet*. Such oblivion of the ideological issues inconvenient for any totalitarian regime is rather symptomatic. It

⁵ As Jack Jorgens the author of the work *Shakespeare on Film* concludes, "Kozintsev's Prince inhabits a crowded castle which has a history and is the center of a society rooted in nature – sky, stone, plains, and sea. The castle becomes, in effect, one of the *Dramatis Personae*" Jorgens J. *Shakespeare on Film*. Bloomington, 1977. P. 218.

⁶ Alexander Etkind writes: "After the success of *Hamlet* Kozintsev was invited to spend a year in England to make another film. The trip never happened but his widow remembers a revealing dialogue. Let's go to England, she said, at least we will spend a year in decent conditions. But Kozintsev responded that he would never have made such a *Hamlet* there in England. His wife rendered his explanation: 'Indeed, he could do it only here, because his *Hamlet* was a direct response to our life'. Etkind A. *Mourning the Soviet victims in a cosmopolitan way: Hamlet from Kozintse to Riazanov. Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*. 2011. Vol. 5. Num. 3. P. 394-395.

demonstrates or at least points to the similarity of the atmosphere in contemporary Russian society under Putin's rule with the one under Stalin's regime. The interpretation of Kozintsev's *Hamlet* without regard to the Thaw context and free from anti-totalitarian implications looks superficial and even dangerous, especially today when authoritarian tendencies are increasing rapidly in Russia and some other countries.

In this context, the responsibility of the intellectual elite and the role of culture as the powerful source of axiologic senses should be adequately understood and clearly articulated. The prophetic mission of art must not be either ignored or underestimated. The masterpieces of literature and their inter-semiotic projections including screen versions appeal to our minds and hearts to warn mankind against catastrophic mistakes. In the case of the video-lecture created by the two Russian intellectuals, we face either superficial interpretation of the remarkable film which has become classics of the world cinema or conscious simplification of its senses caused by the general ideological climate in their country today.

These considerations made me return to the topic I had analyzed in one of my previous articles⁷. to clear up some points that seem to be of great importance today. So, this paper aims at identifying the anti-totalitarian implications in Kozintsev's *Hamlet* as a vivid manifestation of the axiological potential of Shakespeare's greatest tragedy.

1. Hamlet discourse as a spider web of ambiguous meanings and polar codes

Shakespeare's Hamlet has always been in the center of the conflict of interpretations as one of the most enigmatic figures in world literature⁸. Numerous critics in the 19th century followed Goethe's famous interpretation proclaimed by his character Wilhelm Meister: "A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear, and must not cast away. ... Impossibilities have been required of him; not in themselves impossibilities, but such for him. He winds, and turns, and

⁷ Torkut N. 'Hamlet is not a mirror, but a mine-detector': Kozintsev's Film at the Crossroads of Polar Interpretations. *Romanian Shakespeare journal* / editor-in-chief Dr. George Volceanov. Bucharest. 2014. Vol. I, Is. 1. P. 88–112.

⁸ See: Торкут Н. М. Трагічне крещендо Шекспірової музи. *Шекспір В. Трагедії*. Харків, 2004. С. 28–32.

torments himself; he advances and recoils, is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind; at last, does all but losing his purpose from his thoughts; yet still without recovering his peace of mind”⁹. Others, such as William Hazlitt, Ralf Waldo Emerson or Matthew Arnold, echoed the interpretation of Hamlet’s nature suggested by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He viewed Shakespeare’s protagonist as “a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive humane and divine, but the great purpose of life defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve”¹⁰.

At the same time there appeared and strengthened a transnational tendency of criticizing Hamlet as a personification of the specific life attitude characterized as ‘an ennuï’ or even ‘nausea’ towards the world. Such an attitude to Shakespeare’s hero was evident in the works by Jules Laforgue and some other French symbolists. A famous Russian writer Ivan Turgenev called Hamlet ‘the superfluous man’ and manifested his understanding of the Prince’s character in several works (*A Hamlet of Shchigrov District, Hamlet and Don Quixote, Sketches from a Hunter’s Album*). In Russian literature and social life of 1860-1880, the name of Hamlet turned into a common noun with a strong political connotation. It meant a specific social-psychological type of a totally frustrated man which had been formed in the political context of Tsarist Russia and described in many literary works (Alexander Herzen, Apollon Grigoryev, Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ivan Goncharov, Anton Chekhov, Vsevolod Garshin) and journalism (Nikolay Mikhailovsky, Pyotr Jakubovich).

In Shakespeare scholarship of the 20th century, Hamlet was identified with a pathological personality incapable of action¹¹ or ‘the frustrated mind’¹². A similar view was expressed by H. B. Charlton who gave the following explanation of Hamlet’s character: “His supreme gift

⁹ Quoted in *Perspectives on Hamlet*. Ed. by W. G. Horzberger and P. B. Waldeck. London, 1975. P. 103.

¹⁰ Coleridge S. T. *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*. In 2 vols. / ed. R. A. Foakes. Princeton, 1987. Vol. 1. P. 390.

¹¹ See Eliot T. S. *Hamlet and His Problems* / T. S. Eliot. *T. S. Eliot. Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. London, 1932. P. 121–126; Wilson J. *What Happens in Hamlet*. New York, 1935. P. 52–60; Campbell L. B. *Shakespeare’s Tragic Heroes: slaves of passion*. New York, 1952. P. 121–128. This concept is consonant with famous words of German Romantic poet Ferdinand Freiligrath proclaimed Hamlet as ‘poor old dreamer’ whose ‘boldest acts is only thinking’ (cited in *Hamlet. A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* in 2 vols. / edited H. H. Furness. New York, 1963. Vol. 2. P. 376–378.)

¹² Granville-Barker H. *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. Princeton. 1946. P. 250.

for philosophic thought allows him to know the universe better than the little world of which he is bodily a part. ... his mind has distorted for him the particular objects of his actual environment"¹³. G. Wilson Knight considered Shakespeare's protagonist to be 'a diseased soul' who spreads destruction in the world which otherwise could be healthy and harmonic¹⁴. R. Battenhouse expressed the idea about Hamlet as a perverse imitation of Christ: "As a 'scourge' Hamlet imitates inversely Christ's role as a suffering servant"¹⁵.

At the same time, in literary criticism and fiction there appeared antipodal interpretations aiming at moral rehabilitation of Hamlet. A lot of scholars interpreted him as a tragic character and highly appreciated his morality and inner force of his personality. G. R. Elliott, I. Ribner and some other Shakespeareans proclaimed him to be a true minister of God¹⁶. P. Cruttwell compared the prince pulled in a game of higher powers contrary to his will with a soldier during the war¹⁷. G.K. Hunter¹⁸ and B.N.S. Gooch¹⁹ called him a 'hero' and convincingly proved their high appreciation of his courage and virtues. Even the titles of some articles vividly express the position of their authors. Very indicative in this regard are the works *The Double Dichotomy and Paradox of Virtue in Hamlet* by D. G. Campbell²⁰ and *Art of Judgement, Art of Compassion: The Two Arts of Hamlet* by M. Hunt²¹.

The image of the prince of Denmark has become the inexhaustible source of inspiration for several generations of men of letters and artists.

¹³ Charlton H. B. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge, 1952. P. 102–103.

¹⁴ Knight G. Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire. Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy with Three New Essays*. London, 1949. P. 35–36.

¹⁵ Battenhouse R. *Shakespeare's Christian dimension : An Anthology of Commentary*. Bloomington, 1994. P. 402.

¹⁶ Elliott G. R. *Scourge and Minister: A Study of Hamlet as Tragedy of Revengfulness and Justice*. Durham, 1951. xxxvi + 208 p.; Ribner I. *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy*. London, 1969. 205 p. P. 66-67.

