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TO ACT OR NOT TO ACT: HOW COLERIDGE CHANGED THE WAY WE SEE *HAMLET*

Exactly 200 years ago, from 1811 to 1819, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the most famous English Romantic poets, held a series of influential lectures about William Shakespeare and his plays. His presentation of “Hamlet”, a play hitherto not only negatively appraised, but even viewed quite negatively by the leading critics, most notably Samuel Johnson, was especially significant. His insightful analysis helped to change the general opinion about the play, and pointed to the qualities of “Hamlet” that made it into perhaps the best known and most frequently played drama in the next 200 years.

In this paper, I examine the way Coleridge was able to recognise the neglected features of Shakespeare’s profound tragedy up to that point. First of all, he identified with the main protagonist of the play, the Prince of Denmark, and described the unbridgeable gap between ambitions and power of imagination on the one hand, and inability to act on the other. Like Hamlet, Coleridge had “great, enormous, intellectual activity, and a consequent proportionate aversion to real action” (Coleridge 2014: 345). Aware of this shortcoming, but unable to correct it, the extremely talented and educated Coleridge presented it in fascinating detail. Secondly, he used his knowledge of the most influential contemporary philosophers, especially Kant, Locke and Hobbes, and the increasingly popular psychological approach to character analysis in order to paint an internal portrait of leading characters of the play.

Due to the increasingly popular trend in recent literary theory and analysis focusing on the political and material context of an art work, the universal qualities of Coleridge’s interpretation of “Hamlet” that contributed to the lasting influence of his critique have been largely neglected. This article intends, therefore, to re-establish the significance of Coleridge’s “Hamlet” lectures.

KEY WORDS: Coleridge, Shakespeare lectures, “Hamlet” reception, criticism, identification, philosophic approach

INTRODUCTION

It happens very rarely that an individual effort is able to transform the reception of an art work to such an extent that the entire perception of it turns almost upside-down. The effort we are discussing here made one tragedy the most significant and most performed theatre play in the following two hundred years. Exactly two centuries ago, from 1811 to 1819, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an English Romantic poet, held a series of lectures about Shakespeare. His revolutionary insights about *Hamlet* changed the perception of both the public and critics about the tragedy in such a manner that this hitherto misunderstood and negatively evaluated Renaissance work became, almost overnight, one of the most respected and most frequently studied works of drama, of literature in general.

How did Coleridge accomplish this masterstroke? In short, he recognised his own self in the character of Hamlet, and, being one of the most learned and gifted artists of the written and spoken word, he depicted complex mental structure of the Danish prince in an original, penetrating and extremely intriguing way. His new vision of the two-hundred-year-old character and play defeated numerous prejudices about *Hamlet* and stimulated the imagination of future actors, dramatists, directors and critical interpreters. To sum up, Samuel Taylor Coleridge made the great Shakespearean play an inexhaustible source of artistic inspiration.

This work examines how Coleridge broke new ground in literary interpretation by applying his knowledge of contemporary philosophy and psychology to character analysis. It is firstly demonstrated how the critic reversed negative evaluation of the play expressed by the most influential minds of his time, and explained how he related with the fictional protagonist. Then it is pointed out how Coleridge's criticism altered the subsequent view of Hamlet, and philosophic ideas of his epoch that helped shape the intellectual basis for his interpretation are presented. Finally, the reasons for recent neglect of Coleridge's conceptions are enlisted and the rationale and incentive for their return are revealed. It shows how hermeneutic trends in Shakespearean scholarship and the popularity of the play after Coleridge's lectures confirm his inventive and authoritative approach and method.

