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## „The Eye” as a Metaphor in Shakespearean Tragedy

Hamlet, Cordelia and Edgar: Blinded Parents’ Seeing Children

### 1. Prologue: Children in the Comedies

The conflict between parents and their children is a well-known motif in Shakespearean drama, especially in the comedies. Let us consider, for example, one of the best-known comedies, Shakespeare’s masterpiece *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The conflict of the exposition is between Hermia and her authoritarian father, Egeus. Poor Hermia is prevented from getting married to her beloved Lysander because her father supports Demetrius. It is more than natural that a society based on paternal power and patriarchal authority approves the father’s will. In such an anti-comical and repressive society the state is meant to defend the interest of the father and the laws of the state are meant to regulate the erotic drive of young lovers. The Duke, the symbol of ultimate power in society, is naturally the enemy of the young lovers as he is meant to defend the patriarchal and authoritarian structure of society. The conflict between parents and their children could easily lead to catastrophe: the exposition of the play is indeed a potential tragedy. In this case, however, Shakespeare did not develop this tragic potential and he chose to write a comedy instead of, say, *Hermia’s Tragedy*. The tragic movement is reversed soon after the beginning when the youngsters decide to escape into the romantic world of the forest. In this „green world” the artificial order of civilized society loses its validity: the spirit of soberness and Lent is replaced by the spirit of love and Carnival, as hypocrisy, the by-product of the sober spirit is extinguished by Saturnalia. The erotic drive suppressed by the society of the grown-ups is now liberated. In the dazzling flame of love the young couples get confused with one another and since Cupid is blind, even the fairy-queen Titania falls in love with the ass-headed Bottom. By the end of these comedies the revolt of the young will triumph, be it frequently due to some supernatural intervention or some unexpected fortune. But anyhow, identities are revealed, misunderstandings clarified and the lovers are happily united as parents usually make their concessions. Thus society is also willing to integrate the young couples. This victory of love as the power of life is sealed by weddings which are meant to transform or even rejuvenate the old society. In the comic struggle between the old and new, the *sénex* and the young, Lent and Carnival, winter and spring, it is always the energy of life that

triumphs. Comedy is the genre of inclusion and it is always for the sake of the young: at the end the parents usually take a step back to give a place to their children, the regenerative potential. And this is usually the eternal order of life since within two or three decades these children who revolt will likewise become established (and therefore conservative) parents and, being then on the other side, they will have to face the same pattern of revolt from their own children. The pattern is cyclically repeated probably in every generation since there is nothing new under the sun. But this eternal comic and cosmic rhythm is inevitable: it is this rhythm that rejuvenates the old world, that makes this world always fresh and alive.

## 2. The Vision of Evil in the Tragedies

In the tragedies, however, we witness exactly the opposite pattern. Indeed, those children who rebel against their parents in the tragedies will never experience what it means to be a father or a mother. This fact is not only exemplified by the romantic tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* but also by the great tragedies of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. In my present paper I wish to discuss filial — parental relationships within these two great tragedies, the relationships between Hamlet and Gertrude, Cordelia and Lear and, to a certain extent, between Edgar and Gloucester.

We shall see that the world, just like in the expositions of the comedies, exists and operates by the established laws of the parents. It is the world of the adults and of the grown-ups. Therefore, it is perhaps no wonder that Shakespeare who understood that the world is rotten or out of joint is almost always on the side of the young. Through their eyes he could show and express that this world, whether Denmark or pre-Christian Britain, is „prison” or „rotten” and is maintained only by hypocrisy, flattery, corruption, namely, by the law of sin. This diagnosis is perceived by the thinking and the morally sensitive young people, who are men of intellectual integrity or women of pure heart. Hamlet and Cordelia are the ones who can see „in [their] mind's eye” (H 1,2, 186). They are the ones who can see and thereby also judge the real state of the world, they are the ones who can distinguish between truth and falsehood, good and evil, authentic and fake, reality and appearance. Reality or truth will be revealed only to such sensitive, thinking beings. These children are, with Hamlet's self designation, of a „prophetic soul” (H 1,5,40) and the prophets, the seers were considered to be *vates*, people who are able to see what the rest of the world cannot see. Prophetic souls are morally sensitive, *poetic* souls. This is reflected in their enigmatic uses of language they conceal themselves in, in order to reveal themselves. That is the reason why Hamlet is so fond of word-plays or puns. Role-playing (feigned madness) or disguise is a poetic activity of revelation by concealment. But poets, contrary to the Latin proverb, are not born but also become.

