

**“...THERE IS NOTHING EITHER GOOD OR BAD BUT
THINKING MAKES IT SO”¹: SHAKESPEAREAN
INTERTEXTUALITY IN M. HAIG’S LITERARY PROJECTION
*THE DEAD FATHERS CLUB***

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INTRODUCTION

Being in its essence “words, words, words” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.210)², Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is at the same time an absolutely unique cultural phenomenon. Since its first staging, this tragedy, endowed with considerable metatextual potential, has become the center of an extensive network of intertextual connections. The vibrant and impressive discourse spinning around the play can be viewed as a sign of Shakespeare’s genius ability to speak to his audience over the boundaries of time, geography and culture. In the words of F. David Martin and Lee A. Jacobus, “the long-term success of works of art depends on their ability to interpret human experience at a level of complexity that warrants examination and reexamination”³. If this be true, *Hamlet* may be rightfully considered the most successful literary work of the Western canon: there are more instances of scholarly, critical and creative interpretation of the play than there are lines in it.

When the German philosopher Georg Lichtenberg visited London in the 1770s and attended *Hamlet* starring David Garrick, he described his impressions of the great monologue “To Be, or Not to Be” in his memoirs saying that a large part of the audience not only knew it by heart as well as the Lord’s Prayer, but also listened to it with such a feeling of jubilation and godliness that could not be understood by those who did not

¹ Shakespeare W. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine. Folger digital texts, URL : www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/html/Ham.html. (Last accessed 29.02.2020).

² Ibid.

³ Martin F. D., Jacobus L. A. *The humanities through the arts*. New York, 2015. P. 4.

know England⁴. Since then, this reverent admiration for *Hamlet* has conquered the whole world. Over the years the play has not lost its magnetic appeal: from 1879 to 2004, only the Royal Shakespeare Company and its predecessor, Shakespeare Memorial Theater, staged *Hamlet* eighty-two times; and there are more than seventy-five screen versions of the tragedy⁵. G. Lichtenberg wrote in his memoirs that in England aphorisms from Shakespeare's works can be heard everywhere, people sing about Shakespeare and borrow songs from his works, and, as a result, many of the English children learn about him before they learn the alphabet⁶. But Shakespeare's works are not only the foundation of the English culture, they speak a universal language and today *Hamlet* is as relevant as hip-hop or street art.

Hamlet's universal metatextual functionality can be actualized in many ways, one of them being a literary projection – one of the varieties of active creative interpretation of the pretext that leads to the emergence in the new historical and cultural context of a self-contained work of art, which preserves the plot and character coordinates of the source text⁷. In this case, canonical dominant leitmotifs can be specified, undergo re-accentuation or become modified, narrowing, expanding or transforming the semantic continuum of the pretext⁸. Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club* (2006) is a vivid example of such a creative transformation of the canonical tragedy. This novel has not yet been selected as an object of focused and systematic academic consideration. The study of this literary experiment may yield interesting results in terms of a more profound understanding of the way the modern literature eagerly appropriates Shakespeare's works on different levels: the plot, characters, themes and motifs, imagery, etc. Thus, the main **aim** of the paper is to analyze the structure and the functions of the allusive paradigm of *The Dead Fathers Club* as a literary projection of *Hamlet* and examine the ways in which the

⁴ Lichtenberg G. C. On David Garrick as Hamlet in his own adaptation at the theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London. *Shakespeare in the theatre. An anthology of criticism*. Oxford, 1997. P. 26.

⁵ Hunt M. W. Looking for Hamlet. New York, 2008. P. 2.

⁶ Lichtenberg G. C. On David Garrick as Hamlet in his own adaptation at the theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London. P. 26.

⁷ Лазаренко Д. М. «Гамлет» В. Шекспіра як метатекст пізнього Ренесансу та його літературні проєкції : автореф. ... канд. філол. наук. Київ, 2010. С. 8.

⁸ Лазаренко Д. М. Специфіка конструювання літературної проєкції гамлетівського сюжету в романі Д. Вроблевські "Історія Едгара Сотеля." *Нова філологія*. Запоріжжя, 2011. № 3. С. 16.

metatextual potential of the great tragedy is being realized through its adaptation.

1. Matt Haig's novel in the paradigm of contextual literary projections

The literary projections of *Hamlet* differ from other forms of intertextual actualization of the play's metatextual potential by the entirety and systematic character of the interpretation which is based on the key structural and semantic elements of the tragedy. The projection comprises three main levels:

– the plot (the son takes revenge for the death of the father; the murderer is the protagonist's uncle, who seeks to take a higher place in the social and family hierarchy);

– the characters (the main characters on which the projection is based are Hamlet, the Ghost, Claudius, Gertrude; a greater degree of variability is allowed with respect to secondary characters – Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, as well as Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Fortinbras, etc.)

– the problems (power and society, religion, morality, art, thinking, personal self-identification, etc.).