1. JOHNSON AND COLERIDGE

Despite its unenthusiastic reception and substandard reputation, one cannot argue that *Hamlet* was a completely undistinguished drama in the first two centuries of its existence on stage and in print. The play was best known for the appearance of the ghost, which was Shakespeare's frequent stunt, although not in such a dramatic and purposeful manner, and for the picturesque dramatisation of melancholy and madness (Wofford 1995: 3). The element the critics, and even the public under their influence, could least easily digest, though, was the long delay of Hamlet's revenge. Did Shakespeare just unskillfully construct the plot, or was there something wrong with the main protagonist? In other words, "Who is crazy here, we or Hamlet?" seemed to be the main question of the audience. From the very opening act, the Danish prince is not only convinced who had killed his father, but he also seems determined to avenge him. The bloody reprisal, however, does not happen until the last, fifth act, and in the meantime Hamlet succeeds to delay the unpleasant act in various and unexpected ways, playing patiently with the audience and readers.

There was a number of influential critics, both in Britain and abroad, who presented *Hamlet* as confusing, inconsistent, even preposterous.¹ Coleridge's reaction, however, was mostly inspired by Samuel Johnson's critique. The tireless literary expert and language

¹ Probably the most notorious was Voltaire's who thus described the plot of *Hamlet*: *Hamlet runs mad in the second act, and Ophelia in the third; he takes the father of his mistress for a rat, runs him thro' the body; and in despair, the heroine drowns herself. Her grave is dug upon the stage: the gravediggers enter into a conversation suitable to such low wretches, and play, as it were, with skulls and dead men's bones. Hamlet answers their abominable stuff with follies equally disgusting: While this is going on, one of the actors makes a conquest of Poland; Hamlet, his mother and father-in-law drink together upon the stage; they sing at table; afterwards they quarrel; and battle, and death ensue: in short, one would take this performance for the fruit of the imagination of a drunken savage.* (quoted in Prince 2010: 278–279).

reformer had a strong influence on the intellectual climate in the age of a rapid development of the English civil society and the precipitous growth of the readership in the 18th century, and a confutation of his offensive evaluation represented a real challenge. Coleridge was convinced that Dr. Johnson simply did not understand the character of Hamlet.

As Coleridge claimed, Shakespeare placed Hamlet in the most stimulating circumstances a human being can be placed. Hamlet is an heir to the throne, his father dies in an unexplainable manner, and his mother deposes him by marrying Hamlet's uncle. Even this is not enough. The spirit of the murdered father appears to convince the son he was poisoned by his own brother. And what kind of reaction does that produce in the son: an immediate action and revenge? No: an endless rationalisation and hesitation, a constant instigation of the mind to act, and an equally constant avoidance of action. For an hour and a half or so, the audience witnesses a ceaseless chastisement to oneself because of irresolution and lethargy, and a helpless contemplation about the gradual evaporation of the original energy and determination:

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab (II.ii.559–564).

Hamlet hesitates neither because of cowardice, since he is created as one of the most courageous characters of his age, nor because of a lack of thoughtfulness and slow comprehension, since he sees through the souls of the people surrounding him. He delays the act exclusively due to aversion toward action, manifested in those who keep the entire world to themselves (Coleridge 2014: 2–5). Put in modern terminology of psychoanalysis, Hamlet is introverted, and as such entirely turned toward the inner kingdom of his mind.

Samuel Johnson was especially bothered by the scene in which Hamlet enters the premises of his uncle with a sword and an intention to kill him, but he changes his mind because he finds the king in prayer. For him, Hamlet's fear that uncle would be saved if murdered in the moment of confession and repentance is so terrifying that it is "too horrible to be read or to be uttered" (Johnson 1989: 242). Coleridge was really enervated by this opinion, and according to him, "Dr. Johnson's mistaking of the marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, horror striking finedishness!" (Coleridge 2014: 15). Coleridge argued that the decision to allow the king to avoid death at that moment is only an expected result of the hero's irresoluteness. Hamlet's justification has to be understood only as an excuse not to utilise a perfect opportunity for revenge, which is completely in tune with his character.