Hamlet, the morally sensitive man gradually becomes a poet. At first he only suspects that the world is different from what it appears to be: „There are more things in heaven and earth”, says Hamlet to Horatio, „Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” (H 1, 5, 165—6), or, „there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” he says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Such „truth-minded” or „reality-minded” passionate young people are the ones who tend to spoil the festivities of this world by refusing its offered roles or expectations. These other-worldly Princes and Princesses are the eternal killjoys for the Princes or the Princesses of this world, they are the ones who overturn worldly rhythm and worldly rite. They are the ones who are awake and care whilst insensitive men and women infected by the world are asleep or drunk, either with wine or with power. According to the values of this world these children are seen as foolish: their wisdom, as we shall see, is not from this world.

We shall also introduce the parents whom this world has selected and elevated high. This is probably why they have become the primary representatives of the power and the values of this world. Both Gertrude and Lear are pleased to see how they are flattered by their subjects, how their courts and states obey them without condition. Both can complacently bathe in the sun of their power and glory which, for the time being, is only for Hamlet and Cordelia a dazzling, cheating or pseudo light. This may explain why Hamlet, on his first appearance, resists being „too much i'the sun” (H 1,2,67). For him as he later puts it in his conversation with Polonius, this sun breeds „maggots in a dead dog, being a good, kissing carrion” (H 2,2,183).

Therefore he wants to prevent Ophelia from walking „i' the sun” and be „conceived” by it. The music of this world is false or broken for Hamlet and Cordelia as the former recognizes that „time is out of joint” (1,5,188) and the latter trusts that „Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides /Who covers faults, at last shame them derides” (1,283—4). Unlike the rest of the court, Hamlet and Cordelia do not perceive harmony in this world but only dissonance and discord. The world for Hamlet is „but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours” and man is not the beauty of the world but „this quintessence of dust” (2,2,229). The way Hamlet and Cordelia behave appears undoubtedly deviant for the chorus of the majority who unanimously affirms the rituals, the sounds and the furies of the established world. Hamlet and Cordelia are scandals at least to Gertrude and Lear. The latter do not understand why their children, unlike the rest of the world, cannot obey them. Why do they shock their parents, why are they so obstinate in their unwillingness to conform? Why are they not clever enough to recognize that even a false-confidence or mimed conformity is in their *mutual* political interest? Claudius appeals to their image in the eyes of the world: „Let the world take note, /You are the most immediate to our throne” (H 1,2,109—110). But Hamlet has already refused to collaborate in such theatrical shows: „Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not

'seems.'" (H 1,2,76). Hamlet, just as Cordelia, is interested in substance rather than in show, in reality rather than in appearance.

To their parents' question „Why?“ our answer, however unexpected or strange it may sound, is, that the shock is caused by their passionate love for their parents. These parents who are so much identical with the corrupt and vain world? Yes, these parents. Both Hamlet and Cordelia know that Gertrude or Lear were originally different from what they have become. They are convinced that it was only through a long process that their parents have become like that. Hamlet and Cordelia can still remember them as young parents and they know that their minds, hearts or souls were then different. It is painful for them to see that they are no longer what they used to be. They are not identical with themselves, with their earlier selves because something has slowly distorted their characters, something has gradually converted their faces into masks, something has hardened their hearts and unnoticeably confused their minds.