¹⁷ Cruttwell P. *The Morality of Hamlet*. *Stratford-upon-Avon Studies*. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1963. No. 5 Hamlet. P. 128.

¹⁸ Hunter G. K. *The Heroism of Hamlet*. *Stratford-upon-Avon Studies*. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1963. No. 5 Hamlet. P.

¹⁹ Gooch B. N. S. *Hamlet as Hero: The Necessity of Virtue*. *Hamlet Studies*. 2001. Vol. 23. P. 50–58.

²⁰ Campbell D. G. *The Double Dichotomy and Paradox of Virtue in Hamlet*. *Hamlet Studies*. 2001. Vol. 23. P. 13–49.

²¹ Hunt M. *Art of Judgement, Art of Compassion: The Two Arts of Hamlet*. *Essays in Literature*. 1991. Vol. 18. P. 3–20.

Among those who created their works as a result of an inner dialogue with the author of the great tragedy and Hamlet's numerous apologists and/or critics, there are a lot of talented prose writers such as James Joyce and Boris Pasternak²², Iris Murdoch²³ and John Updike²⁴, David Wroblewski and Matt Haig²⁵. The incomparable poetic texts with an evident or implicit reference to *Hamlet* were written by Lesya Ukrainka²⁶, Aleksandr Blok, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Thomas Eliot, Maksym Ryl'sky²⁷, Mykola Bazhan²⁸, Constantine Cavafy, Vasyl' Stus²⁹,

²² About Hamlet's reception in Pasternak's novel *Doctor Zhivago* see: Маринчак В. Феномен Гамлета в інтенційності Пастернака: спрямованість, осягнення, ціннісний синтез. *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2011. Вип. 16–17. С. 181–216; Быков Д. Борис Пастернак. Москва. 2007. С. 690.

²³ See: Лазаренко Д. Гамлетівські алюзії в романі А. Мердок «Чорний принц». *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2009. Вип. 12-13. С. 232–249.

²⁴ See: Лазаренко Д. М. «Гертруда і Клавдій» Дж. Апдайка: від гри з образами до гри смислами. *Літературознавчі студії*. Київ, 2009. Вип. 24. С. 239–243; Торкут Н., Лазаренко Д. «Гертруда і Клавдій» Дж. Апдайка як текстоцентрична літературна проекція «Гамлета» В. Шекспіра. *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2010. Вип. 14–15. С. 234–254; Лазаренко Д. М. Образ замка Ельсінор в романі Дж. Апдайка «Гертруда і Клавдій». *Актуальні проблеми слов'янської філології. Серія: Лінгвістика і літературознавство: міжвуз. зб. наук. ст. / відп. ред. В. А. Зарва. Бердянськ, 2010. Вип. XXIII. Ч. IV. С. 47–55.*

²⁵ These texts have been thoroughly analyzed through the prism of Hamlet's intertext by Darya Lasarenko, see: Лазаренко Д. М. «Гамлет» В. Шекспіра як метатекст пізнього Ренесансу та його літературні проекції: дис. ... канд. філол. наук: 10.01.04. Київ, 2010. 221 с.; Лазаренко Д. М. Специфіка функціонування гамлетівського сюжету в культурному просторі сучасного соціуму. *Літературознавчі студії*. Київ, 2009. Вип. 23. Ч. 1. С. 257–261; Лазаренко Д. Метатекстуальний потенціал Шекспірового «Гамлета» і особливості його реалізації. *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2011. Вип. 16–17. С. 100–124.

²⁶ See: Makaryk I. R. Ophelia as a Poet: Lesya Ukrainka and the Woman as Artist. *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. 1993. V. 20. 3/4 (September – December). P. 337–354; Одарченко П. Леся Українка та Шекспір. *Славутич Яр. Українська шекспірія на Заході. Том 2*. Едмонтон, 1990. С. 5–22; Черняк Ю. І. Специфіка актуалізації ціннісної семантики «Гамлета» В. Шекспіра в українському шекспірівському дискурсі: дис. ... канд. філол. наук: 10.01.05. Київ, 2011. С. 164.

²⁷ About allusions and reminiscences from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the texts of these poets, see: Черняк Ю. І. Специфіка актуалізації ціннісної семантики «Гамлета» В. Шекспіра в українському шекспірівському дискурсі: дис. ... канд. філол. наук: 10.01.05. Київ, 2011. С. 164–167.

²⁸ Ibid. С. 167–171.

²⁹ See: Черняк Ю. Гамлетівська інтертекстуальність у поемі В. Стуса «Ця п'єса почалася вже давно». *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2013. Вип. 20–21. С. 199–210; Маринчак В. Гамлетизм поетичної інтенціональності В. Стуса: від самовтрати до самовигнання. *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2016. Вип. 25–26. С. 107–118.

Vladimir Vysotskiy, Oksana Zabuzhko³⁰, and many others³¹. Tom Stoppard and Boris Akunin made rather successful attempts of polemic re-thinking of *Hamlet* the text as well as Hamlet the prince in their plays³².

It is *Hamlet* that owns the palm of primacy in cinematic Shakespeareana. Today there are more than 50 screen adaptations of *Hamlet* and most of them are worth watching. Since *Le Duel d'Hamlet* directed by Clément Maurice hit the screens in 1900³³ the possibilities and techniques of cinematography, as well as artistic standards, have changed a lot. So, it is natural that the screen history of *Hamlet* is extremely rich in bold experiments, unexpected directing decisions, and bright stars. The genre paradigm of film *Hamlets* is also diverse. It includes different established film genres, parodies, animated abridgments³⁴, films adapted from the successful theatre performances³⁵, theatrical performances within films.

Harry Keyishan, the author of profound analytical review "Shakespeare and the movie genre: the case of *Hamlet*", concludes that four the most renown film *Hamlets* represent various cinematic traditions: *film noir* (Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, 1948), action adventure movie (Franko Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, 1994 (starring Mel Gibson, an icon of 'revenge entertainment')), the cinematic model of the epic (Kenneth

³⁰ See: Лебединцева Н. Офелія як контекст: коло «вічного вигнання» у поетичній інтерпретації О. Забужко. *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2016. Вип. 25–26. С. 119–132.

³¹ See: Лазаренко Д. М. «Гамлет» В. Шекспіра як метатекст пізнього Ренесансу та його літературні проєкції : дис. ... канд. філол. наук : 10.01.04. Київ, 2010. 221 с.; Черняк Ю. І. Специфіка актуалізації ціннісної семантики «Гамлета» В. Шекспіра в українському шекспірівському дискурсі : дис. ... канд. філол. наук : 10.01.05. Київ, 2011. 225 с; Torkut N, Cherniak Y. Ukrainian Hamlet and «hamletizing» Ukraine: «Will you play upon this pipe?» *Ренесансні студії*. Запоріжжя, 2014. Вип. 22. С. 98–115; Grob Th. 'One Cannot act Hamlet, One Must be Hamlet': The Acculturation of Hamlet in Russia. Shakespeare and Space. *Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm* / Edited by I. Habermann and M. Witen. London, 2016. P. 191–227.

³² See: Лазаренко Д. М. «Гамлет» В. Шекспіра як метатекст пізнього Ренесансу та його літературні проєкції. С. 139–143. .

³³ French film with Sarah Bernhardt playing Hamlet was two-minutes in length.

³⁴ For instance, S4C's *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* by Natalia Orlova.

³⁵ Such as Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Greg Doran which was produced for BBC in 2010 or National Theatre Live's film (2015) with Benedict Cumberbatch playing the main role.

Branagh's *Hamlet*, 1996) and metageneric 'media-savvy' (Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, 2000)³⁶.

