

***Hamlet* Revisited: Adaptations of Shakespeare in Recent Russian Drama**

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Abstract

Shakespeare has always been among the most popular foreign playwrights staged in Russia. Among them, *Hamlet* has always been definitely the most widely liked and often staged play. Its protagonist was for a long time perceived by Russians as a symbol of nonconformism and rebellion. Nowadays its reception as a heroic play ending in elevating catharsis has given way to all sorts of deconstruction, which is reflected both in its stage adaptations as well as in creating remakes of the famous play. However, one of the first playwrights, who introduced a new theatrical form and did it on Shakespeare's material, was Tom Stoppard. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* the playwright laid the basic principles of the approach to the classical Canon, which were further developed in the dramaturgy of the second half of the twentieth century, Russian drama including. It became a "precedent play" for the pieces written by recent Russian playwrights, such as Boris Akunin, Ludmila Petrushevskaya, Victor Korkia and the Presnyakov brothers addressed in the essay. They successfully exploited and further developed Stoppard's techniques such as intertextuality, actualisation of metaphors, parcellation and contamination of popular idioms, deheroisation, decentralisation and other types of deconstruction.

Keywords: *Hamlet*, Shakespeare, postmodern remakes, reception, interpretation, deconstruction, Russia

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Introduction

Hamlet has always been one of the most popular and widely staged plays by Shakespeare in Russia (Tavares, 2017; Senelick, 2015; Zhatkin & Kruglova, 2015). Each generation created their own *Hamlet*, which was a kind of seismographer of the times reflecting social changes in society (Reynolds, 2016). Very often Shakespeare's text helped to articulate things that were officially forbidden, becoming witty comments on the topical problems (Burt, 2016; Prokhorova & Shamina, 2014; Verma, 2016; Ryner, 2007). Times have changed, and now it is possible to speak openly without hiding behind hints and allusions. But whereas *Hamlet* had for a long time been for the Russians a symbol of nonconformism and rebellion, nowadays its reception as a heroic play ending in elevating catharsis gave way to all sorts of deconstruction, which is reflected both in its stage adaptations as well as in numerous remakes of the famous play (Candido et al., 2014; Hussey, 2016; Thompson, 2015). Readers and spectators must have got tired of too serious, "heavy" interpretations of the classical piece. However, it will not be an exaggeration to say that its popularity in Russia at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century has nonetheless grown. It is very much due to the spread and development of postmodern techniques in arts, and especially so in theatre, which helped to gain a completely new, fresh perspective of the original, disclosing its semantic and linguistic potential. In fact, in dramaturgy postmodernism established itself earlier than in narrative prose, probably because the very nature of theatre is close to postmodernism, many categories of which are connected with theatrical practice – the game-play, carnivalisation, imitation of reality, etc. This gave birth to numerous remakes and adaptations of classical plots with Shakespeare heading the list.

Our paper aims to define the trends in the approach of modern Russian authors to Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. Thus, techniques of Boris Akunin, Ludmila Petrushevskaya, Victor Korkia and the Presnyakov brothers are described.

Results

One of the first playwrights, who outlined the main principles of a new theatrical form and did it on Shakespeare's material, was Tom Stoppard. His play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* written at the time when the term *postmodernism* was not yet commonly used either in Western or Russian literary criticism, that is why the play was more often referred to the theatre of the absurd (Jenkins, 1989). Since much has been written on this play in Russia as well, we will outline a few moments that seem crucial for understanding its significance for the further development of postmodern drama.

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* the playwright laid the basic principle of approach to the classical Canon, which was further developed in the dramaturgy of the second half of the twentieth century – the principle of deconstruction, which involves all levels of the original – plot structure, language, system of images. The title itself is sharply polemic about Shakespeare. The contemporary playwright immediately declares that he is not interested in the kings and heroes, acting in the foreground of historical narratives, but in those who remain in the background. The main characters here, as the title implies, are two humble noblemen who played a very modest role in the Shakespearean tragedy. Their coming to the foreground, however, does not mean that their characteristics are different.

On the contrary, Stoppard exploits what was inherent in Shakespeare's images. Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* are as levelled and similar to each other, as in Shakespeare's play, but here their identity is brought to the point of absurdity: they are confused by all the characters in the play, and confuse each other themselves, constantly forgetting who is who. It is interesting to note that the whole play by T. Stoppard is a witty illustration of the famous Shakespeare's thesis: "all world's a stage and all men and women merely players". This aphorism becomes a structure-forming principle of the whole work, and everything that happens on stage is its sequential decoding. Life and theatre become inseparable, and it is hard to say what is

what. This is acutely felt by the characters – it seems to Ros and Guil that they are following some instructions:

Guil: Tread warily, follow instructions.