They seem to have gradually lost their sight and hearing: within the past decades they have become spiritually blind and metaphorically deaf. What is the explanation for this change? The power of corruption? Or pride, *hubris*? Or perhaps the error of judgement: *hamartia*? But *hubris* and *hamartia* are rather effects than causes. They seem to have become the victims of a strong power of evil. We can, perhaps more fortunately, locate the causes if we turn to Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological study of evil in *The Symbolism of Evil*. Ricoeur suggests evil appears first as the archaic symbol of defilement (stain, filthiness, foulness) something that infects, contaminates by contact with the external world. But evil gradually becomes internalized. Sin is a more advanced stage of internalization, it is the experience of a power that „lays hold of a man“. Contrary to defilement that infects from without, sin is internal. And with „guilt“ we have arrived at a complete internalization of sin. The guilty conscience may end up in the „sin of despair“, which is a „desperate will to shut oneself up in the circle of interdiction and desire“ (p.136). The symbolism of evil, according to Ricoeur, can be recapitulated in the concept of the *servile will*. This is the final stage of captivity, enslavement or being bound in the circle. Amongst the great tragedies it is undoubtedly *Macbeth* that fearfully illustrates the gradual internalization of evil: the encounter with the witches and the „foul“, „filthy air“ exemplifies the infection or contamination of evil. When Macbeth recognizes „why do I yield to this suggestion“ (1,3,131), it is already a sign of „sin“, the internalization of evil, namely, that they, as Banquo puts it, have „eaten the insane root/ That takes the reason prisoner“ (1,3,4–5). Lady Macbeth's madness and suicide are the signs of her guilty conscience or the sin of despair. And when Macbeth says:

„I am in blood  
Stepp'd in so far, that should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.“ (3,4,135–7)

We can undoubtedly recognize the state of his captive, or, servile will.

Now, unlike *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* show the end-product of this internalizing process rather than the process itself. Of course, it is not my intention to claim that Lear or even Gertrude equal Macbeth in their villainy. I only wish to claim that behind the spiritual blindness or the hardness of heart of Gertrude or Lear there must have been an invisible process of the internalization of evil similar to that we can see in the case of Macbeth. Evil is like the invisible worm of Blake's sick rose that destroys the original beauty of God's creation. If Gertrude or Lear were not captives of the vicious circle of evil Hamlet or Cordelia would not desperately fight to deliver them from this circle. However, the circle is always stronger than these children suppose in the beginning and therefore any interference with this evil circle will demand that they also become victims. They will have to pay for their compassionate love and heroism with their own lives.

### 3. Images and Icons of „Blindness“: „Oculus Cordis“

If one becomes a captive of evil, one loses the freedom of the will, the openness of the soul and the ability to judge what is good and bad, namely the capacity of seeing. Freedom is replaced by bondage, the openness of the soul by a stone heart, clear insights by blindness. Due to spiritual blindness one loses the capacity of proper moral judgement and this process may lead up to the idolatry of self-admiration. In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* Antony is aware of this frightening process:

„But when we in our viciousness grow hard —  
O misery on't! — the wise gods seal our eyes;  
In our own filth drop our clear judgments, make us  
Adore our errors; laugh at's while we strut  
To our confusion“. (3,13, 11–5)

The same motif, the „eye“ as a metaphor of proper moral judgement, and „blindness“ as the metaphor of the lack of ability to judge also crops up in *Cymbeline* when the awaking Imogen says:

„Our very eyes  
Are sometimes like our judgements, blind” (4,2,301—2)

Renaissance iconography frequently uses the motif of blindness. Who is depicted as blind in Renaissance iconography? Well, Cupid, the goddess of love, and Fortune are usually associated with blindness. Cupid and Fortune are blind and they also close the eyes of those who find themselves in their service. So when we fall in love or when we pursue our fortune, we are blind. Shakespeare frequently echoes the iconography of „blind Cupid” (especially in *A Midsummer Nigh's Dream*) or „blind Fortune”, as when, for example, Fluellen says in *Henry V*: „Fortune is painted plind, with a muffler afore her eyes” (3,6,32). (Illustration 1—2)