One of the most successful film adaptations of *Hamlet* was made by Grigori Kozintsev in 1964. The triumphal movie premiere caused a stir. Since then, this film has always been in the focus of multiple discussions in the circles of cinema critics, literary scholars, political experts, and even psychologists. As Thomas Grob insightfully points out, "Kozintsev's lavish film transported Hamlet into the post-Stalinist era"³⁷. The interpretation of Hamlet's character in the film is unique, as it incorporates both a deep understanding of Shakespeare's tragedy and a profound analysis of the real tragedy of life under a totalitarian regime.

2. Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet*: the story of the movie and its resonance in culture and scholarship

In the Soviet Union, *Hamlet's* status as a universally recognized and generally acknowledged masterpiece made it impossible either to ignore this work of literature or to transform its semantics *in corpore*. So, the totalitarian discourse scrutinized the wide spectrum of its semantic valences trying to single out those of them which could be used for carrying out relevant ideological or aesthetic objectives. At the same time, in the flood of officially approved visions of Shakespeare's tragedy³⁸ there existed a thought-provoking stream of contrary interpretations. The life-giving energy of this stream was radiated by gifted translators (into Russian – Michail Lozinsky, Boris Pasternak, into Ukrainian – Yuri Klen, Leonid Hrebinka, Mikhaylo Rudnytsky, Grigori Kochur, into Belorussian – Yuri Havruk, into Georgian – Konstantin Gamsakhurdia), as well as literary scholars (Michail Morozov, Alexander Anikst, Leonid Pinsky, Oleksandr Biletsky, Dmytro Zatonsky, Dmytro Nalyvaiko) and writers who exploited

³⁶ Keyishian H. Shakespeare and the movie genre: the case of *Hamlet*, The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film / ed. by R. Jackson. New York, 2007. P. 75–83.

³⁷ Grob Th. 'One Cannot act Hamlet, One Must be Hamlet': The Acculturation of Hamlet in Russia. Shakespeare and Space. *Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm* / Edited by I. Habermann and M. Witen. London, 2016. P. 219.

³⁸ This "progressive" trend of interpreting Hamlet as a strong personality putting the imperatives of socially-oriented activity into practice is represented by the productions of *Hamlet* in the Second Moscow Art Theatre in 1924, 1925, in the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre, 1932, in Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre, 1954, in Kharkiv Shevchenko Theatre, 1956.

intertextuality rooted in Shakespeare's text (Alexander Blok, Maksym Ryl'sky, Boris Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Eugen Pluzhnyk, Mykola Zerov, Leonid Pervomaiskiy, Zynoviy Krassivskiy, Vasyl' Stus, Vladimir Vysotskiy, and others).

Being involved in the process of ideological molding, the Soviet theatre directors found themselves in a rather dangerous position. They had to choose between the two axiological alternatives: to be responsive to the demands of the authorities, or to be true to Shakespeare. The Bard's iconic status often dictates directors the necessity to stay as close to the original as possible. Still, the original itself is so obscure and enigmatic that staying close to it may mean rambling off in any direction or just as well going round in a circle.

The issue of the appropriateness of the adaptation has been ascertained as most irrelevant as, in the words of V. Roloff, "the director has the opportunity to shine in the creativity of the transformation, the tension, and discrepancy between text and image, rather than the proximity to the literary source"³⁹. In this respect, Grigori Kozintsev's screen version of *Hamlet* can be called 'a touchstone'. This metaphor is open to two interpretations at once. The film is certainly a touchstone, a sample, and a standard when dealing with the perfect artistic balance between recreation, interpretation, and transformation. As this screen adaptation does not just mirror the text, but picks up one of the play's multiple masks and turns it into a living face of a contemporary. This aspect determines the second meaning of the metaphor – Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is a certain 'touchstone of the debate' of the interpretations, the first swallow announcing a brand new kind of cinematographic adaptations, which is, on the one hand, not just a copy or a recital, and, on the other hand, not an 'illegitimate child' having nothing to do with the source text, but an independent work of art, rightfully called Kozintsev's *Hamlet*. This film is an integral part of Hamletian discourse, as it is without a doubt one of the most successful screen versions of Shakespeare's tragedy, at the same time it is an insightful diagnosis of the pathologic state of the Soviet intelligentsia.

³⁹ Roloff V. Film und Literatur. *Theorie und Praxis der intermedialen Analyse am Beispiel von Bunuel, Truffaut, Godar und Antonioni in Volker Roloff / Zima P. V.* (ed.). Darmstadt, 1995. P. 269–309.

The production of Kozintsev's film was launched in 1963, and the actual release took place in 1964. Such dates were not occasional and there were at least three major factors that prompted the appearance of the first Soviet *Hamlet* movie. The first one was determined by ideological shift in official attitude towards the Bard's tragedy, which took place in 1953. The death of Joseph Stalin made 'rehabilitation' of the very status of this Shakespeare's tragedy, that had a reputation of undesirable for the Soviet society, possible and even required.

The role of Joseph Stalin's attitude in the theatrical destiny of *Hamlet* in the Soviet Union has been the point of debates for some decades. As Irene R. Makaryk, an expert in Soviet Shakespeare, argues, "*Hamlet* in particular attracted scorn in official discourse and was tacitly banned up until Stalin's death in 1953"⁴⁰. This statement has recently been challenged by Michelle Assay during the Conference in Elsinore. The scholar makes an attempt to prove that during Stalin's lifetime the productions of this tragedy were not prohibited as Sergey Radlov undertook one in his studio in Leningrad (1938) and there were two more productions of *Hamlet* in Voronezh and Vitebsk. Ronan Paterson whose opinion is consonant with Michelle Assay's position states that "*Hamlet* was never explicitly banned"⁴¹. To my mind, there is no real controversy between these statements. Although *Hamlet* was never formally banned by the Soviet authorities (no documentary rulings were made), under Stalin it was considered an extremely dangerous text that could cost lives for those who dared to deal with it. It was a real tactic of 'text banishment' or 'text exile' which proved to have been no less influential than official directives of the Soviet power. Even an oral negative evaluation of a literary work or its author by 'Comrade Stalin' was enough to exclude it from the Soviet cultural environment. In a totalitarian society, the leader's thought always triggers self-censorship mechanisms that operate no less effectively than laws and directives.

There is an indisputable argument in favor of this position. It is an impressive episode with a prominent Soviet actor Boris Livanov who had

⁴⁰ Makaryk I. R. *Wartime Hamlet. Shakespeare in the Worlds of Communism and Socialism*. ed. by Makaryk I. and Price J. Toronto, 2006. P. 119–135.

⁴¹ Paterson R. *Send in the Clowns. Shakespeare on the Soviet Screen. Shakespeare in Between* / Edited by Jana B. Wild. Bratislava, 2018. P. 206.

to refuse to play Hamlet just because of such an informal ban⁴². One of his friends remembered that during their conversation, “Boris Nikolaevich suddenly gets distracted from the topic, without a shadow of a smile on his face says: ‘Shakespeare wrote the anti-Soviet play *Hamlet*, and Comrade Stalin at a reception of artists of the Moscow Art Theater said: ‘I do not advise you to stage this production’. And I abandoned the role”⁴³.

Russian scholar N. Chushkin writes: “It is enough to recall that an offhand remark by Stalin in the spring of 1941 questioning the performance of *Hamlet* at that time by the Moscow Arts Theatre was sufficient to end rehearsals and to postpone the performance indefinitely. In the following years, the very idea of showing on the stage a thoughtful, reflective hero who took nothing on faith, who scrutinized intently the life around him in an effort to discover for himself, without outside ‘prompting’, the reasons for its defects, separating truth from falsehood, the very idea seemed almost ‘criminal’”⁴⁴.