Ros: For how long?

Guil: Till events have played themselves out. There is some logic at work – it's all done for you, don't worry (30).

Ros: I feel like a spectator – an appalling prospect" (31).

So they feel like characters of some play, and at the same time its viewers, which is very similar as both imply the idea of passivity and inability to change the course of events – in both cases, there is a play, which has been already written and cannot be changed.

The key words are "to play", "to imitate" and "to act", where the latter means both – "to play on stage" and "to behave", which swap so quickly that the spectators, as well as the characters, lose the sense of reality.

Thus, the travelling comedians who played a secondary role in Shakespeare's tragedy here turn into the author's mouthpiece and formulate the message: "We are tragedians, you see. We follow directions – there is no choice involved" (59). With their appearance the action begins, they turn up in the climactic moments of the play, and they conclude it. Such actualisation of a metaphor is one of the characteristic techniques of deconstruction of classic works. Using not only Shakespeare's story, but also a number of Shakespearean motifs, Stoppard deconstructs the original, literally embodying the idea of Jacques Derrida that this process is not so much about destruction, but about the reconstruction for the sake of understanding how certain integrity was designed; thus Stoppard borrows Shakespeare's material to formulate his philosophical concept.

Many British playwrights, including such prominent names as J. Osborne, B. Kops, E. Bond followed Tom Stoppard and created their adaptations of Shakespeare, but in this essay, we would like to address some Russian remakes of *Hamlet*, which were also definitely affected by

Stoppard's work. Here we side with Olga Zhurcheva who believes that the "precedent play" for Russian remakes of *Hamlet* was not so much the original itself but rather Stoppard's adaptation (177).

Though Shakespearean remakes appeared in Russia much later, Shakespeare can be justly considered a key figure for Russian postmodernist drama. For some playwrights, he is the epitome of the classic Canon, which is long overdue to reconsider and to destroy, for others – an ally and confederate in their playing with old texts established forms and ideas. Revising Shakespeare repeatedly, the authors seek not only to deconstruct the plays of the great Bard but to clean away the museum gloss from them, to breathe new life into the textbook works, to reveal the internal potential of his plays. Not surprisingly, most often, the object of the literary games is *Hamlet* - the most popular and that is why, despite the diversity of theatrical interpretations, the most "worn out" of all Shakespeare's plays. Among the authors who appropriated *Hamlet* in Russia, we find such renowned masters of the pen, as Boris Akunin (2003).

Akunin's *Hamlet* is a free verse retelling of Shakespeare's story, only without all those "eternal questions", such as "to be or not to be". Hamlet appears as a merry reveller, a regular of Wittenberg brothels, harassing Ophelia: "now would an impropriety say, now would pinch / While fat and unattractive" (36). Here the author precedes from Gertrude's remark in the final act that Hamlet is "fat and scant of breath" (the majority of Shakespeare scholars agree that these words were introduced by Shakespeare because the role of Hamlet was played by no longer young and handsome Richard Burbage). At the same time, except for some parts (Ophelia in the mad scene sweeps the garbage, then rides on her broom instead of a horse; Polonius turns out to be a conspirator; "the mousetrap" cast are not actors, but Hamlet with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; Hamlet's father was not killed but driven to suicide – drank poison after learning about his wife's infidelity with his brother), the action generally follows Shakespeare's plot

becoming a kind of a digest based on the most popular and well-known quotations from the original. However, it is only in the last scene when Hamlet dies in the arms of his friend, and Fortinbras appears that the hidden intent of the author becomes clear. In Akunin's play the name of Hamlet's only loyal friend is not Horatio, but Horace, which could have put an attentive reader on the alert from the very beginning; later it is revealed that he is a descendant of *von Dorns*, and therefore an ancestor of Akunin's favourite hero – Erast Fandorin. It turns out that the most passive character of Shakespeare's tragedy played the role of a puppeteer, manipulating everyone else to clear the way to the Danish throne for Fortinbras.

Fortinbras: With such servants as you, von Dorn

It is easy to become a great sovereign.

But how did you manage at once

To make a path for me to the Danish throne?