But there is a more ancient tradition suggesting that religion itself is a vision, a way of seeing. Thus „seeing” is a metaphor of religious understanding: „eyesight is insight” (Miles, p.2). Conversely, blindness, the loss of sight, is the loss of one's contact with God, the loss of one's religion. And the alliance with the Devil, just as the alliance with Cupid or Fortune, also makes one blind as well. Therefore both St Paul's expression of the „Eye of the Heart” („oculus cordis”) (Ephesians 1:18) and St Augustine's term the „Eye of the Mind” imply that lightness or proper understanding is inseparable from personal devotedness and in lacking this spiritual sight our relationship with God is also ruined. There is an interesting emblematic representation of the idea of the „eye of the heart” in Wither's *A Collection of Emblems* from 1635. (p. 43). (Illustration 3)

My thesis is that both Hamlet and Cordelia passionately love Gertrude and Lear. This love is a genuine, responsible, filial love which has nothing to do with Ernest Jones' Freudian notion of an „Oedipus —complex”, whatsoever, Hamlet's outburst „Frailty, thy name is woman!” is not the expression of jealousy but the painful recognition that his mother is not what she used to be, that she has lost something essential during the past decades. Her quick marriage to Claudius is only the effect and not the cause. Perhaps her heart has hardened, perhaps she has become blind. We do not know the reason why.

Lear's condition at the beginning of the play is similar to that of Gertrude. He also lacks genuineness, authenticity and reality. He is a vain, senile old man, opening his ears only to flattery, ridiculously insisting on his fragile royal self-image. His human face has merged with the inhuman mask of the king. Again, we can only suspect that originally he was not like that. Again, we can only speculate why he has lost his sight, closed his mind and hardened his heart. For both Hamlet and Cordelia the blind, sinful state of mind of their parents is like a sickness that must be cured. They have recognized, and diagnosed this sickness and they have undertaken the

heroic or even gigantic task to counter-effect the wicked. But this task is so great and so much beyond their own powers, that it will demand their lives.

#### 4. Edgar and Gloucester

However, before scrutinizing how Hamlet's and Cordelia's „Christian psychoanalysis” have some good therapeutic effects on Gertrude and Lear, let us see how this filial, curing love is also at work on a lower level in *King Lear*. Therefore, we now turn to the relationship between Gloucester and Edgar.

In Act I Scene II the somewhat naive but benevolent Gloucester is puzzled by the division within the families, the smallest units of society and explains this rift to himself in some astrological terms as the signs of an impending, cosmic tragedy. This may sound, and is, in fact, a superstitious explanation but nevertheless a more genuine diagnosis than its rationalistic and pragmatic ridicule by Edmund. Gloucester's sense of the „bond” echoes Cordelia's love „according to my bond” and it has wider resonances and implications:

„The late eclipses in the sun and the moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries; discord; in palaces treason; and the bond cracked between son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there is son against father; the king falls from bias of nature; there is father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquitely to our graves.” (1,2,115—30)

The recognition that the divisions within the „bond”, the conflicts between the father and the son, between the brother and his brother are the signs of an impending cosmic tragedy is undoubtedly an apocalyptic notion. In the so-called „small apocalypse” of St Mark's Gospel Jesus predicts that the marks of the end of the world and the impending last judgement can be seen in terms of these conflicts:

„Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.”  
(Mark 13:12)

Gloucester for all his superstition is an ultimately benevolent, „good soul”. But if our intellectual insights are vague or gloomy, we are vulnerable and might easily fall preys to malevolent manipulation. Gloucester is „blind” while he sees and he has to become blind in order to „see”. In his moral blindness he misjudges the true nature of his sons. Due to Edmund’s vicious Machiavellism he makes fatal errors of moral judgement: he believes that Edgar, the legitimate son is wicked and Edmund, the illegitimate one is true. But he will have to pay an enormous price for his moral blindness: when Edmund has betrayed him in his own castle, he is literally blinded and tortured by Regan, Cornwall and their men. This marks the beginnings of his *inferno*. Edgar, just like Kent or Hamlet, recognizes that against a cunningly wicked world you can preserve yourself only by a similar cunning strategy, and this is disguise: „While I may ’scape I will preserve myself” (2,3,5). Only by self-concealment can they reveal some hidden truth to the oppressed. Thus Edgar first disguises himself as Poor Tom, a Bedlam beggar and then he is dressed up as a peasant to accompany his blind father to Dover. The *de profundis* encounter of the blinded Gloucester with the „fantastically dressed”, mad Lear is the artistic peak of the tragedy. Now we recognize that just as Lear had to go mad in order to pronounce wisdom, so Gloucester had to go blind in order to see and understand reality. „I stumbled when I saw”—he admits to the disguised Edgar (4,1,19). Only in his blindness does he understand that the rich who live comfortably are unable to see; „the superfluous and lustdietet man...will not see/ Because he does not feel” (4,1,68—70). And when Lear keeps harping on his empty eyes and yet his ability to see how the world goes, he replies; „I see it feelingly” (4,6,153).