Quite often, the main touchpoints that provide a metatextual connection between *Hamlet* and its literary projections are those elements of the tragedy that are genetically connected with Shakespeare's writing strategies, e. g. metatextual fragments, high semantic valence of the key concepts and polyvariety of readings, metaphoricality of the narrative thinking, etc. Due to the stereoscopic nature of Shakespeare's creative vision and the multifaceted interpretation field of *Hamlet*, this type of metatextual connection is, in our view, the most representative and yielding in terms of exploring the metatextuality of the great tragedy and the multiple ways in which it can be employed by the authors to examine the burning issues of the day.

Literary projections as a form of creative intertextual interpretation of the pretext have two main semantic vectors: they can be text-orientated / text-centric (e. g., works by W. Gilbert, T. Stoppard, C. Cavafy, B. Akunin, J. Updike) and contextual (e. g., works by M. Haig, D. Wroblewski, I. Murdoch, etc.)⁹. Though such a division is provisional, it facilitates

⁹ Лазаренко Д. М. «Гамлет» В. Шекспіра як метатекст пізнього Ренесансу та його літературні проєкції. С. 12–13.

classification of the many varieties of intertextuality and allows for better understanding of the mechanisms of transformation. This dichotomy is applicable in most cases of creative reworkings of Shakespeare, including the cinema, visual arts, and music. For example, *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) directed by F. Zeffirelli is a text-centric projection. This rather close-to-text adaptation aims at visualizing the unique world of Shakespeare's masterpiece, reaching its semantic depths, reviving its atmosphere and breathing life into it. In the more recent B. Luhrmann's film *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), the text-centric vector also prevails: though the film can boast profound and rather stylish modernization, yet, its main function is to bring the classical text closer to the modern recipient, to overcome more than four hundred years that separate the audience from the original. At the same time, due to modernization, the contextual vector is gaining more weight in this case. Finally, *The West Side Story* (1961) directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins is characterized by the predominance of the contextual vector, which makes it possible to interpret the contemporary context by drawing on the images and motifs of Shakespeare's masterpiece.

All in all, literary projections are quite heterogeneous. Their functions vary depending on the author's intentions and many other factors, such as the nature of the pretext, the form and mechanisms of projecting the key plot and image coordinates of the source, the specific background assumptions of the receptive consciousness. However, a certain functional range is common to all types of projections. It is related to providing the recipient – text – culture circulation, transcoding cultural messages into various languages and semiotic systems, facilitating the dialogue of various cultural and temporal layers.

M. Haig's novel *The Dead Fathers Club* can be defined as a contextual literary projection. This type of projecting Shakespeare's works into new creative contexts started to actively develop with the arrival of the Romantics onto the literary scene. Having discovered the unique versatility of Shakespeare's genius, they began to regard the Great Bard as an equal interlocutor in their discussions about the key challenges and philosophical issues of their time. It is the cult of Shakespeare's personality and works, created within the pre-Romanticism and Romanticism, that predetermined the place that the dramatist occupies in the worldview of people of the twentieth and twenty-first century and the literary hierarchy of the Western canon. As N. Dyakonova notes, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Shelley, Keats opened the way to the academic study of the literary heritage of the playwright and spoke of his genius as a

synthesis of all that is beautiful, majestic and eternal, not only in literature but also in nature¹⁰. The list of Shakespeare's perfections, compiled by the Romantics, constitutes not only an enumeration of the especially brilliant aspects of the playwright's mastery but also certain requirements applied to any true work of art: the theoretical provisions of the Romantics, their interpretation of Shakespeare's work put forward criteria that became normative at the end of the nineteenth century and have not been refuted since then¹¹.

German Romanticism, within which the formation of Shakespeare's cult began, transformed Hamlet into a type, teaching the readers to identify themselves with the protagonist of Shakespeare's tragedy. Hamlet became a symbol of a person unable to act and hiding behind the wall of words, melancholy, and despair from a cause that simply cannot be completed. According to H. Gorenok, "trying to explain the character of Shakespeare's protagonist, based on their current social conditions, they [German Romantics – *D. L.*] drew parallels between the prince and their compatriots, sought to interpret his behavior as the behavior of a real person residing in Germany (J. W. von Goethe, F. Schlegel, A. W. Schlegel, G. W. F. Hegel, F. Freiligrath, G. G. Gervinus, etc.)"¹². Thus, it was during this period that the process of appropriation of Shakespeare in general and *Hamlet* in particular began. The appropriation was conducted not only by individuals (philosophers, critics, translators, writers, directors, actors, etc.) but also by entire European nations, resulting in the appearance of specific national interpretations of *Hamlet*. Another important consequence was the formation of the concept of 'hamletism'¹³, the structuring of which largely depended not only on the evolution of critical and academic approaches to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but also on the development of intellectual trends in the recipient culture and the socio-political processes within it.

The transformation of Hamlet into a symbol was a necessary prerequisite for the development of contextual projections: this process

¹⁰ Дьяконова Н. Шекспир и английская литература XX века. *Вопросы литературы*. 1986. № 10. С. 73.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Горенок Г. Ю. Гамлет і Гамлетизм у європейській літературі першої половини XX століття : автореф. ... канд. філол. наук. Тернопіль, 2007. С. 6.