Horace: It was not so difficult, my Lord. It took a little trick with the Ghost, tampering with the letter, soul-saving conversation with the Queen, and a few drops of poison, with which I oiled the blades before the fight. Your would be pirates brought Hamlet back to Denmark, and performed the job flawlessly. The only serious threat was the plot of the French party, but I managed to eliminate its leader Polonius, and young Laertes was not dangerous.

Fortinbras: Horace, my friend, you are a true magician

Horace: Oh no, your Highness, I'm just a scholar of human nature (112-113).

Thus, rewriting Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Akunin has written another page in the family origins of his favourite hero. The author admits this himself, having designated his work as *Hamlet. Version*.

Ludmila Petrushevskaya's play is titled, *Hamlet. Act Zero*. The play was preceded by two essays

titled *An Attempt to Answer and Hamlet*, which motifs would be later developed in her other works. *Hamlet. Act Zero* is another visitation of the famous masterpiece but on a new level – the level of the ironic postmodern game with the original text, seemingly without any serious purpose. The title itself signifies lack of action, which is characteristic of this play. The author rewrites not the whole tragedy, but only its beginning, which is a kind of preamble to the main action, and in a way, explains some cause-and-effect links are missing in the original. Here, too, there is a puppeteer, according to whose plan all subsequent events of the play develop. It is notable that the figure of a puppeteer who becomes a kind of a director of the show manipulating the others is found in many Shakespearean plays, both comedies and tragedies. The most evident is Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Iago in *Othello* and Prospero in *The Tempest*. Like in Akunin's play, here it is a character whose part was often cut by many directors of Shakespeare – Fortinbras. It is on his orders, his attendants – the actors Pelshe, Zorge and Kuusinen “are hanging out in the disguise of a theatre troupe, as spies around the castle” and act as a chorus. Though the names ring the bell with the audience who lived during the Soviet times (Pelshe was a high-ranking Lithuanian Communist Party authority, Kuusinen – the Secretary of the Finish Communist Party, and Zorge – a famous Russian spy in the times of the Second World War), it is hardly worth looking for any special implications. From their story we learn that King Hamlet died of indigestion due to the fault of the cook, after which his mother Gertrude, whom they call the *Hero of Labor*, married his brother, whom they call *Clavdeya*, and young *Prince Hamlet Hamletovich* went round the bend and is looking for someone to kill shouting “faggots, come at me, all of you!” – Here again, we see allusions to the Soviet times, more specifically to Nikita Khrushchev, who when visiting an exhibition of avant-garde painters in *Manezh* in 1962 called them “faggots”. However, none of these political allusions is developed and is used by the author for fun's sake only. Therefore, we disagree with those scholars, who see in this remake a satire

on the modern technologies of obtaining power. Petrushevskaya's world outlook is reflected in creating a picture of an absurd world, where all old values have been turned upside down, rather than in satirising it.

Her *Hamlet*, according to the "chorus", like Shakespeare's, is also tormented by the question "to be or not to be", but in their interpretation, it looks different:

Pelshe:talking to himself, keeps asking, "to be or not to be, that is the question", see?

Kuusinen: All the time: "to beat or not to beat".

Pelsh: to wee or not to wee...

Zorge: to pee or not to pee – doesn't ask, pees anywhere.

Pelshe: to whine or not to whine – no question, whines, complains to everyone loudly. About the feet for three months has been deciding: "to clean or not to clean"...

Zorge: to drink or not to drink – doesn't ask, drinks.

Kuusinen: went to the cemetery, puzzled the gravediggers: to dig or not to dig. They did not give him a shovel, digging by themselves.

Pelshe: Saw Ophelia and asked: "to sleep or not to sleep". She blushed a little. Thought it was a hint. And he just so, to rhyme (252).

Thus, the key question of Shakespeare's tragedy is replicated, giving rise to a series of simulacra, which substitute the essence for the structure, while Hamlet loses the status of a tragic hero and the main question of the play is reduced to zero.

Then a show for Hamlet and Marcellus is performed. Zorge, clad in armour, with a candle in his hand, walks over the castle wall on a tightrope, occasionally jumping up and cursing and crying out for vengeance. After this Hamlet concludes: "How greatly he suffers, unavenged! That's it. Now get up and let's have a drink!" (278) Thus, we get another possible motivation

for what happened in the original. However, Petrushevskaya would not be herself, if, bringing all of what is happening through clowning to "zero", would stop at that. On the next page, we read William Shakespeare *Hamlet*. Act II. From now on according to the text. Therefore, the author, having entertained the readers with the literary game, eventually brings us back to the source.