During the Thaw when the intensification of intellectual activity of Soviet intelligentsia replaced a long period of total spiritual oppression and mighty political dictatorship, the interest in *Hamlet* rapidly grew and brought to life a set of critical and theatrical interpretations. As Mark Sokolyansky observes, “in Soviet Shakespeare criticism of the Thaw the centrality of *Hamlet* was undeniable. In the twilight of that era and on the eve of Shakespeare’s 400th anniversary, there appeared many essays on the play, a book by Israel Vertsman, chapters in the monographs of Alexander Anikst, Alexander Smirnov and other scholars; in

⁴² Some controversial details about the famous conversation between Boris Levanon and Stalin one can see in Сталин и Шекспир. URL : <https://sergeyvetkov.livejournal.com/809828.html> and Пастернак Б. Л. Полн. собр. соч. : в 11 т. Москва, 2005. Т. XI. С. 574. Some convincing facts about the political reasons which caused abandoning the production of Hamlet in the Moscow Art Theater in February, 1945 (when the work over the performance had been almost completed) are mentioned by Vasily Livanov’s memoirs about his father. See: Ливанов В. Невыдуманный Борис Пастернак. Воспоминания и впечатления. Москва, 2002. С. 30–31.

⁴³ Quoted by Шварц А. Думая о Булгакове. URL : <https://magazines.gorky.media/slovo/2008/57/dumaya-o-bulgakove.html>.

⁴⁴ Чушкин Н. Н. Гамлет – Качалов. Москва, 1966. С. 309.

Shakespearean Survey of 1961/1964 a special set of essays on *Hamlet* took a central position⁴⁵.

It should be noted that Kozintsev successfully staged *Hamlet* at the Pushkin Theatre in 1954 and this concept of the Bard's play that faced quite an ambivalent reception by Soviet Shakespeare scholarship stipulated his further considerations on the tragedy. In general, it is quite possible to say that at the beginning of the 1960s Kozintsev, at last, got all the necessary opportunities to express his life-long ponderance on *Hamlet*. Being a well-known Soviet film-director, he was lucky enough to find himself in the situation when his artistic ambitions and cherished dreams coincided with the social inquiries of the day. Sergey Yutkevich shot *Othello* that used to be a stage-favorite in the USSR during the previous decades, and when *Hamlet* turned out to be the key play in the Soviet Shakespeareana, there arose the necessity to make a screen version of this very tragedy as well. Kozintsev whose previous professional experience included both rather successful staging of *Hamlet* and extremely praised filming career appeared to be the best candidate for such a mission.

Kozintsev himself regarded the possibility to shoot *Hamlet* as a unique chance to reach two goals simultaneously: to express his artistic vision of Shakespeare's great tragedy and involve an extremely wide audience of cinema-goers into the dialogue with the Bard. It can be considered as the second factor which enabled the appearance of the Soviet *Hamlet* by Kozintsev in 1964. . The choice of *Hamlet* as a lifetime project meant to most fully state and express the director's artistic and social position was not occasional. As Mark Sokolyansky points out, "Kozintsev's road to his two Shakespeare films⁴⁶ was long and not very easy. It passed through three channels, the first of which was the theatre – the director's earliest passion. As early as 1923 the young Kozintsev was planning to perform *Hamlet* as a pantomime in the 'Factory of the Eccentric Actor' (FEKS), the experimental group he created with Leonid Trauberg and Sergei Yutkevich, but this plan was not realized. Seventeen years later, already a well-known film director, he returned to Shakespeare on stage. ... The most important event in the history of Kozintsev's interpretations of Shakespeare was his *Hamlet* in the Pushkin

⁴⁵ Sokolyansky M. *Hamlet in the period of the Thaw*. *Hamlet East-West* / ed. by Marta Gibinska and Jerzy Limon. Gdansk, 1998, P. 118–119.

⁴⁶ In 1971 the film-director released his film *King Lear*.

Theatre in 1954. ... The second channel of Kozintsev's approach to Shakespeare was literary criticism. He published several critical essays on Shakespeare and a seminal book, whose Russian title is *Nash Sovremennik Viliam Shekspir – 'Our contemporary William Shakespeare'*⁴⁷. ... Most important, though not as remarkable in terms of quantity, was the third channel of Kozintsev's Shakespearean interpretation, the cinema"⁴⁸.

Alexander Kozintsev, the son of the artist, recalls that his father "considered that a director was shooting the same, his 'own', film for all his life. The same fixed image was descending from one his movie to another: a whipped-up haunted person is surrounded by heehawing and whooping crowd; he is beaten, poured over with slops"⁴⁹. It's obvious that the director chose to chant not 'the wide masses' but singles who oppose themselves to injustice and wickedness of the society. And whom could Kozintsev choose but *Hamlet* – an individualist, and a crowd-skeptic– to be the most convincing spokesperson for the director and the epoch he lived in? It was also the age that dictated the choice of the hero – in times of totalitarianism when double-coded language was the only means to express your ideas and survive – it was far safer to appeal to world classics rather than to try and interpret the contemporaneity. Online *Encyclopedia of Native Cinema* emphasizes that "Kozintsev's reference to great literary works was dictated by the interest in eternal philosophic questions of humanity and it was risky, or even impossible, to solve them with the help of contemporary material. 'Personality versus Crowd' was the topic which Kozintsev was always interested in"⁵⁰.

The third factor, which stipulated the production of this film, was closely connected with the typical USSR cultural practices. The commonly known fact is that Soviet authorities were fond of different kinds of jubilees – those of Communist leaders, world-famous writers,

⁴⁷ The English translation of this book, published in 1966, is known as *Shakespeare, Time and Conscience*. Such renaming was deliberate to avoid confusion with the recently-published work *Shakespeare our Contemporary* by Jan Kott.

⁴⁸ Sokolyansky M. Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film / Ed. by Russel Jackson. Cambridge. 2007. P. 203-204.

⁴⁹ Козинцев А. В очах души. Г. Козинцев. *Время трагедий*. Москва, 2004. С. 8.

⁵⁰ Экранизации в отечественном кино. *Энциклопедия отечественного кино* / под редакцией Любви Аркус. URL : http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?dept_id=15&e_dept_id=6&text_element_id=45.

composers, painters and the like. Certainly, ‘the most progressive country of the world’ could not miss the quatercentenary anniversary of the Bard – it was celebrated here through many different events and projects including organizing scientific conferences, publishing papers, editing and re-editing various translations of Shakespeare’s texts into the languages of Soviet republics, printing different sorts of collectibles, etc. In this context, the appearance of a Soviet Shakespeare movie, especially of a version of one of his ‘great tragedies’ was extremely desirable. But one of the crucial virtues of Kozintsev’s film was its unique capability to break the limitations of an anniversary event. It triggered both an inexhaustible interest of the audience and a continuous process of disputation concerning the director’s approach, the main message the film conveys and the axiological essence of the protagonist.

In general, Kozintsev’s film met a warm reception of spectators and was highly approved by the authorities. The work of the film-director and acting by Innokentiy Smoktunovskiy (Hamlet) were rewarded with the highest and the most prestigious Soviet award – Lenin Premium. At the same time, this version was highly appreciated by criticism not only in the USSR but also abroad. The film-review discourse of May 1964 was overloaded with the profusion of compliments towards ‘Russian Hamlet’. *Glasgow Gerald* acknowledged mighty and powerful Kozintsev’s work as the best achievement of the year of Shakespeare’s jubilee⁵¹. *Financial Times* wrote that the film by Kozintsev was surely the cleverest and, of course, the most perfect interpretation of Shakespeare on the screen. It was obvious that there is no Hamlet who can fully satisfy everyone. Albeit Kozintsev’s *Hamlet* was much closer to this perfection than all the previous variants on screen and stage.⁵² An estimated expert in this area *Films and filming* proclaimed magnificent Kozintsev’s film “the most remarkable screen-version of Hamlet comparing to which Olivier’s movie seems to be theatrical and static”⁵³. The outstanding film-director Peter Brook was so much delighted with the work by his Soviet colleague that called it the best Shakespeare film he had ever seen⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Добин Е. Гамлет – фильм Козинцева. Ленинград – Москва, 1967. С. 129–130.