¹³ For more information on the history and essence of hamletism see Черняк Ю. І. Специфіка актуалізації ціннісної семантики "Гамлета" В. Шекспіра в українському шекспірівському дискурсі : автореф. ... канд. філол. наук. Київ, 2011. 20 с.

opened up opportunities for new creative experiments with the 'implantation' of the image into a new chronotope. The romanticist vision of Shakespeare as a timeless genius offered the next generations of writers the possibility to use Shakespeare's images as universal tools for exploring contemporary reality. *Hamlet*, with its amazing ability to adapt to almost any cultural and historical context, has often been perceived by readers as a reflection of their own intellectual and spiritual problems. So, since the middle of the XIX century the process of modernization began to gain increasing popularity, the aim of which was, as a rule, to bring the historical background of the tragedy closer to the modern reader, to make it clearer and more relevant. Such a modernization first occurred in P. Bourget's novel *André Cornélis* (1887)¹⁴. Later, this technique was used by A. Döblin, I. Murdoch, D. Wroblewski, and many others. It is the technique of modernization that underpins *Hamlet*'s numerous contextual projections in contemporary literature and cinema, for example, the iconic film version of *Hamlet* directed by M. Almereyda (2000).

The Dead Fathers Club, the second novel of the British writer Matt Haig, is a fairly representative and extremely interesting example of a contextual literary projection of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Today, 14 novels and several non-fiction works by this author have been published, many of them dedicated to the literary study of family and parenting issues. In an effort to present a new perspective on the eternal problems of growing up and dealing with adolescence, bullying, depression and a variety of other psychological challenges, Haig resorts to a combination of an unusual narrative framework and Shakespearean intertextuality. For example, in his first novel *The Last Family in England* (2004), which became a best-seller in the UK, the narrator is a pet Labrador named Prince, torn between a sense of duty to his master and sympathy for Falstaff, his Spaniel friend. Even more Shakespearean is Haig's second novel, *The Dead Fathers Club*, in which a charming and highly unreliable storyteller Philip Noble, an eleven-year-old boy with a strange aversion to punctuation, tells a story of the tragedy that shook and almost ruined his family when his father died in a car crash. The novel is explicitly and thoroughly Shakespearean, yet, in the words of Gerard Woodward, *The Guardian* literary reviewer, "Haig borrows from Shakespeare in the same spirit that Shakespeare borrowed from his own sources. One is never sure

¹⁴ Frenzel E. Stoffe der Weltliteratur: Lexicon dichtungsgeschichtl. Lägsschnitte. Stuttgart, 1983. S. 281.

where the story is going next, and that's what makes this book such sad fun"¹⁵. This contextual projection takes the reader on an intriguing 'what-if' journey which explores possible real-life implications of Hamlet's iconic lines "... there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.269)¹⁶.

2. Shakespearean allusions in *The Dead Fathers Club* as the foundation for the literary projection

The world of *The Dead Fathers Club*, imbued with implicit and explicit allusions to the text of Shakespeare's great tragedy, is essentially built upon the foundation of the source plot: a young man seeks revenge on his uncle, who is a hypothetical murderer of the protagonist's father. This manifestation of intertextuality is intentional, since the author deliberately constructs intertextual parallels, and the prototype is explicit, that is, verbalized. The type of intertextuality used is allusive: without a precise citation it 'hints' at a well-known pretext. This intertextual technique can be defined as a scenario allusion that preserves the plot frame of the pretext. In this case, the allusion is comparative, because it is important for the reader to compare the storyline of the novel with the source, *Hamlet* by W. Shakespeare.

It should be noted that this intertextual connection on the plot level includes a transformation as in the process of re-interpretation the chronotope is being modernized. The action is transferred from medieval Denmark to 21st century England, the era of teenagers fascinated by the music of Beyonce¹⁷ and the adventures of Spiderman¹⁸ and Wolverine¹⁹. The main location is not Elsinore, but a pub called *Castle and Falcon*, whose owner – 'the king of the castle' – is the father of the main character, Brian Noble. The reader, familiar with Shakespeare's tragedy, has an exciting opportunity to imagine a modern English boy in the situation of Prince Hamlet. Haig's protagonist loses his father in a car accident and is forced to watch the unfolding of his mother's love affair

¹⁵ Woodward G. Hamlet, is that you? *The Guardian*. 2006. URL : <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/01/featuresreviews.guardianreview17> (Last accessed 29.02.2020).

¹⁶ Shakespeare W. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

¹⁷ Haig M. *The Dead Fathers Club*. New York, 2007. P. 35.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* P. 41.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* P. 37.

with his uncle. Shortly after the funeral, the boy sees the Ghost calling on him to take revenge and kill Uncle Alan.