The play by Viktor Korkia is called *Hamlet.ru*, which, on the one hand, refers the readers to Russia, and on the other – to the virtual reality of computer games, where it is always possible to intervene and to change the course of events by clicking a computer mouse. The "mouse theme" is quite widely deployed in the play: in Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet calls Polonius hid behind the curtain, "a rat"; in Koria's play he carries around a large white rat, explaining that "a rat is a mouse of unnatural size". He also sets on stage a real mousetrap, into which almost all characters fall in turn. Thus the main principles of the play are declared – actualisation of metaphors, contamination of idioms, literal explanation of terms and decomposition of set expressions:

Anikst: Tragedy – is literally, "the song of goats", or "goat song". Tragos in Greek is "he-goat", and ode is "song".

Hamlet: If you're a he-goat, and you have a song it is a tragedy (22-24).

All this goes back to Shakespeare's language games; moreover, the object of deconstruction is mostly the original text. Here we can recall that according to Derrida, deconstruction means finding the degree of the autonomy of language about its cognitive content. This is exactly what Victor Koria is doing: he takes most oft-quoted lines, and following their logic to the letter, ultimately, destroys the meaning, bringing it to the point of absurdity and turning into simulacrum:

Hamlet: The world is a prison, which encloses Denmark.

Denmark is a prison, which encloses my skull.

My skull is a prison, which encloses my thought.

My thought is a prison, which encloses my "self."

My "self" is a prison which encloses the whole world (41).

It is notable that bringing logical reasoning to the point of absurdity is often used by Shakespeare (1609) himself: take, for example, Hamlet's reasoning about how "the noble dust of Alexander" can be converted into a stopper for a beer barrel.

The figure of the deceased Shakespearean scholar Alexander Anikst, who appears in the play, is a kind of clue to understanding the intent of the author. At first Alexander, Abramovitch is happy to find himself inside the revered masterpiece he has analysed along and across. However, once there, he is embarrassed by the crazy carnival, in which eventually he is forced to participate. And if in the first act he was completely lost from the inability to explain what was going on, in the second act he appears in the guise of Hamlet – dressed in black, with a flute in one hand and a skull in the other and declares the rules of the game himself:

(Anikst: Messrs. ghosts! Your tragedy is that you don't feel it as a tragedy. You have already understood that we are beyond good and evil? Anyone wants to hold my skull? To play the flute? To play the role of the father of eternal matter? To play with fire? The one who doesn't play, loses, Messrs ghosts! (32)

So "play" becomes a key word, which in turn refers to the famous thesis of Shakespeare's - "the whole world's a stage". This again brings us back to Stoppard's play where the characters were constantly "playing", "acting" confusing the verb "to act" in the meaning of "to do", "to behave" with acting on stage: In Korkia's piece everyone plays: they perform scenes from Hamlet, juggling with corny quotes, thereby depriving them of meaning:

Hamlet: There are more things, in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in our philosophy

Horatio: Our sweet Lord?

Hamlet: I wanted to say – your.

Horatio: Your, my dear Prince?

Hamlet: I wanted to say – ours and yours.

Horatio: Ours and yours my good Lord?

Hamlet: I mean philosophy (38).

The characters perform scenes from Chekhov's *The Seagull*, the assassination of Caesar, act out scenes from *Anthony and Cleopatra*, swap roles and even sexes. Relativism, relativity, stated by Hamlet's words "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" determines what is happening on stage. Gradually the thesis "all the world's a stage" turns into the thesis of "all the world's a text", and here, too, we may recollect the words of Tom Stoppard's *Player* that "everything is written". The play is based on the principle of cross-references like in a thesaurus or Internet, where every word generates a chain of possible meanings and synonyms in the contexts which may have nothing to do with the original, and thus eventually the initial meaning is destroyed. So flute is logically associated with *Zauber Flute (Magic Flute)*, the mentioning of which immediately leads to Mozart, and with Mozart inevitably occurs Salieri, which in turn brings us to the subject of poisoning. The verb "to be" represented by the whole paradigm easily translates into "We are nothing, let us be all" – the lines from *The Internationale*. Mad Ophelia appears with a stuffed seagull and declares: "Gentlemen, I am the Moon, the planet of dreams!" So *Hamlet* is converted into a hypertext, which cross-references include everything – from antique authors, Nietzsche, Chekhov to the lines from the Communist anthem.