Dr. Johnson also argues that Shakespeare included Hamlet's journey to England only because it was found in the original story about the Danish prince by François de Belleforest, with no dramatic purposefulness of that episode. Nonetheless, Coleridge thought that the author took the hero to the trip because he saw that this event contributes to the strengthening and better explanation of the truth peculiar to human nature. It suits Hamlet's

character to suddenly let the enemy decide about his fate in the very midst of putting off the execution. Johnson's vision of Shakespeare is of a poet more blessed by nature in his powers of observation and expression than by art (Bloom 2010: 124), and, according to Coleridge, he gravely underestimated Shakespeare, who had perfectly planned his tragedies.

The tragic significance Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, Hamlet's consorts on the ship, attribute to themselves, was also confirmed by Tom Stoppard. The young playwright understood well the role of those two grotesque characters, and he skillfully portrayed their absurd existence. Hamlet, on the other hand, is full of decisiveness, Coleridge exclaimed, but deprived of the feature of mind which executes the decision already made. He is a man who lives in meditation, called on to action by every human and divine motive, but, alas, the grand purpose of his life is defeated by ceaseless planning (Coleridge 2014: 16).

2. COLERIDGE'S IDENTIFICATION WITH HAMLET

It is also questioned how Coleridge succeeded in describing Hamlet so accurately and convincingly. It is because he completely identified with him. In the character of the Danish nobleman he recognised himself, his unconditional dedication to his own thoughts and fantasies, indecisiveness in acting and propensity for endless procrastination. Coleridge famously admits: "I have smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so" (Coleridge 1990: 11). Majority of the critics and Coleridge's biographers agree on one thing: the gap between his capabilities and his artistic achievement was simply immense. Whoever would meet him would feel a great awe toward the poet's resonant disposition, amazing erudition, intellectual curiosity and lively, seductive spirit. Coleridge was an exemplary genius, who spoke, as Hazlitt put it, "as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet" (Hazlitt quoted in Perry 2002: 105). In practice, his special kind of eloquence is shown to influence the audience in a way a passionate sermon or a moving theatrical performance does, casting what the same admirer calls "a spell upon the hearer" which "disarms the judgment" (quoted in Newlyn 2002: 9). His last abode served as a unique place of pilgrimage for friends, writers and complete strangers, who came to see "the sage of Highgate" (Ibid 9).

For a man of such great potential, Coleridge completed very few works. During a life that did not end abruptly or too early, he developed innumerate plans and projects, but he did not have perseverance and patience to finish them. As Newlyn explains, "A disjunction between theory and practice was a strikingly consistent feature of his life and work" (Newlyn 2002: 13). The reason was a huge gap between his power of will and his intellectual power. Coleridge was unusually self-conscious, and overly dependent on the approval of others for his self-esteem—a man, as Julie Carlson argues, "whose character and relations with others [were] construed by everyone, including himself, as weak, subordinate, dependent, and whose essential condition [was] lack" (Carlson 2002: 203). Coleridge compared himself to a tropical plant with mighty leaves that grows quickly, but remains weak, vulnerable and short-lived (Yarlott 1971: 36). This proved to be sufficient, nevertheless, to endow the world with a lasting legacy.

It seems that the poet had touched upon every possible intellectual and creative effort, but he was not physically able to keep up with his insatiable imagination. He wrote his

best known poems—*The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Kahn* and *Christabel*—in a period of only six months, and of those three he completed only the first one. His excuse for not finishing the unusual and extraordinary *Kubla Kahn* was that a mailman interrupted his dream, which he had after taking a dose of opium, and after the visit the vision permanently evaporated from his mind. If someone was, therefore, capable of understanding the essence of Hamlet's personality, it was Coleridge. The Romantic poet was not assigned an execution of such a responsible act as murder of an uncle and king, but he still constantly berated himself because of all unfulfilled projects. Just as Hamlet, Coleridge also too easily fell into the comfort of his imagination and physical immobility.

