

SHAKESPEARIAN TRAITS IN LITHUANIAN LITERATURE

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1. *Early Instances of Influence*

In considering the influence of Shakespeare on Lithuanian literature the obvious place to start is the work of those authors who chose drama, especially historical drama, as their medium. Authors of this kind in the early period would be Maironis (1862-1932) and Vydūnas (1868-1953). But their connection with Shakespeare is very slight.

Admittedly in his dramatic works Maironis did not try to avoid foreign influences, just as in his lyrics he owed much to Pushkin and Lermontov. His *Kęstučio mirtis* (The Death of Kęstutis), being part of a trilogy of historical dramas, derived much from the Polish writer A. Asnyk's *Kiejstut*, as has been demonstrated by J. Tumas.¹

For present purposes, however, greater importance attaches to the treatment of Shakespeare by Maironis in his *Trumpa visuotinės literatūros istorija* (Short History of Universal Literature), which arose from a course of lectures designed for a priest seminary.² Evidently Maironis had considerable knowledge of Shakespeare. In this work he faced the question, still unanswered, whether Shakespeare was a Catholic or an Anglican, that is to say, a Protestant. Although Maironis noted in the dramatist's work such merits as an understanding of the human soul, imagination, truth to nature, and intellectual depth, he found Shakespeare unsatisfactory as being a writer who raised questions but left them without an answer.

As Maironis may have known, the same criticism of Shakespeare had previously been uttered by the Polish critic Zygmunt Krasinski: "Shakespeare knows how people suffer, how their hearts burst, how blood, sweat and tears flow, but he does not know why or for what purpose. Shakespeare did not reach the depths of life and that is why one must not follow him."³

Yet in spite of this criticism of Shakespeare in the abstract sphere, Maironis was more concerned with the patriotic idea, and he paid considerable attention to *Henry V*, where Shakespeare's patriotism finds full expression. If it were possible at all to talk about Shakespearian influence on Maironis, the patriotism of this work would be the one subject to mention; Maironis was attracted neither by the indecisive Hamlet, the Danish prince concerned for the fate of his country, nor by the proud Julius Caesar, as Brutus found him, nor by the equally proud Scot Macbeth.

A further factor in the somewhat averse attitude of Maironis to Shakespeare was his position as a member of the clergy. This explains why he raised the question of Shakespeare's Catholicism. It explains his reproaches to Shakespeare for allegedly "ambiguous and indelicate" expressions. Otherwise it would be difficult to understand why he took so little interest in Shakespeare, when Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, authors whom he admired, were influenced profoundly by the dramatist.

Vydūnas, as V. Mykolaitis-Putinas observed, was too forceful, original and unitary a personality for his dramatic work to fall under any external influence. His concern was to portray a noble character who did not perish because of evil but rose because of good. With justice P. Markelis observed: "Vydūnas gives the first place to the most important and most noble character, the one who wins. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* the most important heroes for Vydūnas would be the king's son Malcolm and Macduff, because they defend the most noble ideas and win. If other authors had written the works of Vydūnas, the basic characters for them would have been Aitra in *Amžina ugnis* (Eternal Fire), Geiras and Juodžių Vadas (the Leader of the Blacks) in *Likimo bangos* (The Waves of Fate), Kubeikis in *Vergai ir Dykiai* (Slaves and Idlers), and the Major in *Gaisras* (The Conflagration). Clearly these plays would then have had an entirely different appearance. Vydūnas gives the first place to men of intellect, whereas others give it to men of passion."⁴

Consequently, however ironic it may appear, in the first stage of modern Lithuanian literature major attention was given to Shakespeare not by educated writers and dramatists but by a simple village woman, Žemaitė (Julija Žymantienė, 1845-1921). Doubtless Shakespeare's influence on Žemaitė as a writer is slight, but the important fact is that for its growth modern Lithuanian literature sought direct contact with the West.

The merit for this belongs to Žemaitė's neighbor, the talented publicist and man of letters Povilas Višinskis (1875-1906). The question of Žemaitė and Shakespeare was treated formerly by J. Būtėnas in his monograph on Žemaitė, but many more details appear from newly published letters of Višinskis and of the authoress.⁵

In an early literary fragment, intended perhaps to introduce Žemaitė to the works of Shakespeare, Višinskis remarked that "In Shakespeare's works we are not concerned with Englishmen or their kings; somehow we do not see them as Englishmen. Instead we are drawn to men and women as men and women. Those imaginative writers who understood their task in a narrow sense have always carried it out in a narrow way."⁶

Subsequent letters of P. Višinskis to Žemaitė and especially a letter written in the summer of 1898 at Yalta, where Višinskis was undergoing a cure, show that from Warsaw he sent her not only Goethe's *Faust*, Gogol's *Inspector General*, Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* and Byron's *Manfred*, but also Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*; these were in Polish translation.⁷ In the letter he adds the remark about Shakespeare that "Hitherto no one in the world has equalled him," and he instructs Žemaitė on the proper way to read Shakespeare: "Works like those of Shakespeare should not be read just once or twice. You should leaf through the pages and then put the book down, take a meal, go to sleep, and then return to the book and leaf through its pages again."⁸

Study of the outstanding masters of European literature was not an easy task for Žemaitė, and in a letter of February 1898 she complained that Goethe's *Faust* led her "into such an unknown and extraordinary world that the head grows dizzy." *Manfred*, a work akin to *Faust*, so affected her with its spirits that she remarked: "This is perhaps the fantasy of geniuses."⁹

However, Žemaitė formed a more favorable opinion of Shakespeare. Among his works she found *Hamlet* the best. She wrote that in *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare "speaks so beautifully of the matter of love through the lips of Romeo."¹⁰ In a letter to Višinskis on May 5 (17), 1898 Žemaitė even boasted of her comprehension of Shakespeare: "Julija Žymantienė converses with Shakespeare."¹¹

Višinskis himself was convinced that Shakespeare had some influence, though not any great influence, on Žemaitė's work. When he first read her *Kurmelis*, he wrote: "I perceived that his (Shakespeare's) influence was bringing improvement."¹² He recognized this influence in the composition of the story, where "the pictures keep changing," and in Janikė's sudden and intense love for *Kurmelis*, where Žemaitė treated of "the matter of love" which she had observed in *Romeo and Juliet*