There are obvious Shakespearean plot and character allusions in the text. They actualize such significant structural and semantic coordinates of *Hamlet* as:

- the system of motifs: revenge for the death of the father, possible fratricide, betrayal of the mother, traitor friends, etc.;
- magistral conflicts: the appearance of the Ghost, the intervention of the Ghost in the affairs of the living, unintentional murder, the suicide of a young female character;
- key concepts: death, revenge, memory, imagination, art, language, etc.

However, it is important to say here that in Haig's novel, motifs and conflicts are often dramatically re-thought and transformed. For example, the suicide of the young heroine has undergone profound reinterpretation: Leah, Philip's girlfriend, remains alive after an attempted suicide thanks to the intervention of the protagonist and his uncle Alan. The book is aimed at young readers and has educational and 'therapeutic' functions, therefore, a re-interpretation of the *Hamlet* plot is crucial for the young reader to develop a more positive picture of the world and a psychologically resilient attitude. In the words of F. David Martin and Lee A. Jacobus, "the subject matter of art ... is not limited to the beautiful and the pleasant, the bright sides of life. Art may also include and help us understand the dark sides – the ugly, the painful, and the tragic"²⁰; thus, art helps young people "come to grips with those dark sides of life."²¹ Haig's novels are not just fiction, they are fictional equivalents of self-help books that use various cultural archetypes to support young readers and help them get through the hardest of times. The author's noble mission has been praised by a variety of critics. Stephen Fry wittily writes about Haig's newest novel: "Take *Notes on a Nervous Planet* twice daily, with or without food. The book is crammed with wisdom, insight, love and wit"²², while Bel Mooney from *Daily Mail* pays well-deserved compliments to Haig's previous book: "Haig's bestseller *Reasons to Stay Alive* was an engaging self-help memoir which mined personal trauma for

²⁰ Martin F. D., Jacobus L. A. The humanities through the arts. P. 3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The Dead Fathers Club: Reviews. *Matt Haig: Books are our maps*. 2020. URL : <http://www.matthaig.com/thedeadfathersclubreviews/> (Last accessed: 29.02.2020).

valuable life lessons. This follow-up is a rag-bag of personal experience, thoughts and feelings ... some thought-provoking, some pertinent and important ... He's a smart operator who knows his readership and genuinely wants to help them ... I reached the last page admiring the author's inventive energy and insight"²³. The author's design accounts both for the choice of such a literary icon as *Hamlet* as a pretext and his way of profoundly rethinking it. Ultimately, Haig's aim is to work with archetypes that define the overall modern perception of the world and often predetermine the choices of young readers.

In addition to the comparative script allusion working on the plot level, Haig's novel also contains numerous comparative allusions-references. Almost all of the main characters in the novel are twins of Shakespeare's characters: Philip Noble is definitely Hamlet, Brian Noble is King Hamlet, Carol Noble is Gertrude, Alan Noble is Claudius, Mr. Fairview is Polonius, Leah is Ophelia, and, finally, Ross and Gary are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Most of these allusions are rather monovalent than ambivalent or polyvalent, since they are associated with their denotates mainly through some functional trait dealing with behavior. At the same time, the image of Philip Noble is built on an ambivalent allusion because the author attributes to him not only Hamlet's behavior, but also certain personal characteristics and ideological subtexts.

M. Haig's novel contains basic compositional elements of Shakespeare's tragedy, yet, they are subjected to a serious re-thinking. For example, the finale undergoes significant changes: the novel ends with a scene of a total psychological transformation of the protagonist, who, after a series of tragic episodes (Philip sets fire to the workshop, causing Mr. Fairview to die; Leah falls into a state of depression and her brother tries to kill Philip; Leah and Philip find themselves in a river bend, Uncle Alan rescues them and dies), realizes that he must rely solely on his own life experience.

While using a variety of Shakespearean allusions, M. Haig employs a range of transformation strategies. Sometimes the author retains the authentic essence of a certain artistic element genetically rooted in Shakespeare's work. So, for example, the movie that Philip proposes to watch with his uncle and mother is a functional analog of the *Mousetrap*. Sometimes the element itself is transformed, acquiring a new coloring,

²³ Ibid.

being modernized and thus raising a whole new wave of burning issues. For instance, the relationship between Philip and Leah, reminiscent of Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship, is to some extent a plot inversion of the Shakespearean prototype. In Shakespeare's tragedy, Hamlet's status serves as a certain defense mechanism for him and his madness: though the Prince goes beyond the ordinary behavioral norms, he by no means becomes a mockery. At the same time, teenage Philip, who does not have such a high social status within modern English society, is transformed into an outsider, the object of humiliating abuse. Leah, whose name is phonetically consonant with the name of Shakespeare's heroine, stands up for Philip displaying masculine qualities. If Shakespeare's Ophelia lacked determination, life experience, and independence, Haig's Leah not only devises a rescue strategy for Philip but also successfully implements it.