3. INFLUENCE OF COLERIDGE'S CRITICISM

In the past two centuries critics have recognised the influence of Coleridge's interpretation of Hamlet, but not as sufficiently as it deserves. The development of literary analysis, influenced by materialisation and politicising of the Western society, has increasingly led critics to perceive the works of literature of British Romanticism (1789–1832) in a more political, economic and social contexts. Universal topics inspired by religious, spiritual and existential motives were largely abandoned. As Lucy Newlyn puts it, “secularisation has not only relegated the Bible to a thing of the past, but has rendered the idea of spiritual meaning opaque” (Newlyn 2002: 3). Although influenced by politics and social context of his day and age, especially during the early days of his career, Coleridge attempted to give a more universal meaning to his insights about Shakespeare and Hamlet. In the past few decades, however, “knowledge has become diversified in such a way as to make Coleridge's combination of eclecticism and erudition inaccessible, both in terms of its actual content and in the habit of mind it presupposes” (Newlyn 2002: 3). The diversification of knowledge was regrettably followed by the dilution of general understanding of the world.

For a keener observer of the history of *Hamlet* criticism, the legacy of Coleridge's Hamlet lectures is more than obvious. In the imagination of the 19th century Europe, the Danish prince became a colorful representative of a certain psychological type. Critics and audience interpreted his character in different ways, but Hamlet did not leave anyone indifferent. Ivan Turgenev, for example, divided all people into two types: either Hamlet or Don Quixote. If Don Quixote represents faith in something eternal, in truth found outside every individual, and dedication to an ideal, Hamlet then symbolises the inability to find a guiding idea, and a person always obsessed not with his own duties, but his position. Turgenev asserts that Hamlet is aware of his own weakness, but every self-realisation represents a force—this is the source of his irony, which is opposed to the enthusiasm of Don Quixote (Тургенев 1999: 1).² In other words, Hamlet is a thinker and not a doer.

The greatness of one of the most masterful novel writers in the nineteenth century, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, is found, among other things, in his ability to find and depict both

² It is meaningful that Coleridge himself gave a lecture on *Don Quixote*, which was reported to have been one of his most popular ones, in which he performs a philosophical-psychological analysis of the protagonist, describing Don Quixote as a man with perfect reasoning faculties but no faculty of judgment, and pointing out Cervantes's genius in creating Don Quixote and Sancho Panza as complementary characters – two halves of a complete personality (Esterhammer 2002: 152).

good and bad qualities in each character. The gist of the Russian author's dramatic action is found not only in the confrontation between different characters, but in the conflict between two opposing and seemingly contradictory features within the same character. Critics agree that this is a distinguishing property of Shakespearian characters as well. As Jack Lynch asserts, Shakespeare's greatest skill lied in depicting characters of convincing depth and complexity, in whom good and evil were not clearly demarcated, as in fiction, but mixed, as in real life (Lynch 2012: 44). Coleridge was one of the first interpreters who expounded this observation. The main point in his interpretation of Shakespeare is centered around the battle between the virtual reality of the protagonist's inner world and the imminence of the outer actuality.

Early twentieth century brought New Criticism and the very method Coleridge used for interpreting Shakespeare. The English Romanticist conducted a close reading of the text to discover how the work functions as a self-contained, self-referential aesthetic object, the very procedure prevalent in the given epoch. Going a step further, one could even argue that Coleridge's stress of the poetic language as the main vehicle of an esthetic process anticipates the post-structuralist interest in language as the chief means in the relativisation of truth. Coleridge, nevertheless, was aspiring toward the universal, unchangeable in a work of art. His Christian faith, mostly declared in *Lay Sermons*, doubtlessly contributed to his examination of Shakespeare's disinterestedness, or transcendental freedom from the historical conditions of his time (Greenslade 2012: 231). With regard to the biblical tradition, Coleridge calls the poetic word *Logos*, and explains it as the unifying principle of language.

4. THE PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF COLERIDGE'S HAMLET CRITICISM

Coleridge describes Hamlet's "thoughts, images and fancy [as] far more vivid than his perceptions" (Coleridge 2014: 2). The inner world of the Prince of Denmark seems so much more real, that he sees the external world as mere "hieroglyphics":

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world! (I.ii.89–94).