The spirits, witches and fairies, which had so alarmed Žemaitė in Goethe's *Faust* and Byron's *Manfred*, were used for literary composition by Žalia Rūta (pen-name of Rev. Adolfas Sabaliauskas, 1873-1955). His writings, such as *Pančiai* (Chains, 1917), a drama set in the period of serfdom, and the dramatized folk-tales *Kada rožės žydi* (When the Roses Bloom, 1917) and *Laumės* (Witches, 1920), are not of any great literary value, since they suffer from shortcomings of style and composition, but they are significant in the use they make of folktales; they were written shortly after Krėvė had given an example in *Dainavos šalies senų žmonių padavimai* (Legends of the Old People of the Land of Dainava) and in *Šarūnas*. They were also significant for some of their descriptions of nature and even for precision of diction.

In *Laumės* (Witches), "a national tale woven anew," Žalia Rūta in places copies Shakespeare too obviously, and this called forth sharp comment in the periodical *Gairės* (Landmarks) at the time.¹³ But even when Žalia Rūta incorporated passages obviously borrowed from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* into his story, he did so in language of his own. Between the Scottish witches of *Macbeth* and Lithuanian witches there proves to be perfect similarity, and in both cases the author chose three witches. Both the one group and the other weave the web of fate in such a way that one man wins and another perishes (Macbeth perishes by losing his throne and the merchant by losing his wealth).

There is a difference between the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet* and the corresponding scene in *Laumės* (Witches). When Hamlet takes a skull in his hand, he speaks in prose, but in *Laumės* Galva (Head) speaks in verse. Hamlet says:

"Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?" Galva says:

"Where now are the flashing glances,
Which I cast from these sockets?
They have not returned home to me.
Where are the words, which sprang
From these white teeth?
Where is that ardor of love and anger
Which poured from the heart?" (Part 5)

(Kur dabar žaibai akių
Kur mečiau iš šių skylių?
Jie namo man nesugrižo.
Kur tie žodžiai, kur išsprūdo
Iš baltųjų šių dantų?
Kur tas karštis meilės, pykčio,
Kur ištryško iš širdies?)

Žalia Rūta wrote this work in Helsinki, Finland, during World War I (1916), and it also echoes the tone of the *Kalevala*, which he was then translating into Lithuanian.

2. Shakespearian Traits in the Work of Vincas Krėvė

In the past there have been attempts, however hesitant, to connect *Šarūnas* by Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius (1882-1954) with Shakespeare's *Richard III*, with *Hamlet* and less frequently with *Othello*. But there is no documentary proof, as in the case of Žemaitė, that Shakespeare exercised direct influence on Krėvė.

From Krėvė's own observations published on the occasion of the fourth edition of *Dainavos šalies senų žmonių padavimai* (Legends of the Old People of the Land of Dainava) it appears what works he used to construct a picture of early Lithuania, when he was writing *Šarūnas*.¹⁴ Apart from the Polish historians Szajnocha, Prochaska and Halecki he mentions *Scriptores Rerum Prussicarum*, the Chronicle of Strykowski and *Dzieje narodu litewskiego* (History of the Lithuanian Nation) by T. Narbutas (Narbutt). Naturally in such a case he does not mention works of imaginative literature, which may have played an auxiliary part.

It is, however, significant that Krėvė began collecting material for his *Šarūnas* in 1904 in the University of Kiev and he continued doing so in the University of Lwów, where he studied philosophy and literature from 1905. An extensive choice of literature, both eastern and western, was available for strengthening the characterization of *Šarūnas*; it included Pushkin, Slowacki and Shakespeare.

In 1920 Liudas Gira, who was then county chairman at Marijampolė, showed in the local public high school some scenes from Krėvė's *Šarūnas*, which had been printed in 1911; on that occasion he called the work "A *Hamlet* of our own." The opportunity was provided when girls from the seventh grade of the high school acted some passages from *Šarūnas* with female scenes, for example, Voverė's conversation with Eglė, her meeting with Tautvilas on his return, and the appearance of Eglė in the camp (when she has suffered the same fate as Shakespeare's Ophelia).¹⁵

Relying on the methods of comparative literature, Algirdas Landsbergis brings Krėvė's *Šarūnas* into relation with Shakespeare's *Richard III*, though he does not overlook the further possibility of indebtedness to Pushkin. The comparison with one of the well-known historical dramas of Shakespeare is justified, since there are a good many parallels.¹⁶

Studying the composition of *Šarūnas*, K. Jankauskas finds the influence of Shakespeare and of Pushkin, whose *Boris Godunov* itself owed much to Shakespeare. "By considering the composition of *Šarūnas*," writes Jankauskas, "It can be shown that here Krėvė made use of a well-known feature of the dramas of Shakespeare and Pushkin. The material in *Šarūnas* is spread widely; life is treated in many aspects; there is a basic plot, but many subordinate plots and developments are entwined with it."¹⁷ In the same study Jankauskas calls Krėvė's *Skirgaila* "a better edition of *Šarūnas*," that is, the same work but re-written and re-arranged.

The parallel between Eglė in *Šarūnas* and Ophelia in *Hamlet* is brought to light by V. Mykolaitis in his lengthy study of Vincas Krėvė.¹⁸ The further conclusion is offered there that Voverė in *Šarūnas* calls to mind Desdemona in *Othello* by her traits of character and behavior.

Finally the Marxist literary critic K. Korsakas says that "in virtue of complexity of character and dramatic tension" Krėvė's *Šarūnas* reminds the reader of Shakespeare's realism.¹⁹

All previous studies point to the conclusion that Krėvė's *Šarūnas* has features in common not only with Shakespeare's *Richard III* but also with others of his plays, including *Hamlet* and even *Othello*. But there is more justification for comparison with the work where similarities are clearer.