But why does Edgar play the fool with his father, why does he torture this old man by playing this absurd game of the mock-fall from the pseudo-cliff of Dover? Undoubtedly he does all this for therapeutic ends:

„Why I do trifle thus with his despair  
Is done to cure it” (4,6,34—5)

He must protect his father from his bad spirits and prevent him from falling into despair and wishing to commit suicide again. Using a Ricoeurian phrase (and I think a very Shakespearean practice) we can say that Edgar „disorients” his father in order to „reorient” him. Edgar, the Stoic psychoanalyst, cures the depression of Gloucester

by means of games and shocks. He is both wise teacher and the devoted doctor of his father. The lesson he teaches is the stoic morals of patience and endurance of all affliction:

„Men must endure  
Their going hence, even as their coming hither;  
Ripeness is all.” (5,2,9—11)

And at the end we learn from Edgar’s narration that Gloucester’s desire

„Ah! dear son Edgar,...  
Might I but live to see thee in my touch  
I’d say I had eyes again. 2 (4,1,21\*3)

was eventually fulfilled even if

„his flaw’d heart,—...  
’Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,  
Burst smilingy..” (5,2,198—201)

## 5. Cordelia and Lear

Cordelia’s silence and obstinacy in the initial ritualistic love-test scene might strike the so-called „normal,” and „sober,” people of the court as some puritanical, pugnacious attitude and even an unnecessary cruelty. In fact, very dangerous behaviour! Why is Cordelia not willing to take part in this ritualistic ceremony? Why does she break the music of this rite? Why does she refuse to behave according to the expectation of her father and of the court? Why does she not respect paternal authority? Why is she not concerned with her father’s health? Why does she lack compassion? The king is an old man of a choleric temper probably with high blood-pressure and, this unfortunate aged man might easily have a stroke! Cordelia’s silence and her obstinate insistence on „nothing,” and „truth,” are seen not only as deviant but also as dangerously cruel by most members of the court and probably by several readers of common sense. According to their sober and realistic logic, Cordelia’s attitude is a condemnable nonsense not only because it is unaware of a sense of reality and filial gentleness but, they may argue, it even lacks a necessary sense of humour and the ability to play, a healthy theatricality.

However, there is one character in the court who does not behave according to the stereotype patterns of good manners and public expectations. Kent is willing to behave "unmannerly /When Lear is mad" despite the king's warning:

„The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft”  
(1,1,145)

But Kent understands the point: anger and passion lacking reason makes one blind. To Lear's outrageous cry „Out of my sight!” he replies:

„See better Lear; and let me still remain  
The true blank of thine eye.” (1,1,160)

For all the logical arguments and the voice of reason power and passion prevail: Cordelia is disowned and disinherited, and Kent is banished.

Cordelia leaves for France and she does not reappear in the play until the fourth act. Though physically she is not present during Lear's successive humiliations and *inferno*, nevertheless we have the feeling that everything is taking place because of her and around her. Her absence is even weightier than her presence. The world is mad, empty and is suffering from the lack of Cordelia.

Her return with the French troops is considered treason by Goneril, Regan and Cornwall. We get a short glimpse of her in the company of the doctor and some French soldiers in Act IV, Scene IV. This signals that she has come to cure not as an earthly professional, but her licence is from the heavenly powers. She comes to cure with piety and love:

„All blessed secrets,  
All you unpublish'd virtues of the earth,  
Spring with my tears! be aident and remediate  
In the good man's distress!” (4,4,15—8)

She appears as a saint, a redemptive agent whose voice is not from this world. Some of her words and phraseology even echo the words of Christ. When she says

„O dear father!  
It is thy business that I go about;” (4,4,23—4)

These words, in fact, evoke the sentence of the child Jesus in Luke 2:49:

„I must be about my father's business”.