Coleridge observed this very same phenomenon in his own mind, and based its theoretical grounding on the ideas influential in the early nineteenth century, most notably those of the English Associationists and the founder of German idealism, Immanuel Kant. Associationists were 19th century faculty psychologists, most prominent among whom were John Locke, David Hume and James Mill, who were convinced that mental processes operate by the association of one mental state with its successor states. They considered "reversal of vividness", the phenomenon in which the inner world seems more real than the outer sensations, a type of abnormality, as Roberta Morgan observed already in an

early study of the topic (Morgan 1939: 257–58). As James Stuart Mill puts it, “We know nothing of objects but the sensations we have from them. There is a cause, however, of those sensations, and to that we give the name object” (Ibid 259). Hamlet would then, according to this view, probably be diagnosed as mad, for only in madness, dreams and fever, did the mental images grow so vivid as to overpower or be easily taken for the impressions from real objects (Ibid 263).

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge criticises the associationists’ ruling out of the active mind, and therefore of all personality and individuality. The system led to the “degradation of every fundamental idea in ethics or theology” (Coleridge 1983: 121). Coleridge accepted the dichotomy between world and mind, between sense and thought, and the restricted view of experience as atomic, non-relational and non-biological. He accepted the copy theory of thought and sensationalism, but in his view the mind fills out the gap the empiricists left. It is solved, he thought, by the concept of a super-empirical reason, a faculty which will “connect and synthesise the alleged stuff of experience, which will unite in itself both object and subject, and thus bridge the gap between man and the external world” (Coleridge 1983: 231–32). Coleridge called this active, unifying principle by various names: Reason, Will, Imagination, Spirit, the Inner Sense, in contrast to passive Understanding or Fancy. A person either had it or not. This faculty belonged to certain privileged, sensitive people, who were placed rather high on the human scale, and it was distinctly superior to that of Understanding (Morgan 1939: 267).

Coleridge grew dissatisfied with Hobbesian psychology of empiricism popularised by John Locke and developed most exhaustively by David Hartley. In *Biographia Literaria*, he proclaimed philosophical emancipation from the mainstream British empirical tradition in order to establish his ties with the new German tradition (Hamilton 2002: 170). For Coleridge, German idealism represented somewhat of a romantic reaction to sensationalism: external objects had a hidden meaning, perhaps as symbols of a supra-sensual, supra-natural world. There is an implied superiority of the idea to the impression in the treatment of sublimity (Morgan 1939: 265). In *Table Talk*, Hamlet is “the man of Ideas,” Polonius “the man of Maxims.” An “Idea” is defined as “a Principle” which “carries knowledge within itself and is prospective” in contrast to the “Maxim” which is a “conclusion upon observation of matters of fact and is merely retrospective” (Coleridge 1990: 12). This is a specific application of the distinction between Reason and Understanding which Coleridge took over from Kant, and which is paralleled by his well-known distinction between Imagination and Fancy.

The initial rootedness in English philosophy, and then, even more significantly, in German idealism, arguably the most influential movement in the history of human thought, gave Coleridge the intellectual basis for his literary interpretations. His criticism reflected, on the one hand, the reigning empiricist and associationist convictions of his socio-historical surroundings, and, on the other, anticipated the neo-Kantian reaction to materialism that ensued a few decades later. Perhaps most notably, the Kantian primacy of perception in individuals judgment helped to expose Hamlet's vividness and internal experience as an objective entity capable of transforming the world around us.

Conclusions

Eighteenth-century critics and contemporary reviewers were much more likely to practice a type of criticism that focused on isolated passages of particular works, pointing out their “beauties” or (more frequently, in the case of reviewers) their “defects”. The pieces that commonly appeared in partisan periodicals were, as Coleridge complains, full of “personalities” and “superficial judgments” (Foakes 1989: 14). Coleridge argued that the readership is formed by unsettling political events of the time, and the popularity of journalism, reviewing and gossip about public characters, without any reference to “fixed principles” (Coleridge 1990: 18–19). Coleridge attempted to correct this tendency with a criticism founded on elaborate theories of language, representation and aesthetics, revealing his conviction that “literary criticism must have a philosophical structure of its own in order to be able to understand literature as a particular mode of representation, an imitation and not a copy of life” (Esterhammer 2002: 144, 151). By basing his argument on philosophy, psychology and universal, even theological maxims, Coleridge rendered his criticism ageless and free from the vacillations of socio-historical contexts.