Doubtless Krėvė needed a support to rest on in creating so complex a character as that of *Šarūnas*. There is no evidence at all about the historical *Šarūnas*. The folk-songs of Dzūkija (South-eastern Lithuania), collected by Krėvė in 1903-1907 and published in 1924 with the title *Dainavos krašto liaudies dainos* (Folk Songs of the Territory of Dainava), contain too few songs about *Šarūnas*, and even the authenticity of these has been denied by the folklorist Dr. Jonas Balys.²⁰ But

some traditions and tales about Šarūnas have oriental features and traits of the Oedipus complex. Krėvė was in a sense an orientalist, and this may have helped him considerably in working out the conception of Šarūnas.

The case of Shakespeare's *Richard III* is different. This is a purely historical play, and its source is recognized in the Chronicles of Holinshed supplemented with St. Thomas More's account of the life of Richard III, an account on which Shakespeare drew extensively, especially in emphasizing the physical and spiritual defects of the royal figure.

In the first place Richard III, previously duke of Gloucester, is known to history as a hunchback, who ruled England for two years (1483-1485). He talks about his physical shortcomings at the beginning of Shakespeare's work:

"But I, — that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them..."
(Act 1, Scene 1)

Consequently he is not unduly moved by the bitter words of Queen Margaret:

"Thou elvish-mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!
Thou that wast seal'd in thy nativity
The slave of nature and the son of hell!"

Allegedly he was born with fully grown teeth. Likewise one story about Šarūnas says that the latter had twelve teeth at birth.[21](#)

At the beginning of the second act Krėvė introduces his Šarūnas as "having at least a slight hump, a strong man of low stature with arms too long, a dark complexion and deep-set, flashing eyes." Like Richard, he knows that he is ugly and he is not surprised because young people run away from him one time, when he comes to their merry-making; he cannot win the heart of Voverė, "a wanton ambling nymph."

Both monarchs pursue their goals through blood and slaughter, but in *Šarūnas* the blood is mostly shed on the field of battle, whereas in *Richard III* deaths are brought about through policy and intrigue. Just as Šarūnas's minstrel Rainys observes that "Šarūnas does not seek glory but strives to bring order to his fatherland, that it may be powerful; he wants to unite all the sons of his country, that it might shine like the sun," so the duke of Buckingham begs Richard:

"This noble isle doth want her proper limbs;
Her face defac'd with scars of infamy...
Which to recure, we heartily solicit
Your gracious self to take on you the charge
And kingly government of this your land..."
(Act 3, Scene 7)

Before the decisive battle with the earl of Richmond, later Henry VII, Richard has a vision of the spirits of the fallen; he is overcome by despair and they wish him death. Likewise before the decisive battle with the Knights of the Teutonic Order, when Šarūnas is fated to die, the souls of those who have perished through his fault appear on the shore of Trakai lake and call to him:

"We are waiting for the pyre, on which you will burn." This is one of the clearest parallels between the works of Krėvė and Shakespeare.

Finally in *Šarūnas* the tragedy of Eglė, who is deceived by Alūnas and goes mad, resembles closely the similar fate of Ophelia. There are too many songs in *Šarūnas* as a whole, but the short songs sung by Eglė after the change in her condition sometimes correspond precisely with those of Ophelia. Thus Ophelia sings

"For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy,"

and this is equivalent to Eglė's song:

"There is no one, there will never be anyone
Like my young man"

("nėra tokio, nebus tokio,
kaip mano bernelis").

Yet such correspondences are rare and may be accidental; so no extensive conclusions can be drawn from them. The murder of the two little princes in the Tower has no corresponding scene in *Šarūnas*; it can only be compared clumsily to the murder of Vilkė, the mother of Voverė and Eglė.

Krėvė's *Skirgaila* can perhaps be regarded as a continuation of his *Šarūnas*, but in a more restrained vein, for in the last scene Skirgaila does not kill his wife on suspicion of infidelity, as *Šarūnas* had done. If such a view is correct, the character of *Šarūnas* also finds a pale reflection in that of Mindaugas (in the drama *Mindaugo mirtis* — The Death of Mindaugas). Mindaugas, "born on the grave of *Šarūnas*", admits that he has never practiced severity and that his heart bled every time when he had to preserve Lithuania from danger by inflicting death.

The Knight of the Teutonic Order calls Mindaugas a "dreadful minister of hell", as Shakespeare's Richard was called, but on the whole Krėvė concentrates in the character of *Šarūnas* those qualities of cruelty which Słowacki brings together in his *Mindowe* (Mindaugas), a work influenced profoundly by Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

Thus in order to characterize *Šarūnas*, if Krėvė had to choose between Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, which offered not only a view of Lithuanian history but also a picture of an extraordinary tyrant, and Słowacki's *Mindowe* (Mindaugas), he was more inclined to select the latter portrayal of Mindaugas, even though it was distorted after the model of Shakespeare's work.²²

In fact Słowacki's Mindaugas is a true Richard, a "dreadful minister of hell", who on one occasion complains to his mother Ragneda in words almost like those of *Šarūnas*:

"I have rended hearts. I am godless, a murderer, a tyrant, a hypocrite, an assassin. One of these sins alone could burn up the human conscience, but I have committed them all... Now that I am tired of evil-doing, I shall fall asleep and be carried to my grave, while lanterns of fire shine in the burning villages of the crusaders" (Act 5, Scene 1).

Aldona, the wife of Daumantas, whom Mindaugas keeps for himself after the death of Morta, suffers remorse and undergoes the fate of Ophelia. The short songs which she sings are like those of Shakespeare's Ophelia.²³

In spite of these similarities, there are greater contrasts between Krėvė's *Šarūnas* and Shakespeare's *Richard III*. *Šarūnas*, as Dr. V. Maciūnas has said, is the direct opposite of Hamlet.²⁴

3. Shakespearian Traits in the Work of Balys Sruoga

Of all the writers of modern Lithuanian literature Balys Sruoga (1896-1947) had perhaps the closest link with Shakespeare's work and went furthest in interpreting it and using it.

At an early stage Sruoga paid attention to the distinguished playwright. The goals he had in mind were both the improvement of the Lithuanian theater and the stimulation and perfection of his own dramatic work. Among his many articles dealing with the theater, its development and dramatic criticism, there are a considerable number of allusions to Shakespeare, although he did not write any monograph about him.