Cordelia's redemptive capacity is alluded to by the Gentleman in Act IV Scene VI:

„Thou hast a daughter,  
Who redeems nature from the general curse  
Which twain have brought her to.” (4,6,211—3)

But who are these redemptive agents? They are the ones who have come from much tribulation. They are the poor, the oppressed and the outcast. The fools of this world, who were, however, clever enough to disguise themselves in order to preserve themselves. Kent, Edgar and above all, Cordelia. As their power is not from this world they have to save the weak who have fallen as victims of this world. They have a therapeutic function. Just as Edgar has to cure his literally blind and spiritually despairing father, so Cordelia has to cure her literally mad and spiritually blind father. But Cordelia does not cure with stoic wisdom but with heavenly power. She appears as a „soul in bliss” a light of Paradise for the suffering Lear who feels himself burning already in the flames of Purgatory:

„I am bound  
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears  
Do scald like molten lead.” (4,7,46—8)

The wonderful reunion between father and daughter at the end of Act IV is radically challenged, or, according to some critics, even ironically twisted by the cruel, inexplicable tragedy of Act V. We are expecting, in Kent's words, „the promised end” (5,2,265) and instead we get, in Edgar's words, the „image of that horror” (5,2,266).

Does not this end affirm that redemption is an illusion in this world? Against a host of critics pressing this point I believe, it does not. Cordelia's cruel murder and Lear's death would indeed support these critics. But however inexplicable, unaccountable, and unjustifiable their deaths are, we can point out there is a wonderful gain within this tragic loss. At the end of the play Lear is a different man: his spiritual blindness is gone; he has regained his capacity for proper moral judgement, his hard heart is softened, his closed mind is opened. In the court of death he has learned the lesson that to live, means to love. Though he is not saved from death, his soul is saved from *eternal* death, because for those who see, the real question is not whether life or death but whether eternal life or eternal death.

## 6. Hamlet and Gertrude

My last case—study of blinded parents and seeing children is taken from *Hamlet*. Let us focus our attention upon the famous closet—scene, Hamlet's encounter with Gertrude in Act III Scene IV. We are just over the mouse—trap scene, so Hamlet is convinced that the secret the Ghost revealed to him, is true: Claudius is his father's murderer. He has to take revenge on his father's death and murder Claudius but he has to keep the Ghost's warning in his mind that he should not harm his mother;

„But, howsoever thou pursu'st this act,  
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven,  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,  
To prick and sting her." (1,5,85—9)

In this scene Hamlet is taking seriously, almost literally, the Ghost's counsel of not harming his mother but leaving her to heaven „to those that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her." In this intensely ambiguous scene he murders Polonius by accident and he also tries to make his mother repent so he has to learn about himself that he is both „scourge and minister" (3,4,175). Now we shall concentrate on his role as a minister, of a peculiar, „Protestant" kind.

Shakespeare mentions four times that Hamlet is a student of Wittenberg and we remember how much he insisted on going back to the university of Luther. For the Protestant believer the rule of faith is *Sola Scriptura*, only the Scripture. His moral sternness can easily be justified by the Bible. In the Mosaic Law you read „Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife" (Leviticus 18:6) and if this is valid, then Claudius has seriously transgressed God's law and order. For the Protestants both the Old and the New Testaments agree that it is the duty of the faithful believer to warn, exhort or even admonish his or her brethren if they are seen to have sinned.