Coleridge’s main purpose was to find a character or a scene that contributed to the unity of the play (Esterhammer 2002: 147–148). Hamlet, the principle protagonist of the play, is the unifying force in Coleridge’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s work. No aesthetic or formal rule may be applied indiscriminately, Coleridge argues; rather, we must first know and appreciate “the end, the nature, the Idea of a work” before we can understand what kind of rules should be applied (Farley-Hills 1996: 70). Coleridge focused his interpretation of the play on the psychology of the main character. That was his central idea that changed the perception of the tragedy and influenced the subsequent *Hamlet* productions.

In the twentieth century, Coleridge was seen as “the founding father of modern literary criticism, largely on the basis of his *Biographia Literaria* and the lectures on Shakespeare <...> touchstones of critical acuity” (Newlyn 2002: 7–8). His influence on major schools of the twentieth century was mainly based on psychological criticism, which grounds his conception of the psychology of characters, poets and readers in a new, Kantian vocabulary of mental faculties, and philosophical criticism. Herbert Read explained that “The distinction of Coleridge, which puts him head and shoulders above every other English critic, is due to his introduction of a philosophical method of criticism” (Read 1949: 18). His aims were to ground the reading and appreciation of literature and art on a set of fixed principles derived partly from the British philosophical tradition, as well as from Kant and German idealism (Esterhammer 2002: 153).

As a direct result of Coleridge’s criticism, the publication of *Hamlet* dramatically increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, and, with 63 publications, it was the most published play in that century (followed by *Macbeth* and *Merchant of Venice* 41) (Hollingsworth 2012: 444–445). It continued to be a supreme inspiration for theatre, film and literary artists in the next century. With thirteen film versions in the past seven decades, it is also Shakespeare’s play most frequently cast on the big screen.

Finally, the most important component of Coleridge’s interpretation of Hamlet is his identification with the Prince of Denmark. Just like Coleridge, Hamlet is turned toward

his self and resides only within his own psyche, which implies that he is not capable of external action. Hence, Coleridge concludes: “Action is the ultimate goal of everything. No intellect, no matter how great, is worthy of taking us away from action and taking us to contemplation until the time for action is gone and there is nothing we can do about it. Someone told me, ‘This is a satire about oneself.’ ‘No,’ I said. ‘It’s an elegy’” (Coleridge 2014: 33). Elegies, as we know, end in sorrow. Hence Hamlet, although with his goal is accomplished, ends up on the ground with a hole in his belly, and Coleridge, inconsolable and utterly disappointed, ends up deeply convinced that he had wasted his enormous potential.

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VEIKTI AR NEVEIKTI: KAIP COLERIDGE'AS PAKEITĖ *HAMLETO* SUVOKIMĄ.**Santrauka**

Prieš 200 metų, 1811–1819 metais S. T. Coleridge'as, vienas garsiausių anglų Romantizmo epochos poetų, surengė paskaitų ciklą apie Shakespeare'ą ir jo pjeses. Ypač reikšmingas buvo *Hamleto* pristatymas, iki tol neigiamai vertintas ne tik žiūrovų, bet ir garsiausių kritikų, ypač Samuelio Johnsono. Įžvalgi Coleridge'o analizė padėjo pakeisti nuomonę apie pjesę ir atkreipė dėmesį į tas *Hamleto* savybes, kurios jį greičiausiai padarė žymiausia ir dažniausiai statoma drama ateinančius 200 metų.