⁵² Ibid. С. 130.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sokolyansky M. Hamlet in the period of the Thaw. P. 122.

Kozintsev's affection for *Hamlet*, excellent cast (Innokentiy Smoktunovskiy (Hamlet), Mikhail Nezvanov (Claudius), Elza Radzina (Gertrude), Yuri Tolubeev (Polonius), Anastasia Vertinskaya (Ophelia)), highly professional film crew, perfectly fitting music by Shostakovich, beautiful scenery – all these factors secured the success of the film – it received a massive international recognition – the Golden Lion of Venice film festival, BAFTA award, different prizes of several well-known film festivals.

But the general triumph of the Soviet picture was accompanied by the heated polemics considering the director's message inherently bound with his interpreting of Hamlet's quintessence. One of the opinions shared by both Soviet and foreign critics was that Hamlet of Smoktunovskiy and Kozintsev was unusually active. A reviewer from *Esquire* even compared Soviet Hamlet to Richard Burton: "This is a Hamlet who rides and duels a lot more than he reflects, – Smoktunovskiy looks a little like Burton and plays the part in the Burton style, as a vigorous type much more at home with horses and women than with ideas"⁵⁵. Soviet reviewers also pointed out unconventional interpretation of Hamlet's image though alongside emphasized the democratic character of this very Prince of Denmark – this traditionally complex character can now be understood by everyone: "This Hamlet doesn't require specific knowledge in Shakespeare studies and volumes of critical guides – he is comprehensible to any spectator. This is a 'generally accessible' Hamlet in the noblest meaning of this phrase ... This is that very Hamlet who already knows ... He knows what is good and what is evil, and he also knows that evil is cunning and elusive"⁵⁶.

Another review of this category attributes to Hamlet such a previously inconceivable quality as decisiveness: "the Prince belongs to those people who are not afraid of taking responsibility for everything which is happening around them ... He dies as a soldier and Fortinbras for a reason orders to give to dead Hamlet all the honors, to bury him as a hero..."⁵⁷ Efim Dobbin even proclaimed Kozintsev, the artist nurtured by the Great Revolution, to be the restorer of Hamlet's true nature, based on eager enthusiasm and intense perseverance: "Weak Hamlet

⁵⁵ Brode D. Shakespeare in the Movies. From the Silent Era to Shakespeare in Love. Oxford, 2000. P. 128.

⁵⁶ Туровская М. Гамлет и мы. *Новый мир*. 1964. № 9. С. 227.

⁵⁷ Погожева Л. Гамлет. *Искусство кино*. 1965. № 3, С. 143.

was a certain barometer of social relations and attitudes. He was the sign of the challenges of the century, extreme difficulties on the way to the liberation of humanity. Kozintsev – the artist who was raised by the great revolution – possessed the historic vision necessary to free Hamlet from temporal additions returning him to the genuine Shakespearean scale”⁵⁸.

The second opinion as for axiological dominant of Kozintsev’s Hamlet played by Innokentiy Smoktunovskiy was quite different, or even opposite. A friend of the film-director, Sergey Utkevich, who himself had great success in making films, insisted on the fact that the image of the protagonist should be interpreted only in the context of Kozintsev’s whole conception. He emphasized that the film-creator underwent the deep influence of Russian classics, Dostoevskiy, Blok and Pasternak in particular. “Smoktunovskiy’s Hamlet is neither a philosopher, nor a warrior, nor an avenger, but a poet. This fact explains his constant striving to nature, to the intercourse with it, and his reflection is more lyrical than dramatic”⁵⁹.

Though the majority of critical opinions, which appeared just after the premiere of the film, agreed in acknowledging a principal difference of this new Hamlet from the gallery of ‘weeping, effeminate Hamlets’, there existed a set of various views on this essential difference. Some scholars perceived the source of Hamlet’s activeness to be in his sincere desire to overcome the social evil at Elsinore. This very point was dominating in the numerous letters of film admirers to Kozintsev which were published as a special chapter of his book *Nash Sovremennik Viliam Shekspir*. Others considered the prince of Denmark to be an embodiment of moral force. This idea was brilliantly expressed by Maya Turovskaya in her article *Gamlet i my* (“*Hamlet and we*”): “Is he a doughty hero – the image which we sometimes for no reason attribute to the prince of Denmark? Certainly not, otherwise, we would have to admit that the actor has shifted away from Shakespeare on that illicit distance where notorious ‘*strong*’ Hamlets, paying no attention to the time that was out of joint, turned into campaigners for the throne. However, non-romantic Hamlet of Smoktunovskiy reveals moral strength which allows keeping courage and the presence of mind on the dangerous edge of

⁵⁸ Добин Е. Гамлет – фильм Козинцева. С. 22.

⁵⁹ Юткевич С. О трех «Гамлетах», одной Офелии, двух клоунах и призраке. *Шекспир и кино*. Москва, 1973. С. 58.

Claudius's world – specific heroism of this specific character, which was created by the playwright three and a half centuries ago and has not lost its relevance. When *Hamlet* was released, some people were disappointed: they thought that Kozintsev's production did not give any innovative solution of 'Hamlet's problem'. On the contrary, others found that the film solved all the problems of the tragedy once and forever – this is a very ardent compliment not likely to flatter the artist and the scholar who knows the secret of Shakespeare's immortality"⁶⁰.

Although more than half a century passed after the film release, it still catches the attention of the audience and criticism inspiring the new waves of polemics⁶¹. Boika Sokolova remarks, "Kozintsev blended the visionary Russian hero and the Soviet fighter against social evil into something uniquely his own and of his own time, a synthesis that has given us the masterpiece we have"⁶². Mark Sokolyansky considers Hamlet in Kozintsev's film as "not only the centre of the whole action but also its leader. The hero's nervousness was played without any affectation, shown in nuances, but it made clear the intensity and scale of his inner shock..."⁶³ The scholar treats this kind of leadership as a moral phenomenon: being 'a keen philosopher'⁶⁴, the Prince personifies 'an unsleeping conscience'⁶⁵. Mark Sokolyansky quotes the words of a British critic Roger Manvell who wrote: "Kozintsev portrayed the tragedy of a whole society where real justice was impossible"⁶⁶. One can observe that the tendency of analyzing this screen-version in the axiological paradigm becomes more and more popular among the critics of the XXI century. Alexander Etkind sees in Kozintsev's *Hamlet* "not only an allegorical protest against a criminal state but also a play of mourning for its victims"⁶⁷.

⁶⁰ Туровская М. Гамлет и мы. С. 230.

⁶¹ See, for instance, Moore T. A. C. Kozintsev's Shakespeare Films: Russian Political Protest in Hamlet and King Lear. Jefferson, 2012. 202 p.; Hudgens M. Th. The Shakespeare Films of Grigori Kozintsev. Cambridge, 2017. xi+146 p.

⁶² Sokolova B. Between Religion and Ideology: Some Russian Hamlets of the Twentieth Century. *Shakespeare Survey*. 2001. Iss. 54.: Shakespeare and Religions. P. 151.

⁶³ Sokolyansky M. Grigori Kozintsev's Hamlet and King Lear. P. 207.

⁶⁴ Ibid. C. 210.

⁶⁵ Ibid. C. 207.

⁶⁶ Ibid. C. 208.

⁶⁷ Etkind A. Mourning the Soviet victims in a cosmopolitan way: Hamlet from Kozintse to Riazanov. P. 396.