"Let me be cruel, not unnatural,  
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;  
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites,  
How in my words soever she be shent,  
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!.,  
(3,2,421—5)

Hamlet is ready to act as a „surgeon" with the word of God, which, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews is „quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two—edged sword, piercing even the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart., (Hebrews 4:12). This dagger or two—edged sword is meant to touch and, if possible, to remove the cancerous tumour from the heart. Therefore Hamlet's first strategy is to hold up a mirror or a looking—glass for his mother so that she can see her sins:

"Come, come and sit you down; you shall not budge;  
You go not, till I set you up a glass  
Where you may see the inmost part of you.. (4,18—20)

In Renaissance iconography the looking glass has frequently been associated with self—knowledge so this mirror functions also as a penitence—mirror, which is meant to explore or X-ray the concealed spots or hidden sins of Gertrude's life. Hamlet deliberately wishes to "wring,, his mother's heart because he knows that "damned custom,, (convention, comfort, power) can easily "brass,, that is, harden or make the human heart insensitive.

Hamlet's „shock—therapy" with Gertrude is, to a certain extent, similar to that of Cordelia's with Lear, but Hamlet's is undoubtedly more active and rapid than Cordelia's. Hamlet's cure is violently intensive: he holds up the looking glass, wrings her heart, injures her soul and, above all, he is desperately concerned to open her eyes. First he directs Gertrude's gaze onto the picture of his father to make her see the huge difference between the god—like image of Old Hamlet and the image of Claudius „like a mildew'd ear,/ Blasting his wholesome brother." And Hamlet asks repeatedly: „Have you eyes? Have you eyes?" — and the operation of the eyes goes on:

„What devil was't  
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman—blind?  
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,  
Or but a sickly part of one true sense  
Could not so mope." (3,4,76—81)

The blind usually resist acknowledging their blindness. In the Book of Revelation the angel admonishes the lukewarm and self—complacent but, in fact, blind church of Laodicea by saying „anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (3:18). But lo and behold, all of a sudden we see that Hamlet's anointing cure, this intense

and painful operation is making remarkable progress with Gertrude. Her eyes are being gradually opened when she says:

„O Hamlet! speak no more;  
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;  
And there I see much black and grained spots  
As will not leave their tinct.” (3,4,88–91)

The so far blind Gertrude is beginning to see and acknowledge the spots in her life as heaven indeed makes the thorn of her bosom „to prick and sting her.”

And at this moment the Ghost unexpectedly appears. It is remarkable that it is only Hamlet who sees the Ghost, whilst Gertrude does not. Only men of „prophetic soul” can envisage the presence of a supernatural reality, whilst „normal” or infected men, cannot. When the Ghost has departed, Hamlet continues the cure, but his tone is now much more softened and gentle. He speaks with passion, tenderness and love giving pieces of practical advice and persuading her to confess her sins:

„Mother, for love of grace  
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,  
That not your trespass but my madness speaks;  
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,  
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,  
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven;  
Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;  
And do not spread the compost on the weeds  
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue;  
For in the fatness of these pury times  
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,  
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.” (3,4,144–54)

Hamlet seems to have succeeded in „wringing” his mother's heart because after the defeat of her eyes, then her ears, Gertrude acknowledges:

„O Hamlet! thou hast cleft my heart in twain.”  
(3,4,156)

Hamlet seems to have fulfilled his role as a „Protestant priest”, as the confessor of his mother. The wonder that we would not have expected, at the beginning of this

scene, is taking place: Hamlet, the Wittenberg 'priest' speaks, and Gertrude, the penitent, obeys.

Of course, I do not wish to claim that there is such a rejuvenation in Gertrude as we have observed in Lear. There is no spectacular suffering nor any spectacular rebirth about her. However, when Hamlet leaves the closet the confidence between mother and son is regained. One could argue that her heart has softened only for a moment. But is this really the case? We do not know whether or not she managed to abstain from Claudius' bed. But there is no evidence that she betrayed Hamlet to Claudius. On the contrary, in the last scene when she has drunk the poisoned cup she dies, revealing the villainous treachery with „O my dear Hamlet” on her lips. In Hamlet's farewell „Wretched queen, adieu!” there is no revenge, contempt or anger but rather pity, compassion and love. The once blinded mother and her seeing son eventually embrace one another in their deaths.