Straipsnyje analizuojama, kaip Coleridge'as sugebėjo atpažinti iki tol ignuortas giliausias Shakespeare'o tragedijos savybes. Visų pirma, jis susitapatino su pagrindiniu pjesės veikėju, Danijos princu, ir aprašė, viena vertus, atotrūkį tarp ambicijų ir vaizduotės, kita vertus, nesugebėjimą veikti. Kaip Hamletas, taip ir Coleridge'as atliko „didelę, milžinišką, intelektualinę veiklą ir atitinkamai jautė proporcingą baimę veiksmui.“ Suvokdamas šį trūkumą, bet negalėdamas jo ištaisyti, talentingas ir išsilavinęs rašytojas jį detalčiai ir išsamiai aptarė. Antra, jis panaudojo žinias apie įtakingiausius to meto filosofus, ypač Kantą, Locke'ą ir Hobbesą, taip pat vis labiau populiarėjantį psichologinį požiūrį į personažų analizę siekiant atskleisti vidinį pagrindinio pjesės personažo portretą.

Kolridžo *Hamleto* interpretacijos universaliosios savybės, palaikę ilgalaikę jo kritikos įtaką, buvo nuvertintos dėl vis labiau populiarėjančios literatūros teorijos ir analizės tendencijos sutelkti dėmesį į politinį ir materialųjį meno kūrinio kontekstą. Šiuo straipsniu siekiama reaktualizuoti Coleridge'o paskaitų apie *Hamletą* reikšmę.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Hamletas, suvokimas, Shakespeare'as, Coleridge'as.

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Zainteresowania naukowe: humanizm i renesans, Szekspir, Hamlet, Coleridge

DZIAŁAĆ CZY NIE DZIAŁAĆ: JAK COLERIDGE ZMIENIŁ SPOSÓB POSTRZEGANIA *HAMLETA***Streszczenie**

Przed dwustu laty (1811–1819), S.T. Coleridge – jeden z najwybitniejszych poetów angielskich okresu romantyzmu – zorganizował cykl wykładów o Szekspirze i jego sztukach. Najbardziej znaczącą była jego prezentacja *Hamleta*, wówczas negatywnie ocenianego nie tylko przez widzów, ale i czołowych krytyków, zwłaszcza Samuela Johnsona. Wnikliwa analiza Coleridge'a pomogła zmienić powszechną opinię o tej sztuce i zwróciła uwagę na te cechy *Hamleta*, które uczyniły go bodaj najlepiej znanym i najczęściej wystawianym dramatem przez kolejne 200 lat.

W artykule omówiono sposób, w jaki Coleridge potrafił rozpoznać lekceważone dotąd właściwości tragedii Szekspira. Przede wszystkim, utożsamił się on z głównym bohaterem dramatu, księciem Danii, i opisał, z jednej strony, rozdźwięk między ambicjami a siłą wyobraźni, z drugiej zaś niezdolność do działania. Coleridge, podobnie jak Hamlet, podjął „wielki, ogromny wysiłek intelektualny, i odpowiednio proporcjonalną niechęć do działania”. Świadomy tej wady, jednak nie będący w stanie się pozbyć, niezwykle utalentowany i świetnie wykształcony Coleridge przedstawił jej szczegółowe omówienie. Po drugie, wykorzystał on swoją wiedzę o najbardziej wpływowych współczesnych filozofach, zwłaszcza o Kancie, Locke'u i Hobbesie, oraz o zyskującym na popularności podejściu psychologicznym do analizy postaci w celu ukazania wewnętrznego portretu głównego bohatera sztuki.

Uniwersalne walory interpretacji *Hamleta* w wydaniu Coleridge'a, zasilane długotrwałym wpływem jego krytyki, zostały pomniejszone przez coraz popularniejszą tendencję w dziedzinie teorii literatury i analizy skupiającej uwagę na politycznym i materialnym kontekście dzieła. Niniejszy artykuł ma więc na celu przywrócenie znaczenia wykładów Coleridge'a o *Hamlecie*.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Hamlet, recepcja, Szekspir, Coleridge.

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