However, Sruoga's interest in Shakespeare underwent a certain evolution. In one of his early articles on the theater, entitled *Iš mūsų vaidybų* (From Our Dramatic Performances), he recognized Ibsen rather than Shakespeare as the pioneer of psychological drama.²⁵ He thought that Shakespeare was too much influenced by the drama of antiquity and that Ibsen opened up greater psychological depths.

A good many years later, in an article called *Istorinė teisybė dailiojo literatūroje* (Historical Truth in Imaginative Literature) and written in 1935, Sruoga recognized that Shakespeare was less concerned for historical accuracy than for psychological credibility. "His whole attention is devoted to philosophical and psychological problems, personalities, the plenitude of character, but not the historical perspective of their lives."²⁶

Sruoga probably underwent this change of outlook after his dramatic studies in Munich (1921-1924). While still under the influence of these studies, in an article called *Naujos idėjos teatro moksle* (New Ideas in the Science of the Theater), he showed a new attitude of Shakespeare; he said that Shakespeare had written only for the theater and cared for nothing but dramatic art.²⁷ Those who sought historical truth or philosophy or morality in Shakespeare's works overlooked their main purpose. This idea, that Shakespeare wrote primarily not for literature but for the theater, was repeated by Sruoga some twenty years later, when he was in the concentration camp at Stutthof and with stoic fortitude wrote *Apie dramaturgijos pradžiodalas* (Concerning the Origins of Dramaturgy).²⁸ There he wrote: "Historians of literature forgot Shakespeare for at least a couple of centuries after his death. When the romanticists revived his memory, Shakespeare received a place of

honor for the first time, since while he was alive, like his contemporaries, he wrote his works solely for the theater without printing them or intending to print them."[29](#)

Yet even Sruoga was no blind worshipper or disciple of Shakespeare. Almost at the same time he drew attention to the dramatist's shortcomings, which had offended not only Goethe but also Tolstoy and even in more recent times Bernard Shaw.

In view of such divergent evaluations of Shakespeare, Sruoga set about writing a lengthy study of the dramatic art of Vaičiūnas, and in it he expatiated on the merits of Shakespeare's plays, even though these had no close connection with the subject under study.[30](#) Here too he reiterated the idea he had expressed in Munich, that the attempt to examine a dramatic work from the standpoint of strictly literary value leads to misunderstandings.

Balys Sruoga, like Vincas Krėvė, was to deliver an independent course of lectures in the University of Kaunas and later in that of Vilnius. So he brought to the subject not merely the interest felt by a lover of the theater but the conscientious devotion of a scholarly investigator. In his *Rusų literatūros istorija* (History of Russian Literature, 1931 and 1933), which arose from a course at the University, Sruoga linked Shakespeare with authors like Pushkin, since he held that Shakespeare influenced not only short compositions, like the poem *Angelo*, but even the tragedy of Boris *Godunov*.[31](#)

In his monograph *Lietuvių teatras Petrapilyje 1892-1918* (The Lithuanian Theater in St. Petersburg, 1892-1918), written about the same time (1930), Sruoga writes with enthusiasm of the Lithuanian theater of the period under study and compares it with the theater of the period of Shakespeare. "The audience came crowding in, like that of the Shakespearian theater in the legendary age of the English Queen Elizabeth. In fact in the theater, as in other spheres, we lived through a renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century."[32](#) Under the direction of K. Glinskis the actors in the Lithuanian Theater of St. Petersburg included not only K. Jurgelionis and later S. Pilka but also A. Voldemaras, and such works were performed as Slowacki's *Mindowe* (Mindaugas), which is so imbued with the spirit of Shakespeare, although one may wonder whether anyone recognized this at the time.

In 1932, when the State Theater at Kaunas produced *Hamlet* and suffered a good deal of hostile criticism in the press, Sruoga was one of the very few to form a favorable estimate of the production and he threw himself into an attack on the press with all the force of his temperament.[33](#)

Probably through the influence of the drama seminar which he had founded at the University Sruoga, in his last articles written before World War II, paid attention to such problems as producing the works of Shakespeare and adapting them to modern conditions, and to the training and general education of actors, since it is only possible to act *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* well if there is considerable understanding of the author.[34](#)

Not only Sruoga's scholarly interest but also his creative bond with the British dramatist have led some people to call him "the Lithuanian Shakespeare." With some reservations this can be granted. On the other hand Sruoga in his dramatic works dealt with strictly Lithuanian problems and their universality may be limited. Yet Shakespeare helped him a great deal to discover his true bent both in point of form and of content.

Literary critics have pointed out that Sruoga follows Shakespeare in portraying the internal tragedy of unsympathetic characters and in writing within the category of historical chronicle.[35](#) K. Korsakas remarks that Sruoga, basing himself on Shakespeare's practice, revived the monologue and introduced a musical element.[36](#)

J. Blekaitis, who knew Balys Sruoga well and has expressed his enthusiasm for his work in many articles, does not speak directly of any Shakespearian influence on Sruoga, but some passages in his articles indicate that there was such influence. In an article written in exile about Sruoga and his work, Blekaitis says: "Sruoga was an individualist, who set man, his freedom and personality at the center of the world, and so he is firmly opposed to any tendentiousness in art, to any didacticism, partisan spirit, utilitarianism or pettiness."[37](#) This is almost a paraphrase of Sruoga's own words about Shakespeare, that he wrote only for the theater, without trying to teach anything or propound any morals, and that his sole concern was to represent living men and women.

Beginning with *Milžino paunksmė* (The Shade of the Giant, 1932, written in honor of the year of Vytautas the Great), Sruoga continued for years writing in the genre of historical chronicle, which corresponds to Shakespeare's Histories. This was the origin of Sruoga's *Radvila Perkūnas* (Radvila the Thunder, 1935), *Baisioji naktis* (The Terrible Night, 1937), and *Algirdas Izborske* (Algirdas at Izborsk, 1938). This undertaking did not come to an end in the troubles of the war and postwar period; Sruoga continued with *Apyaušrio Dalia* (The Destiny of the Dawn, 1945), *Kazimieras Sapiega* (Casimir Sapieha, 1947) and *Barbora Radvilaitė* (unfinished).