In the third act of this crazy carnival when Hamlet asks Anikst to explain the meaning of his (Hamlet's) tragedy, the venerable literary critic bursts into a lecture packed with popular clichés: "Hamlet is a tragic hero, he embodies the tragedy of humanism"; "the Image of Ophelia is

poetry itself"; "her death is deeply symbolic"; "the whole tragedy of Hamlet denounces evil," until eventually escalating into self-parody:

Anikst: Hamlet kills Ophelia's father accidentally mistaking him for a rat. Everybody is trying to comfort her saying that he didn't suffer and died well. But Ophelia is heartbroken, and Hamlet utters the soliloquy "To be or not to be". This monologue is terribly tragic. Everyone is indescribably delighted and out of terror kills each other.

Hamlet: what exactly is the point of the tragedy?

Anikst: There are so many points in this tragedy that all smarty-pants go crazy. But the main thing is the quintessence of humanism (66).

This proves that the image of the deceased Anikst is the play's landmark. First, it is a sign of a literary, purely philological game, in which the author invites the initiated to join. Secondly, it's a blatant parody of the worn out literary clichés, that's why the characters often fruitlessly discuss various terms, for example:

Hamlet (about the seagull): It is not a stuffed bird. It is a symbol <> The symbol of a stuffed bird, which is a stuffed symbol <...> This stuffed bird is the symbol of the tragedy of our theatre <> Doctor, what is the role of the Seagull in Chekhov's "The Seagull"?

Anikst: Titular.

Gertrude: What?

Anikst: The role of the curtain

Hamlet: <...> (*into the audience*) Ladies and gentlemen! Seagull is a phallic symbol of our time!

Thus the author suggests how often a jumble of buzzwords can lead to absurdity, and all of this as Hamlet said are just "words, words, words", which can drown the sense. It is also worth remembering that the French drama of the absurd was born as a parody of the intellectual drama, where there was too much talking. And, eventually, bringing to the stage the master of

classical literary studies, the author thus implies that his text cannot be parsed according to these canons otherwise we risk sharing the fate of the famous scholar in the play

- going bananas. Still realising this, we fall into the trap of the endless literary games, from which the author does not exclude himself: in the final scene, Hamlet appears on the stage with a mousetrap in hand, which houses a big white rat.

Hamlet: You think it is me in the form of a rat? Mistaken, friends! This is the author of our tragedy Viktor Korkia. He was born in the year of the rat, and therefore, in our tragedy played himself. (Pulls out the rat from a mouse trap and sits it on the shoulder).

(to the rat) What do you say?

(Assumes a tragic pose)

To be or not to be! (93)

So, if Petrushevskaya in the finale of her play invited us to re-read Shakespeare, Korkia in his final scene invites us to continue the game, which can go on infinitely. Here we side with the scholars Walentina Golowcziner and Natalia Prokhorenko who conclude that the author "enjoys the endless specter of irony and self-irony" involving the readers and spectators into the intellectual search, which is more interesting by itself than the final answer" (311).

The Presnyakov Brothers belong to the younger generation of Russian playwrights. Their piece *Playing Victim* at first glance has nothing to do with the Hamlet theme. However, particularly after the film adaptation scripted by the same authors appeared, it was called a new Russian *Hamlet*. Without any distortion of the source material, the authors and the director managed to introduce some implicit parallels with *Hamlet*, and thereby to raise its theme to a higher level of generalisation.

It is a play about a young man of Hamlet's age, 30, who has a strange job – he plays the victim during investigatory experiments. He doesn't ask himself any philosophical questions, but his whole life is built on the principle of "to be/not

to be”, which succeed each other, like two sides of a coin in the game of chance. He’s alive, but constantly portrays those who have passed into oblivion; he’s alive, but feels constant fear – he is afraid of heights, afraid of water, he is “scared to go out...even to buy bread...even just to take a walk...”, but ultimately, he is afraid of life, no wonder he says about himself: “I do not live!” The symbol of this fear is the baseball cap, which he never removes, even when he goes to bed. At the same time, this cap resembles a fool’s cap, which Hamlet figuratively speaking puts on and for whom it also becomes a means of self-defence. Like Hamlet, Valya – the Presnyakovs’ hero – feels uncomfortable in this world, and he hides his depression and confusion under cynical behaviour and buffoonery.

Association with *Hamlet* is hidden in the very title. To expose King Claudius, Hamlet presented the play *Mousetrap*, which depicted the murder of Hamlet Sr., so it was also a sort of investigatory experiment – “playing victim”. As in many Shakespeare’s plays, in the Presnyakovs’ piece, most of the crimes are committed out of jealousy – Shakespearean passions are boiling in communal flats, eateries, public restrooms and swimming pools.