The next point of an on-going discussion about Kozintsev's movie deals with the religious position of the film-director. Boika Sokolova insists that Soviet artist suppressed religious references of the Bard's tragedy and diminished the importance of Hamlet's appeals to God. The Ghost's presence is carefully reduced to one, though mighty, visual encounter and the text in 1.5 is cut so that all references to purgatory or a heaven to be entered with one's reckoning made, or a power which will pass judgment on Gertrude, are removed. The Ghost is a pagan force, come back to seek its right, without imposing moral limitations on the son. Hamlet's references to God are also dramatically minimized. To give only one example of many: in 1.2, the little that remains of his speech elides "the everlasting", "God" or meeting "one's dearest foe in heaven". The only religious outburst in the film belongs to Claudius and is provoked by fear. Nor is it composed as a prayer proper by kneeling at an altar. The King rather considers his chances to obtain forgiveness only to find that he is not up to it. Hamlet is not present, and as a consequence, does not have to consider his actions in a religious context. The only altar ever seen is the one where Laertes pledges silently to avenge his father's death and the only priest is the one who refuses to give Ophelia full funeral rites⁶⁸. The secularizing character of Kozintsev's approach is confirmed by Alexander Etkind who writes: "Like many of his friends, Kozintsev was a convinced atheist, a belief system that was necessitated not only by his Soviet allegiance but also by his hybrid Russian-Jewish experience"⁶⁹.

The polar position in the discussion as for the role of religious references in the film is expressed by Tiffany Ann Conroy who insists that "religious imagery pervades Kozintsev's *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet and Ophelia are associated with Christianity"⁷⁰. She discovers Orthodox implications in some symbols used by Kozintsev: "... the images of the broken cross in the graveyard and the subservient cleric at Ophelia's funeral bring to mind Khrushchev's persecution of the Church and his appointment of clerics he could control"⁷¹. It is rather difficult to agree

⁶⁸ Sokolova B. *Between Religion and Ideology: Some Russian Hamlets of the Twentieth Century*. P. 150.

⁶⁹ Etkind A. *Mourning the Soviet victims in a cosmopolitan way: Hamlet from Kozintse to Riazanov*. P. 394.

⁷⁰ Conroy T. A. "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say": political dissent in Grigory Kozintsev's Shakespeare. Boston, 2009. P. 101.

⁷¹ Ibid.

with this opinion because all the mentioned elements of the film can be interpreted in the other way. The broken cross may be decoded as a sign of dereliction of the cemetery, for, following the Christian tradition, the persons who committed suicide were buried beyond its confines. Ophelia's "death was doubtful ... shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her"⁷², so she should not have been buried near her noble relatives. Using the broken cross as well as some other signs of dilapidation, Kozintsev depicts the setting itself and creates an atmosphere of sheer neglect: for more than two or three decades nobody has been buried there and the unearthed skull of Yorick is a vivid manifestation of the total decay. As for the priest, he did not do anything unusual or contradicting Shakespeare's words.

3. Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* as a mine-detector on the fossilized field of Soviet mentality: a lesson of artistic resistance

The long-lasting discussion revolving around Kozintsev's masterpiece has a key-point shared by the majority of modern interpreters. It is the admittance of the overall anti-totalitarian message in Kozintsev's approach to interpreting Shakespeare's text. It also should be noted that some scholars found the elements of criticism of the Soviet regime even in Kozintsev's stage version of *Hamlet*. Moreover, Arthur P. Mendel believes that the Leningrad performance of *Hamlet* directed by this artist in April 1954 stipulated "the arduous and tortuous efforts of Soviet society to liquidate Stalinism"⁷³.

It is necessary to emphasize that the shooting of Kozintsev's *Hamlet* took place when the tendencies of the Thaw perceptibly weakened. The general atmosphere of that time was characterized by the premonition of returning half-forgotten communist dictatorship in all the spheres. When the regime started eliminating those elements of democracy and creative freedom that were characteristic of the Thaw, explicit declaration of anti-totalitarian ethos became rather perilous. So, the artists were to search for new strategies of expressing the opinions defying the prescribed official course. According to Gregg Redner, Kozintsev's "interest in Hamlet grew directly from his understanding of

⁷² Shakespeare W. *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. The Complete Works of Shakespeare* / ed. by David Bevington. New York, 1997. P. 1110.

⁷³ Mendel A. P. *Hamlet and Soviet Humanism. Slavic Review*. 1971. Vol. 30, No. 4, P. 734.

the play's relation to contemporary Soviet life"⁷⁴. The director himself remarked that "they often stage *Hamlet* in modern dress, but tell a tale of ancient life. The tragedy must be played in sixteenth-century costume but must be dealt with as a modern story"⁷⁵.

But at the same time, it is quite difficult to agree with the key idea, expressed by T. A. Conroy who interprets Kozintsev's *Hamlet* as if it were cinematographic realization of Aesopian language for voicing political disagreement with Soviet regime. She reasonably insists on the fact that "Soviet audience was trained to look for and to understand Aesopian discourse. ... The special 'languages' artistic and critical works employed to communicate meaning must be decoded and then juxtaposed against official history, propaganda and dogma before one can comprehend their political potency"⁷⁶. But her statement about the deciphering of Aesopian language as the main strategy in interpreting *Hamlet* on the screen looks rather farfetched. The creative method of Grigori Kozintsev is much more complicated, subtle and far from direct allegorizing and simplified parabolic character. The essence of his anti-totalitarian implications is formed employing numerous ontological reminiscences deeply rooted in Soviet reality. Kozintsev who considered his rendition of *Hamlet* not as a mere screen version of the great tragedy, but as a "cinematographic poetry"⁷⁷ insisted on the necessity for any film-director to avoid "brisk dialogue with the burning problems of the day"⁷⁸.

The overall anti-totalitarian message of the film does not mean that every single symbol or detail used by the director was loaded with special political pathos, as T. A. Conroy insists. Interpreting several film episodes as political allegories, she compares Hamlet, who was dispatched from Elsinore, to Vyacheslav Molotov who was sent to be the USSR ambassador in Mongolia and to Georgiy Malenkov who was sent to head a Siberian power station.⁷⁹ Moreover, the scholar draws parallels between

⁷⁴ Redner G. *Deleuze and film music: Building a Methodological Bridge Between Film Theory and Music*. Chicago, 2011. P. 77.

⁷⁵ Козинцев Г. Наш современник Вильям Шекспир. Ленинград – Москва, 1966. С. 237.

⁷⁶ Conroy T. A. "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say": political dissent in Grigory Kozintsev's Shakespeare. P. 16, 19.

⁷⁷ Козинцев Г. Наш современник Вильям Шекспир. С. 287.

⁷⁸ Ibid. С. 291.

⁷⁹ Conroy T. A. "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say": political dissent in Grigory Kozintsev's Shakespeare. P. 96.

the Cuban missile crisis which happened just before the film's release and the director's emphasis on Norway's military preparations and the arrival of Fortinbras' soldiers which should, in her words, "evoke the violent suppression of dissent within the USSR and the international Cold War standoff"⁸⁰.

The scholar tries to attribute the use of Aesopian language not only to symbolic episodes but also to filming technique Kozintsev used while presenting the main character's soliloquies – Hamlet on the screen remains silent and his words are given in a voice-over. T. A. Conroy explains this peculiarity of the film using the Soviet political context: in 1964 the infamous KGB was in the prime of its power and "Kozintsev's film accordingly dramatizes an Elsinore full of spying and secret plots where people like Hamlet have to guard themselves carefully. Many of Hamlet's monologues take place in voiceover – he cannot speak aloud his thoughts for fear he is being listened to"⁸¹. In fact, such a politically-focused interpretation of the film arouses discussion. Mark Sokolyansky offers an alternative interpretation: "Kozintsev preferred the off-screen reading of the soliloquies accompanying silent behavior. This device was contemplated in Russian film-making as far back as the 1930s by Sergei Yutkevich, who had planned several Shakespeare films many years before his 1956 *Othello*. The device was used by Olivier in his 1948 film of *Hamlet*"⁸².