Doubtless it would be incorrect to say that Shakespeare was the only author to exert a fascination for Sruoga. On the contrary Vincas Krėvė with *Šarūnas* and *Skirgaila* had already made a deep impression on him, and the question of Pushkin's significance for him has still to be studied. But there is some evidence that he owed the idea of writing historical dramas to Shakespeare.[38](#)

In realistic drama, in lyrical and musical plays, and in comedy, in short in all forms of dramatic composition except tragedy Sruoga stands close to Shakespeare. Some details of the literary connection between them appear from his own remarks about the English playwright and from comparison of their works.

The parallels in subject matter may be due to Shakespearian influence, but some of them may be accidental. The eternal theme of *Romeo and Juliet*, the theme, that is, of two politically hostile families and two young people in love, arises in Sruoga's musical play *Radvila Perkūnas* (Radvila the Thunder). In this case the two families, of Radvila and Katkevičius, diverge because of the confessional difference between Protestants and Catholics, but they also compete for wealth and for power in the political life of Lithuania. The young couple escape the catastrophe of the Shakespearian play and achieve happiness, and the Swedish danger unites the different families in the common cause.

In *Kazimieras Sapięga Marysenka*, the wife of Sobieski, proposes marriage to Sapięga for political reasons, just as Richard III makes a similar proposal to Lady Anne to secure himself more firmly on the desired throne. Elžbieta, the daughter of Oginskis, shows a still closer resemblance to King Lear's daughter Cordelia. Finally the madness of Liucija and its mode of expression call *Hamlet* to mind.

It is to be noted that in *Milžino paunksmė* (The Shade of the Giant) Jogaila's wife Sofija (Sonka) calls Vytautas a sorcerer, since the same characteristics are detected in Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. But instead of a conflict between two brothers Sruoga develops the conflict of Vytautas with the Pole Olesnicki.

Yet the influence of Shakespeare on the form of Sruoga's plays is more significant than these resemblances of subject matter. It is evident in the introduction of crowd scenes and scenes of contrast and in the use of monologues and of iambic meter.

Crowd scenes are to be found as early as *Radvila Perkūnas* (Radvila the Thunder), where Jesuits, Protestants, villagers and courtiers appear in distinct groups. These scenes also present contrasts, where completely different classes are brought together. In *Baisioji naktis* (The Terrible Night), where the action is set in the revolution of 1905, two processions meet in a forest and they both make their way against a fantastic and inconceivable terror, which threatens to destroy Lithuania.

In Shakespeare's plays there is often comic relief alongside of tragedy, and Sruoga also often weaves a comic element into his dramas. Some scenes of *Radvila Perkūnas* (Radvila the Thunder) call to mind *As You Like It*, where a comic element is entwined with the serious progression of the action. At the end of *Uošvė* (The Mother-in-Law) the audience sees three couples marrying, just as in *As You Like It*, although the subject matter and development of the action are different. When the contrasts in *Milžino paunksmė* (The Shade of the Giant) and *Kazimieras Sapięga* evoked unfavorable criticisms, Sruoga used to rebut them by citing Shakespeare's example.

Sruoga probably drew some strong words (for example, *šuva* - cur, *keltava* - brute) from Krėvė's *Šarūnas*, which has passages of sustained vituperation, but Shakespeare was an equally important source of strong language for him. For example, in Richard III Lady Anne upbraids Gloucester to his face:

"Vouchsafe, diffus'd infection of a man,
For these known evils but to give me leave,
By circumstance, to curse thy cursed self."
(Act 1, Scene 2).

It seems at first that Gloucester will pay her no further regard, but after a time he marries her. Sruoga evidently found such diction necessary as a condiment, always provided that the speaker and the tone were right. He suffered severe criticism on this account, but he could cite Shakespearian practice. It was rather more difficult to answer the reproaches, when the strong words were uttered by a member of the clergy or of a religious order or by a bishop, or when the vituperation took place beside a cathedral and a mystically religious closing scene provided a contrast.³⁹

An important achievement of Sruoga, for which he was dependent on Shakespeare, was the introduction of monologue into drama. Especially unforgettable are the monologues of Jogaila and Švitrigaila, uttered at the tomb of Vytautas, in *Milžino paunksmė* (The Shade of the Giant) and that of Sapięga in *Bajorų mirė Lietuva* (The Passing of the Boyars' Lithuania). But some of the concluding choral hymns in *Milžino paunksmė* (The Shade of the Giant) suggest Goethe rather than Shakespeare. The iambic pentameter in Sruoga's plays is an obvious borrowing from Shakespeare.

4. Shakespearian Traits in the Work of Putinas

Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas (1893-1967) has left few utterances about Shakespeare. Yet he gained considerable knowledge of the English playwright during his literary studies in the University of Fribourg (1918-1922), where he concerned himself

with West European poetry, and later in the University of Munich (1922-1923), where he concentrated on literature, preparing himself for an appointment in the University of Lithuania. In Munich he met Balys Sruoga, who was preparing himself for a similar appointment and had been studying art history and drama.

In the University of Lithuania Putinas gave a course in general literature and, like Krėvė and Sruoga, he came into contact with Shakespeare. Together with Krėvė and Vaižgantas he worked to develop the Society of the Humanities and Literature (*Humanitarinių mokslų ir literatūros draugija*), and about 1928 the Society commissioned Lithuanian translations of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.⁴⁰

In articles written about the same time and later collected as *Literatūros etiudai* (Studies of Literature, 1937), Putinas mentioned Shakespeare, although he did not write a separate essay about him as he did about Dante, another poet whom he esteemed and admired. But Shakespeare was significant and important to him, because the dramatist "analyzed the most complex passions of the human soul and his inspired intuition cast light into its deepest recesses."⁴¹