Sometimes, however, an element of the Shakespearean world is radically rethought, demonstrating the productivity of the dialogue between the contemporary culture and the canon. The ending of M. Haig's novel is a vivid example: the young seeker of truth finally realizes that Uncle Alan is not guided by the evil impulses attributed to him by his tortured imagination and inspired by the Ghost's words. The young man understands that he was mistaken when he looked at his uncle as a personal enemy who wanted to take a higher place in the social and family hierarchy (to become the sole owner of the pub and the sole object of Carol's love). Alan's tragic death, which turned him from a Cain figure into a martyr, a victim of his own nobility, demonstrates to Philip the deceptive nature of prejudice towards his uncle. Having been magnetically influenced by the words of the Ghost, Philip becomes a hostage to his own emotions and memories. His perception of reality is defined not so much by real-life experience, as by the reactions of an unsteady teenager's psyche to the dramatic events (tragic death of his father, his mother's second marriage, loss of trust in friends). In such a shift in focus, there is a clear echo of modernity with its increased interest in issues such as the social isolation of the individual, adolescent conflicts, the moral and ethical confusion of a young person who is unable to find adequate role models.

One of the means of delineating the semantic field of *The Dead Fathers Club* is M. Haig's strategy of using the cognitive potential of Shakespeare's famous metaphors. For example, Haig uses the metaphor of 'sin as a disease' when the ghost of Philip's father says to his son, "Dont hate your Mum Philip. She cant see the rotten Cancer she is letting

into this place. Its unnatural but she is too weak”²⁴. Another metaphor is built around the image of the seducer as a snake: the Ghost begs his son to take revenge upon his uncle saying, “Dads Ghost closed his eyes and then said Kill him Philip. Hes a snake. If you ever loved me youll kill him”²⁵. These images add color to the speech of the Ghost, make it more somber and sinister. M. Haig also resorts to Shakespeare’s image of weeds as a symbol of forgetfulness and sin. In *Hamlet*, the Black Prince says, “’Tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely” (1.2.139-142)²⁶. The garden is one of the images crucial for Christianity, so, an abandoned garden is akin to a lost paradise, which forms associations with such concepts as forgetfulness, guilt, conscience, shame, self-disgust. Philip reflects on the death of his own father and the father of Leah and Dane, while looking at the plants under the bridge: “At the bottom of the bridge wall there were weeds under the old bricks but not under the new ones. The new bricks didnt have any holes and no room for weeds. But one day the weeds will find a way into the new bricks because weeds can grow anywhere Dad told me”²⁷. Here weeds serve as a symbol of how the recollections about parents will gradually be erased from the memory of children, and their place will be occupied by mundane everyday thoughts.

Interestingly enough, Haig often visualizes metaphors: for example, he combines two phrases that are used by Shakespeare to characterize Claudius (“Thoughts black, hands apt,” 3.2.280)²⁸ within the visual image of his character. There is a key feature in Alan’s appearance – his black hands, which are always dirty with the oil from the workshop. Shakespeare’s metaphors of the world as a prison and the man as an animal are similarly visualized. One of Philip’s teachers, Mr. Wormwood (his name is also allusive), makes such visualization possible decorating the classroom in a peculiar way: “He has put black tape on the glass in his Science Lab door and the tape is in bars like a prison and he has a sign on the door that says DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS”²⁹. As one can see, these allusions are somewhat semantically reduced, even travestied. They belong not to the world of philosophy, but

²⁴ Haig M. *The Dead Fathers Club*. P. 92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Shakespeare W. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

²⁷ Haig M. *The Dead Fathers Club*. P. 265–266.

²⁸ Shakespeare W. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

²⁹ Haig M. *The Dead Fathers Club*. P. 150–152.

to the world of everyday life, and are shown from an ironic perspective. However, they prompt young Philip to philosophical reflections on the essence of the human nature: “He thinks it is funny but its not because children are animals and so are grown ups so he is not a zookeeper he is just an older animal. Children dont change into different animals when they grow up. It is not like they are caterpillars going into butterflies. They just get taller and wider and less funny and do jobs and tell more lies like Uncle Alan”³⁰.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that following in the steps of Shakespeare, M. Haig also dives into the depths of the speech and language domain in order to create new meanings with the help of puns and words that reveal their hidden nuances only to the attentive and eager reader. A striking example is the interplay of anagrams “Brian” – “Bairn”, “Brian” – “Brain”. “Brian” is the name of the father of the protagonist. “Bairn” is a dialectical word for “a son” used by Philip’s grandmother. When Philip says “I am not a little bairn”³¹, it seems that he is not merely declaring his own adulthood, but protesting against being identified with his father, Brian, whose place he must now take and whose responsibility he must heave upon his own young shoulders.

Even more significant is the anagrammatic parallel “Brian” – “Brain”. All the misfortunes that happen in the novel are brought to life by the death of Philip’s father, Brian, and his orders for his son to take revenge. Interestingly, the notion of consciousness, often featured in Shakespeare’s tragedy and having an ambivalent semantic structure there (as consciousness and as conscience), is replaced in Haig’s novel by the biological term “brain”, which generally reflects the semantic simplification that occurs in the novel. Taking into account the phonetic and graphic similarity of the words “Brian” and “Brain”, one can better understand the message, which is more clearly manifested towards the end of the novel and finds a reflection in the words of Philip’s teacher who says, “we believe in what we want to believe.”³² The teacher’s comment is a paraphrase of Shakespeare’s “... for there is / nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it / so” (2.2.268-270)³³. Indeed, Shakespeare pays much more attention to what is happening in the mind

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid. P. 2.