While the anti-totalitarian dimension of Kozintsev's rendition of *Hamlet* never comes into the foreground of the film, it is implicitly present in the profusion of subtle details of film direction which are interspersed on the screen for the attentive viewer to notice.

The first peculiarity of the film's anti-totalitarian background that deserves special attention is the choice of the translation. Kozintsev selects Pasternak's version and one can name at least two valid reasons for that. The first and foremost is the unique "Russianness" of Pasternak's text. The originality of Pasternak's translation consists of his avoiding the faithful following of the original. The originality of Pasternak's translation involves a strategy to avoid closely following the original. G. Redner writes, "Instead Pasternak employed an artistic and poetic approach to his translations – one that made use of twentieth-century

⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 95.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Sokolyansky M. Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. P. 207.

colloquial Russian. By doing this, he succeeded in making the plays completely accessible to the Soviet audiences of his day”⁸³. In Anna Key France’s opinion, Pasternak’s translation of *Hamlet* broke away from the practice of translating words and metaphors and, instead, focused on a translation of thoughts and scenes⁸⁴. Such a bold artistic shift was not accidental in any way. G. Redner points out that “by doing this he allowed himself the freedom to turn *Hamlet* into a distinctly Russian work – one that took the Bard out of sixteenth-century Denmark and placed him firmly into the post-Stalin twentieth-century Soviet Union”⁸⁵. Pasternak’s original approach to translating the great tragedy allowed Kozintsev to use this version as the textual basis to fill the film with implicit anti-totalitarian messages which were palpable and perceptible for Soviet intelligentsia suffering in the ideological, cultural and political prison. Pasternak’s translation served not only as a means of interlingual communication but also “as a means of personal creative expression at a time when other avenues of artistic self-expression were closed to him because he could not express himself freely or hope to have his work published in the Soviet Union”⁸⁶.

So, the second reason which inspired Kozintsev’s choice was the reputation of Pasternak in the sixties in his native country. The writer was reviled and banished by the Soviet critics and governors. Regarded as hostile to the state machine, Pasternak simultaneously became the symbol of democratically oriented Soviet intelligentsia which suffered from the constant suppressing control. So, Kozintsev’s choice of the translation by Pasternak may be viewed as a certain act of artistic solidarity – the film, which won the Lenin Prize, helped to ameliorate the reputation of the writer who fell out of grace with the Soviet regime.

A crucial role in creating anti-totalitarian overtones in the film is performed by the powerful imagery which encapsulates and actualizes the concepts vital for Kozintsev. The dominants of the visual universe of the screen version are water, stones, iron, and fire.

⁸³ Redner G. *Deleuze and film music: Building a Methodological Bridge Between Film Theory and Music*. Chicago, 2011. P. 78.

⁸⁴ France A. K. *Boris Pasternak’s translations of Shakespeare*. Berkeley. Los Angeles. London, 1978. P. 11.

⁸⁵ Redner G. *Deleuze and film music: Building a Methodological Bridge Between Film Theory and Music*. P. 79.

⁸⁶ France A. K. *Boris Pasternak’s translations of Shakespeare*. Berkeley. Los Angeles. London, 1978. P. 6.

Water and seascapes become visual leitmotifs of the film. All the crucial scenes (encounter with the Ghost, soliloquy *To be or not to be*, Hamlet's death to name the few) take place on the beach. The sea-scenes perform not only the function of the emotional counterpoint of Hamlet's reflection, they symbolize moral and intellectual freedom. Hamlet mournfully follows the flying seagull, because this creature can leave Elsinore and see the distant horizon of unending natural space, whereas Hamlet in soliloquy *To be or not to be* is deprived of this view – hearing the sound of waves he cannot look at the sea hidden by a rock. Saviour Catania emphasizes the interrelation of sea-scenes, pointing out that “the beach death-sequence synthesizes the visionary essence of earlier seascapes and thus accrues their ‘inner dynamism’”⁸⁷. Moreover, in the screen version, Kozintsev uses the effect of framing – at the beginning and the end of the film one can see the rough sea with a shadow of a rock on which the castle stands. This ominous shadow looming over the seascape implies the virtual inviolability of the rotten superpower: the waves of nature are unable to ruin the shade of the castle of human making. No matter how noble are the natural aspirations of human beings, he cannot destroy the might which is a product of diabolic mind the autocratic power is endowed with.

In his vision of Elsinore, Kozintsev accentuates stones and lathings – obligatory markers of a prison. In the film, both of them acquire additional symbolic meaning – they serve as tokens of extreme barrenness and infertility. Gerald Moore notes that when at the beginning of the film horsemen thunder into the castle, the draw-bridge, “photographed from road-level, begins rising terribly against the eyes of the spectator. As it rises higher, a portcullis at the top of the screen and begins to descend in front of it. After this sequence we scarcely need the words, “Denmark’s a prison”. Over and over again the detail of this film’s direction reveals the same clarity and strength”⁸⁸. The prison-like character of Elsinore is also made visible through some very subtle light techniques – after Hamlet’s arrival into the castle, the sun-beam we see on the brick-wall of the well under the entrance bridge gradually dies out as the gate of the castle

⁸⁷ Catania S. ‘The Beached Verge’: On Filming the Unfilmable in Grigori Kozintsev’s Hamlet. *Enter Text: An Interactive Interdisciplinary E-Journal for Cultural and Historical Studies and Creative Work*. 2011. Vol. 1.2. P. 314. URL : https://www.brunel.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/111315/Saviour-Catania,-The-Beached-Verge-On-Filming-the-Unfilmable-in-Grigori-Kozintsevs-Hamlet.pdf.

⁸⁸ Moore G. The Russian Hamlet. *Transition*. 1965. No. 20. P. 56.

closes, thus showing symbolically the death of hope caused by the waning of the Thaw tendencies.

The spectators also encounter flickering flame rather early in the film: in the opening credits, one can see a flambeau with the fire burning into black smoke erasing the names of the filming crew and the cast. The burning flame serves as the image leitmotif of truth: it flares in the fireplace when Horatio recounts his affronting the Ghost (when Claudius passes it one can see only charred firewood), the cressets are enkindled during the performance of the “Mousetrap”. Hamlet enters the hall for secret meetings also with a flambeau but throws it away no sooner than he sees Claudius. After this, he slowly passes all the authorities sitting at the round table, thus challenging them for never being candid, for playing into the king’s hands. So, the fire in Kozintsev’s version suggests sincerity and truth which were becoming extinct in the totalitarian society.

In his diary, Kozintsev wrote, “it is strange that people always strived to film *Hamlet* in the pavilions, but it seems to me that only in nature one can find the key to turning of Shakespeare’s words into visual images”⁸⁹. The images of nature, sea, and fire which, according to Yutkevich, become “not the foil, but the organic ferment of the film”⁹⁰ form one of the grand artistic victories of the Soviet director. But the natural landscape confronts in the movie with the insincere and pompous world of human making. This stone and iron space is confined by the walls of Elsinore – the non-natural prison-state overloaded with the numerous signs of power. Practically in every castle shot the eye of a spectator is caught by coats of arms, ominous bas-reliefs, bronze monuments and statues, busts and portraits. At the beginning of almost every scene, the film-director makes use of a visual anaphora – the multiple signs of honor and adoration of the power appear in the first seconds as the accents of the setting. Such abundance is by no means casual – in such a way Kozintsev unfolds totalitarian honorific discourse.