This was the period when Putinas himself suffered the major crisis of his life and tried to express it in his works, such as *Valdovo sūnus* (The Son of the Ruler) or cycles of passionate verse. *Valdovo sūnus* was a lyrical drama in six parts, first printed in the second volume of Putinas's *Raštai* (Writings) in 1921, and revised as *Valdovas* (The Ruler) in 1930. E. Radzikauskas (Liudas Gira) in his critical comments on this drama remarked that Putinas did not avoid "Even the most emotionally charged scenes, sometimes taken directly from Shakespeare's repertoire."⁴² He found scenes of this kind in the fourth part, where the legendary ruler Krušna is faced by the revolt of his own unacknowledged son Gytis and, after the ruler's death, his son Skaidra denies his paternity, but only the one daughter Danguolė shows love for her father, calling to mind Cordelia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

The scene of the cursing of the son is indeed among the most emotionally charged and Shakespearian. In angry and bitter words Krušna curses his son, who is accusing his father of being bloodthirsty (a theme from *Hamlet*):

"Be silent, wretch! Is it not enough for thee
To injure my heart with pain till the blood flows?
I will not endure disdain from anyone!
Be accursed, for ever accursed,
If thou art truly my son!
May a bitter serpent gnaw at thy heart
Till death — so that thou shalt find no place —
But shalt die without knowing joy."
(Part 4).

(Nutilki, niekše! Negana dar tau
man širdį kruvinai skausmu sužeidus?!
Aš pajuokos nuo nieko nepakęsiu!
Prakeiktas būk, prakeiktas amžinai,
jei mano tu išties esi sūnus!
Tegu ik mirsiant tavo širdį grauš
pikta angis — kad vietos neberastum —
kad pats tu žūtum džiaugsmo nepažinęs!)

No less tragic is the scene in the fifth part where the father recognizes his son, after wounding him fatally with a sword in error. The theme is an old one, paralleled in the legend of Oedipus and in the Lay of Hildebrand; indeed Radzikauskas called *Valdovo sūnus* (The Son of the Ruler) "The Lay of Hildebrand." Yet as can be seen, the play owes something to Shakespeare.⁴³

Later the name of Shakespeare occurs in Putinas's novel *Altorių šešėly* (In the Shadow of the Altars, 1933; Part 2, Chapter 13). The passage shows which of Shakespeare's works Putinas himself had read most attentively. In it Liudas Vasaris, the principal character of the novel, discusses literary questions with Baroness Rainakis and becomes convinced that very few major works of world literature were written by priests. "That day he took some books from the shelf and began to read them greedily. This time he chose only names known to him from the course on literature. Since he was a priest and his literary ambitions were beginning to be aroused, after each book he asked the question, could a priest write that way? Each time he was deeply disappointed, since he had to admit that a priest could not write in such a way... If he attached the abbreviation Rev. to the any of the authors he knew and was reading, the result was a nonsensical hybrid: Rev. Mickiewicz? Rev. Slowacki? Rev. Tatmajer? Rev. Goethe? Rev. Hugo? Rev. Shakespeare? Heaven forbid! ..." ⁴⁴

Among these authors Shakespeare was doubtless as close to Putinas as Mickiewicz, whose *Konrad Wallenrod* he translated about 1950, the translation being brought about by the publishing house Gabija in the United States in 1953. Later, in 1955-1958, Putinas composed a cycle of love sonnets modeled on the sonnets of Shakespeare.

In the character of Vasaris K. Korsakas finds something of the spirit of Hamlet. "Vasaris conforms wholly to the classical principle of liberalism, *laissez faire, laissez passer*... In other words, in one part of his character Vasaris is a Hamlet."⁴⁵ His

lyrical and contemplative nature did not allow Vasaris to take any positive or negative decision, as his life developed. Hesitating like Hamlet for long periods, he experienced continually an internal tension between duty and feeling. "Two loves have I of comfort and despair," says Shakespeare in one of the sonnets (144). It would be more difficult to accept Korsakas's assertion that Hamlet and Vasaris were each a product of the social environment of his time; this is the outmoded theory of positivism.

In the cycle of seven sonnets, written on the model of Shakespeare, Putinas attempted a return to the early experience of love:

"Now, when frost again bites its yellow teeth into the maples,
The heart discovers you in a dream of spring."[46](#)

(Dabar, kai vėl klevuos šalna geltonai kanda,
Širdis pavasario sapne tave suranda.)

Putinas gave his sonnets an original quality, so that in some of them only a very few echoes of Shakespeare can be found; sometimes several such echoes are combined in one sonnet:

"Forgive me, if I have disappointed you
And your expectations perish like a dream.
Insensibly I poured into your heart
Drops of moisture poisoned with sorrow.

Like an unthrift who has spent his treasure,
I tread further into the darkness of unknowing.
But remorse grows in my breast
With your gaze, smile and name.

You will depart, disillusioned with our love,
When the black chill of night has covered me.
It was love that you loved,
But in love you did not find the joy of love.

Or perhaps your lips will prove to me
That this black word of mine is not just?"[47](#)

(Atleiski man, jei aš tave užvyliau
Ir tave lūkesčiai kaip sapnas žus.
Aš nejučiom į tavo širdį pyliau
Tuos sielvarto apnuodytus lašus.

Kaip niekadaris lobį išaikvojęs,
Tolyn į juodą nežinią brendu.
Tik gailėsis krūtinėje kerojas
Su tavo žvilgsniu, šypsniu ir vardu.

Nueisi tu, mūs meile nusivylus,
Žvarbai nakties mane apgaubs juodai.
Buvai tu meilę meilėje pamilus,
Bet meilės džiaugsmo meilėj neradai.

O galgi tavo lūpos man įrodys,
Jog neteisis šis juodas mano žodis.)

In this sonnet the "unthrift who has spent his treasure" echoes a figure in Shakespeare's ninth sonnet, and the phrase "it was love that you loved" alludes Shakespeare's fortieth sonnet, although there the subject is the love of a friend whereas here it is the love of woman. Putinas addressed this whole sequence of sonnets to her; its theme is love experienced dramatically in old age. These are perhaps the most significant stanzas in all of Putinas's work.

The last and perhaps most highly developed of these sonnets shows only a general Shakespearian atmosphere. To achieve a more dignified mode of expression Putinas chose the iambic hexameter instead of the pentameter:

"The doubts of the heart and errors of the mind
On the winding path of life no longer frighten me.
Recollections of them entwine in a many-coloured bouquet;
Some offer sweet comfort, others bring bitter grief.