## 7. Conclusion

In these two tragedies of Shakespeare the seeing children did not turn their backs upon their blinded parents who have lost their capacity for proper moral judgement. It would have been much easier for them to smile ironically or argue rationally, appealing perhaps to elderly senility or inconstancy of women. These conflicts could have easily been avoided with a bit of diplomacy, cool distance and a sense of humour. But these children, were not worldly diplomats but rather ministers or heavenly angels. And angels, just like the apostles, are sent. They do not act by their own will but by a will from above. Their mission is constraint. They represent their parents' earlier, truer, uncorrupted selves. They are what they used to be. These blinded parents are, in fact, confronted with themselves in their confrontations with their seeing children. Hence, the encounter is so painful for them. They do not only have to acknowledge that they have changed but also that this change, contrary to their self-deception, is not development but corruption, deviation and infection. While they might have thought of themselves as „rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing”, in fact, they have turned out to be „miserable, and poor, and blind and naked” (Revelations 3:17.) With the remaining ruins of their pride they desperately protest against their children being their judges. In their protests they fail to notice that by the means of their children they pronounce judgement upon themselves.

For the seeing children their holy duty is far from being a light burden. The parents shout about „inquisition” or even „murder” as they are seen not as the ministers of God but the agents of Satan. They are accused of patricide, whilst they are labouring to save their parents' souls. „I must be cruel only to be kind” (3,4,178);



says Hamlet towards the end of the operation. For all the resistance, contempt and judgement, even at the expense of self—annihilation, they had to accomplish their tasks; to save their parents' eyes, ears and hearts. Have they succeeded? Are Gloucester, Lear and Gertrude „saved”? This is for the reader to decide.

#### Illustrations

1. „Blind Fortune Blinding Cupid.”, Otho Venius: *Les Emblèmes de l'Amour Humain* Brussels (1667)
2. „Cupid Blinding Its Follower”, John Hall, *Emblems with Elegant Figures* (1648)
3. „The Eye of of the Mind”, George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635)

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#### Illustrations



The Minde should have a fixed Eye  
On Objects, that are plac'd on High.



Katalin Kürtösi:

### Bilingualism in drama: *Henry V*

'If I know the letters and the language' says Romeo (Act I Sc.ii.64), and no doubt, his words refer to the very basic problems of understanding a text. After Babel, different languages appeared, and then writing in all these different languages. In several periods of world literature the language of a given work did not coincide with the mother tongue of its writer; some of the best known Latin authors (like Seneca, Martialis, to name but two), created their masterpieces this way. In the late middle ages and the Renaissance, very often it was the *genre* which decided what language the poet should use, resulting in a colourful, polyglot literature. Latin was widely used for several centuries; the popular emblem books helped preserve its presence, and there was a reading public for them even if this public used another language for everyday life. Writing in a foreign language was considered an exercise in mastering classical forms, as well as an escape from the inhibitions of mother tongue. Several famous figures of world literature switched from one language to another from time to time — e.g. Milton in some of his sonnets, or Goethe in his early years. Turning to another language became an issue only in the 19th century when, as a result of rising nationalist feelings, the idea of *language loyalty* appeared and became an expectation — very often for political reasons. This is what Oscar Wilde refused to accept when he decided to write *Salome* in French. In twentieth century world literature there are several cases of writers becoming world famous by works written in a language other than their mother tongue; Joseph Conrad chose to write in English, Eugene Ionesco in French — both of them abandoned a mother tongue which was less known than the chosen one. Julien Green and Samuel Beckett used two languages, rewriting some of their work in the other one and never mixing the two in the same version. James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, however, chose another strategy: in *Finnegans Wake* the former created words on the basis of existing languages, while Eliot, in *The Waste Land* quoted lines in other languages (even using other alphabets). This essay will focus on the alternate use of languages within the same work, using examples of drama.

In the mystery and miracle plays of the late Middle Ages, Latin was widely used at the beginning, later it changed to the vernacular. In the mid-15th century, Maître Pathelin tries, in his fevered talk, to confuse Guillaume by mixing several words in dialect and other languages (e.g. Italian, German, Breton and Latin). The most exhaustive, and hitherto valid method of language shift in drama can be found