But there is a more hidden reference to Shakespeare. The whole of reality depicted in the play looks like a deranged theatre, where everyone is portraying something or somebody. The policemen just for fun fuddled ordinary Zavarov roaring drunk, dressed him as a female hooker and locked the drunk in “a monkey cage”; the Captain, played a practical joke on his wife on the first of April, putting mustard into her tube of toothpaste; the elderly “screwy” grey-haired woman in a Japanese restaurant portrays a *Japanese girl with destiny*; Valya plays the murdered victims, the killers portray themselves; “the other captain” plays the murdered captain, and Valya reasonably asks him:

Valya: And who will be you?

Other Captain: Me? What do you mean?

Valya: Well, I mean the captain, who leads the investigatory experiment. If you

play the captain who led that investigatory experiment, someone should lead this investigatory experiment (63)

Someone from the management of the restaurant also offers “to play somebody”. Thus, the murder turns into a child’s game: “I took the gun and...bust a cap in his neck” – the killer explains (70), the tragedy turns into a farce, and finally reality completely dissolves in this irrepressible carnival of successive simulacra.

The play ends with a conversation of two filmmakers who discuss the idea of a new film, the hero of which would be a guy with a strange profession – he plays victims because he is afraid to become one, afraid to die:

Another Man: this is why he chose this work...He portrays the victims during the investigatory experiments (...), a kind of vaccination (...) to avoid...

A Man With A Beared: Death!

Another Man: And he must die, in the end, he dies. (...) Imagine a cool ending – again an investigatory experiment is being carried out, only the victim is played by another guy, another one takes his place! (80)

Discussion

Thus, we seem to be trapped again in the vicious circle of the infinite game facing the same open end, as in Victor Korkia’s play. Even the title (the gerund “playing...”) emphasises this incompleteness of the action. Moreover, the simulativity of postmodern reality is even more visibly expressed in the Presnyakovs’ play as an investigatory experiment itself suggests an “as if”. And yet *Playing Victim* is fundamentally different from all three clownish versions of *Hamlet* discussed above as behind its external frivolity and hollowness we feel a tragic note. It is a play about the blurring of the boundaries between “being” and “not being”, when “not being” increasingly replaces “being”. The characters replace each other: new faces, new fates; some die, others take their place but nothing changes, and that’s the tragedy of our

times. Shakespeare's "Hamlet" is a tragedy of a man, who feels uncomfortable in one's own epoch and so does the hero of the Presnyakovs' play. No matter that Valya does not reach Shakespearean scale – each time gives birth to its hero – the tragedy of modern *hamlets*, is perhaps even worse because they themselves are the product of the time, which is "out of joint". In the film, the same authors brought Shakespearean allusions to the fore, which enabled them to express their message even more clearly. Unlike the plays discussed previously, where deconstruction was done for its own sake, here behind the absurdist form we can't fail to see deep socio-psychological content that makes this work an outstanding artistic event (Prokhorova & Shamina, 2014).

Conclusion

So on the example of the pieces addressed in this essay we can outline certain trends in the approach of modern Russian authors to Shakespeare's legacy, in particular, to his most iconic play *Hamlet*. Most of them can be justly called "textbooks" on postmodernism, as they reflect, reproduce and even parody all known postmodernistic clichés – intertextuality, the actualisation of metaphors, parcellation and contamination of popular idioms, deheroization, decentralisation and other types of deconstruction. The authors invite not only the readers but also the critics to join in the exciting intellectual game called "all worlds's a text", and it would be ridiculous to take this game too seriously as some researchers do. At the same time for modern authors, Shakespeare's text serves as a source for new stories implying their ideas about the contemporary world, its values and heroes. There is no more place for a heroic protagonist who is ready to sacrifice himself for the sake of humanity, therefore so often Hamlet becomes just a tool or even a puppet manipulated by somebody else or even does not appear on the stage at all, while minor characters narrate his story. High-flown words have lost their essential meaning turning into simulacra thus reflecting the general simulativity of modern reality with the prevalence of simulative relations and feelings. Moreover,

there are pieces in which we don't see any intrusive literary games with quotations or explicit references to Shakespeare, but through a careful analysis find many hidden Shakespearean motifs, which help to feel the amazing vitality of the themes and problems stated in Bard's plays. One may have different opinions about the treatment of Shakespearean heritage by modern authors, but in any case, this unremitting interest testifies to the vitality of the great classic, especially so because the path they take, was largely laid by Shakespeare himself.

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