More than once my heart poured forth streams of blood,
My head reeled from midnight hesitations.
Thus storms and heat bring new grain to ripeness,
And a broken nutshell gives birth to a bright shoot.

Today again I come to a standstill on the path to the sunset.
My heart bleeds again and my thoughts go astray.
But I feel a hard stone firmly beneath my feet,
And on high my eyes recognize the paths of the stars.

Watching at the cross-roads, I know now at last:
Not in vain have I wandered, suffered and lived."[48](#)

(Širdies svyravimai ir proto paklydimai
Painiam buities kely manęs nebebaugina.
Į marga puokštę klojas jujų atminimai --
Vieni saldžiai paguodžia, o kiti gaudina.

Širdis nekartą buvo kraujuose paplūdus,
Galva vidurnakčiuos nuo abejonių svaigo.
Taip audros ir kaitra naujus brandina grūdus,
O sprogęs kevalas pagimdo šviesų daigą.

Saulėlydžio kely aš šiandien vėl sustoju, —
Ir vėl širdis kraujuoja, ir mintis nuklysta.
Bet kietą akmenį tvirtai jaučiu po kojų,
Ir akys aukštumoj Žvaigždžiu takus pažįsta.

Budėjęs kryžkeliuos, tiktai dabar žinau:
Ne veltui klaidžiojau, kenčiau ir gyvenau.)

5. *Shakespearian Traits in Recent Lithuanian Poetry*

At least the most important of Shakespeare's works were published in Lithuanian translation during the period of independence, and so they exercised influence in the schools and the theater. In secondary schools programs of literature introduced students to Shakespeare and his works. In the University literary courses, especially in general and in English literature, sometimes went deeper into the artistic qualities of the dramatist's works.

The theaters were not backward in producing Shakespearian plays, although without any systematic plan. For the student of literature or the young poet the theater had as much significance as private reading, or at least the one complemented the other. If the limitless fantasy of Dante could stimulate the public only through the written word, Shakespeare offered a more direct stimulus on the stage. It is accordingly not surprising that young people pursuing higher education were and are affected by such unforgettable Shakespearian characters as Hamlet, King Lear, Romeo, Othello, and especially by female characters like Ophelia, Desdemona and Imogen.

Some response to these characters is reflected in recent Lithuanian poetry, although no major examples of influence are to be found. A noticeable debt to Shakespeare is evident in the work of Jonas Aistis (born 1904). Bernardas Brazdžionis, editing a collection of Aistis's work under the title *Pilnatis* (The Full Moon), called one section *King Lear*, although that section includes poems about the Lithuanian composer and painter Čiurlionis. Aistis was deeply moved by the situation of conflict in *King Lear*, when the king is rejected by the daughters he favored and saved by the one he thrust aside:

"That bitter cold of nights and evenings
Grew firm in my heart still today.
In such weather King Lear
Was rejected by his daughters.

Ah, Shakespeare was heartless;
Even a dog would have squealed, when driven out.
But King Lear was lyrical,
Even in the bitter weather of the fall.

He was weary, it seems,
Of life of grey days and evenings...

Besides Lear still wanted to tell stories
To one of his daughters."49

(Ta dargana dar šiandien tvyro
Širdy naktų ir vakarų.
Tokių oru karalius Lyras
Atstumtas buvo dukterų.

Ak, beširdis tas Šekspyras —
Išvytas cypęs būt ir šuo! —
O lyriškas karalius Lyras,
Nors dargana ir nors ruduo.

Matyt, gyvenimas įkyro
Pilkų dienu ir vakarų ...
Ir pasakas dar sekti Lyras
Norėjo vienai dukterų.)

More poems by Aistis on Shakespearian themes are to be seen in his most recent collection, *Poezija* (Poetry). He shows special sensitivity in speaking of Ophelia and her unswerving trust in Hamlet:

"Ophelia out of her mind, Ophelia in love —
White as snow, pure as a tear —
Ophelia, nymph, remember my sins
In your prayers, your most holy prayers!"50

(Ofelija beprotė, Ofelija mylinti —
Balta kaip sniegas, skaisti kaip ašara —
Ofelija, nimfa, prisimink mano nuodėmės
Savo maldose, maldose švenčiausiose!)

Less Shakespearian influence is to be found in the poetry of Bernardas Brazdžionis (born 1907). He has more allusions to poets of the Romance languages, such as Dante, especially since his travels to their countries. But the significance of Shakespeare, alongside of other poets, for Brazdžionis appears from the poem *Amžių ugnis* (Fire of the Ages), dedicated to J. Aistis, and written, as the author said, "In the poverty-stricken years of exile, ruins and death, when the whole world was tortured by Shakespeare's eternal question, 'To be or not to be'." The poem says:

"Poet, you were the first to kindle the fire
In the fire of the altar of the ages,
And crossing the abyss of the ages,
You handed it on to another,

That in other lands, which you were not called to visit,
Thousands of poets might run a later race
Bringing the holy fire of the ages,
That it might burn restless for ages

In the hands of Sappho, and Dante, and /Shakespeare,
Of Poe, Tagore, Rilke, Li-tai-pe.. "51

(Amžių aukuro ugnį tą ugnį
Uždegei, poete, pirmas tu
Ir, per amžių perbėgęs bedugnę,
Perdavei kitam, kad prie kitų,

Tau lankyt krantų nepažadėtų,
Su šventąja amžių ugnimi
Vėliai bėgtų tūkstančiai poetų,
Kad ji degtų amžiais nerami

Rankose Sappho, ir Dantės, ir Šekspyro,
Poe, Tagorės, Rilkės, Li-tai-pe...)

In occupied Lithuania at present Eduardas Mieželaitis (born 1919) writes on Shakespearian themes. He has been particularly influenced by the characters of Hamlet, Ophelia and Cleopatra. This appears in some of his cycles of poems,

which he composed after traveling as a tourist or lecturer. The poem directed towards Hamlet and called "To be or not to be" shows a deep experience of the tragedy of life:

"Life,
sometimes you are heavy
like a cross.
You too are heavy,
death lying in wait."[52](#)

(Gyvenime,
tu kitąkart sunkus
kaip kryžius.
Ir tu kaip kryžius,
laukianti mirtie!)