Pervaded with the obtrusive elements of the discourse of power glorification, Elsinore becomes a spiritual jail for Hamlet, that is why he feels his perfect loneliness so palpably. This estrangement from

⁸⁹ Юткевич С. О трех «Гамлетах», одной Офелии, двух клоунах и призраке. С. 50.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

surrounding reality is underlined by his clothing – in several scenes, Hamlet’s costumes are quite different from those of people surrounding him. Though a representative of the nobility, he never wears the luxuriant court collar; his apparel looks more like that of a philosopher or a monk (in the cemetery scenes) than of a prince. This contrast is even more conspicuous on the Soviet poster of the film. On it, the protagonist is depicted in a snow-white costume which sharply contrasts the darkly clad Claudius’ allies. Hamlet stands distinctly aloof from the authorities of Elsinore over whom a bloody crown-grid looms. To convey the grand scale of the prince’s loneliness Kozintsev employs the whole palette of visual devices – the spectator can note how impressively change Ophelia’s apparel and hairstyle when she starts to participate in Polonius and Claudius’s plot, in the relations of Hamlet and Horatio a certain distance is perceived. These stunning visual details are supported by Shostakovich’s score which evokes the atmosphere of solitude in the crowd of conceited and arrogant allies of Claudius. Smoktunovskiy’s expression greatly adds to this dramatic effect, Gerald Moore, for instance, even suggests that “he is Hamlet almost before he speaks”⁹¹. So, the film realizes the director’s conception stated in his pre-production notes from the diary where he writes, “in Shakespeare we have ... loneliness in the ebullition of court life. Hamlet is suffocated not by the castle’s architecture but by the life organization, spiritual atmosphere of the century”⁹². Kozintsev’s success in showing perfect isolation of Hamlet adds dramatically to the revelation of the tragedy of an intelligent sensible personality in hostile surroundings.

Kozintsev, who lived and worked in the USSR, occasionally modifies the manner of representation of Shakespeare’s text to evoke the associations with the Soviet reality. He deliberately gives Claudius’s words concerning “the rules of mourning” to the king’s public crier. This alternation allows us to see how indifferently but with fright people react to the words of the herald – another decision of the al-mighty governor. The director also shows the mourning for the dead king as feigned and affected: the black flags appear some moments before Hamlet’s arrival; the black blind on the window is being rolled only when Hamlet enters the castle. One more step away from the conventional approaches is the

⁹¹ Moore G. *The Russian Hamlet*. P. 56.

⁹² Козинцев Г. *Наш современник Вильям Шекспир*. С. 316/

deliberate focus on the flute soliloquy⁹³. This emphasis is not accidental: Kozintsev wanted to decidedly accentuate the paramountcy of spiritual freedom of a human being – one of the virtues that the totalitarianism-infected Soviet society lacked so much.

The revelation of one more Soviet scourge – constant espionage – is a significant part of Kozintsev’s screen version. The director’s emphasis on this motif is rather well-considered. In his book *Nash Sovremennik Viliam Shekspir*, the director writes: “The architecture of Elsinore – not walls, but ears in the walls. There are doors so that one can eavesdrop behind them, windows so that one can spy through them. The guards are the walls. Every sound gives birth to echoes, reverberations, whispers, rustling... Fear – a general, mutual guarantee – is the very air of Elsinore”⁹⁴. The spies intrude into the private life of people: entering his room Hamlet finds the papers on the table in disorder, he is kept under the vigilant eye of king’s surveillance agents. Such fear and desire to spy inevitably occur in the totalitarian society, they thrive in the atmosphere of harassment and aggression. And one of the most ingenious artistic inventions of the Russian film-director is developing Claudius’s cult of personality. In the course of the film, one can see his full-scale portraits, miniatures, busts. A new monument to him appears between the bronze lions in the castle when Hamlet was sent to England. Polonius has the king’s portrait on the medallion and his bust is triumphantly placed on the wardrobe.

CONCLUSION

Grigori Kozintsev’s *Hamlet* turned out to have been used as one more column in the colonnade that supported the topos ‘our Shakespeare’⁹⁵, one of the ideological products of Soviet cultural politics. But at the same time, this film with its anti-totalitarian implications was destroying the key point of the myth about the Soviet Union as ‘the country of socialism with a human face’. Appropriating Shakespeare was

⁹³ See *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* C. 276, 320.

⁹⁵ On this topos see: Chernyak Y. Shakespeare as a Sovietism: the red lines on the map of the Ukrainian Shakespeareana. *Romanian Shakespeare Journal*. București, 2013. P. 12–17; Cherniak Y. Ukraine. *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* / Ed. by M. Dobson, S. Wells, W. Sharpe and E. Sullivan. Oxford, 2015. P. 542. and the article *Key Topoi of the Ukrainian Shakespearean Discourse of the late 19th –mid 20th century* by Yurii Cherniak in this edition.

crucial for the Soviet authorities, as the Bard symbolized not just English literature, but the whole Western canon, preserving in his works the essence of Europeaness. Kozintsev's interpretation was all the more opportune for the regime as it turned out to be a world-level masterpiece proving the immense possibilities of the Soviet cinema. In this way, it became a useful tool in making Shakespeare's tragedy an integral part of the socialist ideology and a convenient instrument for implementing its values both at home and abroad. This was certainly not what Kozintsev had strived for, but at least such vision of the film's message secured him from being sent to the camps.

Further history of the Soviet Union and Putin's Russia has shown that Kozintsev's cinematic metaphors proved prophetic. The Thaw period came to the end soon after the film was released. In the fall of 1964, Nikita Khrushchev, who carried out the de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union and liberal domestic policy reforms, was removed from both political posts (the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and chairman of the Council of Ministers). After Leonid Brezhnev became the first secretary of the Communist Party, the overcoming of the effects of totalitarianism stopped and soon came to naught. As Mark Sokolyansky puts it, "the role of the party's dictatorship increased considerably in cultural and spiritual life. It is enough here to mention the several notorious trials sentencing writers to imprisonment, the dismissal of the editorial boards of progressive periodicals, the banning of many books, theatrical performances, films and so on"⁹⁶. In contemporary Russia, the situation with democracy and freedom of speech is much worse than at the sunset of the Soviet Union or even under Leonid Brezhnev. So, Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* is of acute topicality again.

All the signs of anti-totalitarian discourse in Kozintsev's film which are often mentioned in modern criticism could not have been examined from this angle by Soviet cinema critics and scholars. It was equally dangerous for the film-maker, the critics and the further destiny of the film. It was equally dangerous for the film-maker, the critics and the further destiny of the film. So, the criticism in the USSR considered it safer to represent vices of Elsinore as essentially Danish and medieval, rather than native and contemporary features. As this has been shown in the introduction to this article, a similar interpretation is offered to the

⁹⁶ Sokolyansky M. Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. P. 208.

young generation in contemporary Russia where the totalitarian tendencies are getting stronger. Yet analysis of particular cinema metaphors and semiotic signs used in Kozintsev's film helps us to identify the ideological implications of the film and appreciate the political courage of the director as well as his high skill in making classics contemporary.

SUMMARY

The article deals with the film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* directed by Grigori Kozintsev (1964) and aims at identifying the anti-totalitarian implications in it. The author argues that though this film turned out to have been used for supporting the topos 'our Shakespeare' as an ideological product of Soviet cultural politics, the anti-totalitarian implications were destroying the key point of the myth about the Soviet Union as 'the country of socialism with a human face'.

Being a vivid manifestation of the axiological potential of Shakespeare's greatest tragedy Kozintsev's film raises the complicated existential problems and outlines the conflict zones created by the complex interaction of various motives within the tragedy. The numerous successful directing decisions, interesting finds of Kozintsev and his cast, as well as the set of impressive cinematic metaphors form an implicit layer of the film and make it a vibrantly anti-totalitarian reading of Shakespeare's great tragedy.

Keywords: Grigori Kozintsev, Hamlet, contrary interpretations, axiological potential, film adaptation, cinematic metaphors, anti-totalitarian implications.

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