³² Ibid. P. 304.

³³ Shakespeare W. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

of Hamlet, than to his revenge mission. In the words of Marvin Hunt, “the fact that it [the play – D.L.] relocates reality from outside the human mind to within it, taking us from a medieval mindset that held reality to be objective, anterior, and superior to human experience, to a modern, or more precisely, an early modern view that holds reality to be in large part, if not entirely a function of subjective experience”³⁴. Thus, it is possible to say that the key conflict that is mesmerizing the viewer in *Hamlet* is not happening on the stage, but in the mind of Hamlet and the audience. Consequently, the key themes of the play are not those of revenge and betrayal, but rather a much more complex problem – the essence of being human. In Haig’s novel, the teacher’s utterance, the validity of which is finally confirmed by the final scene of the novel, acquires the status of an ideological verdict of the work. Modern writers have developed Shakespeare’s brilliant idea and taken it to the extreme: for example, Cavafy portrays Claudius as a wise and skilled politician, a good king³⁵, and Stoppard shows Hamlet to be cruel and selfish³⁶. Matt Haig in his own turn brings a teenage version of the Black Prince into the limelight focusing on the issues relevant for the contemporary young audience.

Thus, *The Dead Fathers Club*, the leitmotif of which is consistent with the main collision of Shakespeare’s tragedy, and the finale is an inversion of the pretext, can be considered a contextual literary projection of *Hamlet*. The similarity of the plot structure, which is often found in text-centric projections, performs a very different function here. M. Haig’s purpose is not to interpret Shakespeare’s text (though this design is also present, and sometimes even clearly visible in the text), but to explore contemporary reality, in particular, the problem of family relations, through the involvement of elements of *Hamlet*’s semantic compendium. *Hamlet*’s plot, character and metaphor coordinates are used by Haig as a starting point in his own reflections on those life situations and conflicts that worry the modern readers.

3. Intertextual polyvalency as M. Haig’s writing strategy

In M. Haig’s novel, Shakespearean allusions act as predicative intertextuality, that is dominant, structure-forming intertextual connections. However, the text of the work also contains a large number

³⁴ Hunt M. W. Looking for Hamlet. P. 8–9.

³⁵ Cavafy K. King Claudius. *Collected poems*. Princeton, 1992. 304 p.

³⁶ Stoppard T. *Rosencratz and Guildenstern are Dead*. New York, 1971. 126 p.

of other pervasive, recurrent allusions that have a relativistic, fragmentary character and do not seem to be pivotal to the narrative, yet, still play an important role in the process of shaping the semantic landscape of the novel. These reminiscent, rather than comparative, allusions are intended to diversify the cultural palette of the narrative, to detail the portraits of the characters, to make the chronotype more realistic, etc. Moreover, one can observe the subtle connection that binds these allusions in a synergistic unity with the Shakespearean intertextuality. Thus, it would be interesting to look at the main manifestations of intertextuality in the given novel that are included into the Shakespearean intertextual framework as a text within a text and form a complex intertextual paradigm.

By typology, most of the allusions found in the text of the novel are intentional, explicit, reminiscent. They are easy to recognize because they reflect the narrator's deliberately naive and straightforward thinking. It would be most convenient to consider these instances of the intertextual dialogue by dividing them into three contingent groups: a) historical allusions (related to outstanding figures and events of the past); b) cultural allusions (those not directly related to the diachronic development of civilization, but reflecting its cultural diversity); c) literary allusions.

A significant group is constituted by historical allusions. Of particular note are the references to the history of ancient Rome, which fascinated Philip. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also contains a number of references to the same historical period, especially, the rule and fall of Julius Caesar. Historical allusions in Haig's novel serve as a leitmotif that runs through the whole story and reflects the moral and intellectual pursuits of the protagonist. The key image here is such a historic fortification of Roman Britain as Hadrian's Wall³⁷. This construction symbolizes the alienation of the young man, his loneliness and otherness: "Imagine what it must have been like! After years spent in warm sunshine having to cross the rough English Channel to a country which was known to be very unfriendly. There was not only the bad weather and the hills but many Britons hated being part of the Roman Empire and would throw stones or vegetables or even spit on the new soldiers"³⁸. For Philip, such a wall separates his world and the world of his peers. In a similar manner,

³⁷ Ibid. P. 28–32.

³⁸ Ibid. P. 29.

the wall of the battlement on which Hamlet encounters the ghost of his father separates him from all the other characters in the play.