Less effective lines of Mieželaitis mention Cleopatra and Ophelia, but in these imaginative sympathy gives way to artificiality and every day rhetoric. An example is the following description of Ophelia:

"A promise is given her. It is not fulfilled.
Then there is long hesitation.
She is deserted. But the fall heaps up
piles of brown leaves upon her. Fate carries off
the woman beloved and deserted
like a butterfly, unable to resist,
so wan, so frail..."[53](#)

(Jai pažadama. Neišpildoma.
Paskui ilgai dvejojama.
Apleidžiama. Na, o ruduo užkrauna lapų
rudus glėbius. Likimas nuneša
apgautą mylimąją
kaip tą drugelį — nepajėgų atsispirti,
tokį blyškų, tokį trapų...)

A. Churginas, a translator of Shakespeare in Lithuania, has written a few poems on Shakespearian themes, but his translations have much greater value.

- 1 J. Tumas. *Jonas Maironis Mačiulis*. Kaunas, 1924, p. 214-217.
- 2 Maironis. *Raštai*. Kaunas, 1926, vol. 5.
- 3 J. Calina. *Shakespeare in Poland*, London, 1923, p. 21.
- 4 Pr. Markelis. "Kaip suprasti Vydūną?" *Varpai*, Šiauliai, 1943, p. 205.
- 5 J. Būtėnas, *Žemaitė*. Kaunas, 1938.
- 6 P. Višinskis. *Raštai*. Vilnius, 1964, p. 115.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 318.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 318.
- 9 *Žemaitė. Raštai*. Vilnius, 1957, vol. 6, p. 67.
- 10 *ibid.*, p. 70.
- 11 *ibid.*, p. 78.
- 12 P. Višinskis. *Raštai*. Vilnius, 1964, p. 341.
- 13 *Gairės*, 1923, Nr. 1, p. 57.
- 14 V. Krėvė. *Raštai*, ed. V. Maciūnas, Boston, 1960, vol. 1, p. 408.
- 15 L. Gira. *Raštai*. Vilnius, 1963, vol. 5, p. 273-275.
- 16 *Lietuvių Enciklopedija*. Boston, 1962, Vol. 27, p. 338.
- 17 K. Jankauskas. "Krėvė ir dulkės". *Varpai*, 1943, p. 2020.
- 18 V. Mykolaitis. "Idėjiniai pradai V. Krėvės kūryboj". *Pradai ir žygiai*, 1926, Nr. 7.
- 19 *Lietuvių literatūros istorija*. Vilnius, 1961, Vol. 3, p. 299.
- 20 J. Balys. "Dzūkų tautosakos falsifikacijos". *Vairas*, 1936, Nr. 9, 11.
- 21 V. Krėvė. *Raštai*. Boston, 1960, Vol. 1, p. 396.
- 22 J. Calina, op. cit., p. 40.
- 23 *ibid.*, p. 41.
- 24 Cf. V. Maciūnas. "Grožinis pradai Krėvės kūryboje". *Gabija*, 1953, Nr. 4, p. 66.
- 25 *Dainava*, 1920, Nr. 1, p. 110.
- 26 *Vairas*, 1935, Nr. 7-8, p. 311.
- 27 *Židinys*, 1926, Nr. 11, p. 211.
- 28 *Aidai*, 1950, Nr. 6, p. 250-256.
- 29 *ibid.*, p. 250.
- 30 B. Sruoga. "Vaičiūno dramaturgija". *Darbai ir Dienos*, 1930, Nr. 1, p. 3-121.
- 31 B. Sruoga. *Rusų literatūros istorija*. Kaunas, 1933, Vol. 2, p. 474-475.

- 32 B. Sruoga. *Lietuvių teatras Petrapilyje 1892-1918*. Kaunas, 1930, p. 7.
- 33 Cf. *Skynimai*, 1933, Nr. I, p. 54-58.
- 34 B. Sruoga. "Teatrinio mokslinimo reikalai". *Vairas*, 1940, Nr. B, p. 337-340.
- 35 Cf. V. Kubilius. "Sruogos lyrika ir dramaturgija". *Mūsų rašytojai*, Vilnius, 1958, p. 83.
- 36 *Lietuvių literatūros istorija*. Vilnius, 1957, Vol. I, p. 497.
- 37 J. Blekaitis. "Balys Sruoga, asmuo ir teatro kūrėjas". *Aidai*, 1948, Nr. 19, p. 407.
- 38 Dr. V. Sruogienė's letter to the author, Feb. 17, 1965.
- 39 A. Vaičiulaitis. "Balio Sruogos "Kazimieras Sapiega". "Naujoji Aušra, 1948, Nr. I, p. 15.
- 40 D. Judelevičius. *Gyvasis Šekspyras*. Vilnius, 1964, p. 180.
- 41 V. Mykolaitis. *Literatūros etiudai*. Kaunas, 1937, p. 162.
- 42 L. Gira. *Raštai*. Vilnius, 1963, Vol. 5, p. 317.
- 43 *ibid.*, p. 317.
- 44 V. Mykolaitis-Putinas. *Altorių šešėly*. Memmingen, 1951, p.321.
- 45 *Literatūra ir kritika*. Vilnius, 1949, p. 254.
- 46 V. Mykolaitis-Putinas. *Raštai*. Vilnius, 1959, Vol. I, p. 462.
- 47 *ibid.*, p. 46.
- 48 *ibid.*, p. 468.
- 49 J. Aistis. *Pilnatis*. Schweinfurt, 1948, p. 110.
- 50 J. Aistis. *Poezija*. New York, 1961, p. 49.
- 51 J. Aistis. *Pilnatis*, p. 155.
52. E. Mieželaitis. *Autoportretas ir Avioeskozai*. Vilnius, 1962, p. 150.
53. E. Mieželaitis. *Atogrąžos panorama*. Vilnius, 1963, p. 183.