This intertextual connection is strengthened through the use of an attributed quote, which is graphically highlighted in the text: “I tried to act normal and so I had my book on the Romans in Britain by Graham Fortune but I could only read one sentence. The sentence was ‘For the Roman soldier Hadrian’s Wall was more than just a defence against the Caledonian tribes – it was also the dividing line between the known world of order and civilization, and the unknown world of chaos and barbarism’”³⁹. Quotations are rarely used in the text of this novel, which is why this case is particularly significant. The boy’s choice of the quote reflects his emotional state: his life is now divided into a *Hamlet*-like opposition of two separate worlds – a harmonious and orderly world before his father’s death and a chaotic, dangerous world after the car crash.

Subsequently, Philip begins to use allusions to the ancient history realia and episodes as cognitive tools that help him explore and better understand himself and the world around him. Philip methodically looks for parallels between his situation and ancient history, which is, in general, highly reminiscent of the Renaissance way of thinking. The boy writes, “I knew everything about Rome because it was my favourite bit of History and I had all the books from the library ... I knew that Romulus was like Uncle Alan because he killed his brother and became the first King of Rome 2800 years ago”⁴⁰. His confused mind tries to use antique images to grasp the difficult life-threatening collision in which the protagonist finds himself. One of the key images for this intellectual and spiritual search is Emperor Nero – a whole section is devoted to his story, told by a teenager in simple and understandable terms (“Emperor Nero and Emperor Neros Mum”⁴¹). As a result of these reflections, the boy draws an important conclusion which runs, “once you do one bad thing everything changes and you end up doing more bad things like Emperor Nero”⁴². Initially, the image of Nero is extremely negatively coloured and the narrator associates it with uncle Alan⁴³. But as the plot develops, it is the image of Emperor Nero that allows the boy to understand the entire

³⁹ Ibid. P. 63.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 179-180.

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 210-213.

⁴² Ibid. P. 210-213.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 133.

relativity of his subjective judgments, and therefore his own injustice to his uncle: “I blamed him like Emperor Nero blamed the Christians and the Romans blamed Nero”⁴⁴. After all, it is the ancient allusions that help Philip express his feelings, guilt and desire to change for the better. This idea is clearly reflected in the boy’s monologue when he says, “I did a prayer in my head and then after the prayer I wished I was a Roman because they had more Gods and they could keep saying prayers until there was a God who could help”⁴⁵.

So, as one can see, the historical allusions comprise quite a broad spectrum in the text of the novel: these are allusions-references that build a connection with particular historical realities, descriptive allusions, which help to better understand the character of the protagonist, and scenario allusions within which the development of the plot is paralleled with historical counterparts. Historical allusions perform a wide range of functions – from informational and evaluative to entertaining and decorative: they give information about the protagonist’s inner world, reflect his value system, the specifics of his personal evolution, make the story more interesting to a young audience, bringing out its relevance, connection with the real world and the contemporary school curriculum.

The next group of allusions worthy of consideration is cultural allusions. Most of them are fragmentary and relational. They are relevant to a particular fragment of the novel and intended to enhance its expressiveness. For example, when Philip first sees the Ghost, he portrays this image in an allusive way, saying, “Dad was pale and see through like the ghosts at the Haunted Mansion in Disney World and he had blood running down from his hair”⁴⁶. A combination of the mention of Disneyland and the naturalistic depiction of a bloodied face enhances the dramatic effect and reflects the young protagonist’s perception of the world in all its childlike immediacy and paradoxicality. Another interesting example is a predicative allusion to Spiderman. For the first time, a mention of this comic hero is made when describing the Ghost: “Dads Ghost looked at me with the most serious face I had ever seen like Norman Osborn in the first Spiderman when he has the nerve gas before he becomes the Green Goblin”⁴⁷. This allusion has an important

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. 290.

⁴⁵ Ibid. P. 313.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 4.

⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 41.

prognostic function – it hints that the image of the ghost cannot be seen as exceptionally positive, because it will bring the protagonist a lot of trouble and suffering in the future. The reference to the Green Goblin⁴⁸ also actualizes the heated controversy around the function of the Ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* which quite possibly became one of the sources of inspiration for Matt Haig.

The allusive paradigm is supplemented later when the boy starts to identify himself with a superhero (e. g., “I made myself think of the Spiderman and I made myself stronger”⁴⁹). Just like Hamlet, Philip is looking for a role model. The boy finds it in the image of a comic book hero: “When I kissed her I tried not to think about the Horrible Things about mouths and the one million little creatures that live in mouths and the two pints of spit that a mouth makes every day and my mouth was slower and I thought of Spiderman and Peter Parker kissing Mary Jane and I felt good and I wondered if Mrs Fells kissed like Leah”⁵⁰. Spiderman's image allows the teenager to recover lost social reference points, become more flexible and adapt to the social environment. However, gradually Philip realizes that the world is much more diverse and complex than comics or cinema: this is discussed in a separate chapter called “Spiderman 2”⁵¹. This completely Shakespearean realization of the need to distinguish between the imaginary and the real becomes a kind of a moral compass for the protagonist. No wonder he ironically comments upon his contemporaries' passion for the PlayStation game console, calling it a “PrayStation”⁵². Just like Claudius's prayer keeps Shakespeare's Hamlet from acting, the PrayStation prevents the boys from living a real life. Built with a series of cultural allusions, this leitmotif acquires further development in the last chapter of the novel where Philip says, “I thought life is not like a film or a Christmas play or a TV with only one channel. There are more channels. You can change the story and turn over or do something different it is up to you”⁵³. Thus,

⁴⁸ “Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned, / Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell, / Be thy intents wicked or charitable, / Thou com'st in such a questionable shape / That I will speak to thee.” (1.4.44-1.4.49) Shakespeare W. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

⁴⁹ Stoppard T. *Rosencratz and Guildenstern are Dead*. P. 43.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* P. 75.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* P. 95-97.

⁵² *Ibid.* P. 120.

⁵³ *Ibid.* P. 287.

cultural allusions perform important functions in the text of the novel, structuring not only the general cultural background of the narrative but also acting as triggers for social and philosophical reflections on problems that profoundly resonate with Shakespeare's great tragedy.

The central element of the novel's semantic mechanism is literary intertextuality. Apart from Shakespearean allusions, one can find references to a variety of other significant texts semantically connected with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. For example, R. Kipling's poetic lines are discussed in Philip's class. These lines are accurately cited, attributed and graphically highlighted: "‘If any question why we died, / Tell them, because our fathers lied.’ / Common Form, ‘Epitaphs of the War (1914-1918) / Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936)⁵⁴". In his usual manner, the protagonist begins to look for parallels with his own fate and, as it seems, finds them. However, his teacher draws the boy's attention to an important aspect – the need to understand the boundary between reality, poetry, and fiction ("She said that is History Philip not Imagination. In fact its a poem so its both"⁵⁵). R. Kipling's lines give the teenager food for thought, he ponders the problems of war and peace, as he puts his own intellectual experience as a matrix on the world around him.

Another literary source that is mentioned many times in the novel is a book called *Murder Most Foul* by Horatio Wilson. The book describes mysterious deaths of famous historical figures, stars, and writers (Marvin Gaye, Napoleon Bonaparte, Edgar Allan Poe, Marilyn Monroe, Princess Diana, Christopher Marlowe, etc.). The latest is a fictional story of Hollywood celebrity Lana Turner: her boyfriend is killed by Cheryl Crane, the actress' daughter, trying to protect her mother. This story seems particularly telling to Brian and pushes him to take action, just as Hamlet was motivated by a conversation with an officer in the Norwegian army.

CONCLUSIONS

All in all, M. Haig's novel *The Dead Fathers Club* exhibits an extremely wide range of intertextual connections. To a greater extent, these are allusions, including allusions-references, allusions-descriptions, and allusions-scripts of literary, historical and cultural types. Also, there are several attributed quotes. This intertextual specificity is entirely

⁵⁴ Ibid. P. 53.

⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 56.

consistent with the novel's orientation to the young, inexperienced reader, on the one hand, and the connoisseur of intellectual literature able to appreciate the stylistic and psychological authenticity of the representation of adolescent consciousness, on the other hand.

Shakespearean allusions, which form the semantic and structural framework of the novel, work together with other groups of intertextual references to create a synergistic metatextual construct – a complex and highly functional literary projection, which can both intrigue the young readers and teach them to use classical literature as a toolkit to help them deal with the daily challenges and traumas.

The analysis of the functioning of particular contextual literary projections of Shakespeare's tragedy can form a basis for some observations about their general nature and peculiarities. Although a contextual projection (as well as a text-centric one) is characterized by an interpretive vector, the dominant strategies here are the adaptation and modernization. So, Shakespearean images (often represented in a reduced, stereotyped, travestied form) are often used as certain cognitive 'tools.' As a result, even when the author preserves the key elements of the storyline, the prerequisite is a transformation of the chronotope, as well as a significant development of the character images, the emergence of new motifs. However, an important role in this type of projection is played by a connection with the source text as a means of semantically enriching the target text and bringing collisions and images to a new level of generalization.

SUMMARY

The paper employs the strategy for analyzing metatextual nature of a literary work to explore the metatextual potential of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* realized in the play's literary projections. Two types of literary projections of *Hamlet* are distinguished: text-orientated / text-centric (e. g., W. Gilbert, T. Stoppard, C. Cavafy, B. Akunin, J. Updike) and contextual (e. g., M. Haig, D. Wroblewski, I. Murdoch). A study of these two modifications makes it possible to identify those factors due to which Shakespeare's great play steadily maintains the central position in the world literary canon and manages to generate a powerful *Hamlet* discourse. *The Dead Fathers Club* by Matt Haig is viewed as a vivid example of a contextual literary projection. The investigation of this novel's intertextual paradigm allows to better understand the

transformational mechanisms that shape the semantic landscape of this type of creative reworkings of the iconic pretext.

Keywords: metatext, metatextuality, literary projection, intertextuality, allusion, Hamlet discourse.

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