

THIS IS JUST TO SAY

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THIS IS JUST TO SAY



A Collection of Creative Student-Responses

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William Carlos Williams

[This Is Just To Say]

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

INTRODUCTION

The seemingly modest title of this volume is borrowed from William Carlos Williams' famous poem. Students majoring in English at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary usually get acquainted with Williams' text in the course "Introduction to Literary Studies". Some frequently asked questions are: "What makes it a poem?" "Isn't it just something like a post-it note on a fridge?" "Wouldn't anybody be able to write such a text?" And a frequently given answer is: "Give it a try! Get personally involved! Discover the flavors of Williams' text, the personal pronouns, the rhythm, the word order and the vocabulary! It might make a decisive difference that the last word of the text is 'cold', not 'sweet', reminding the reader of the 'ice-box', offering a chilly touch to the relationship between the 'I' and the 'you'. And the word 'forgive' is an odd one out, much more emphatic than a simple 'sorry', indicating a major offense or sin...But isn't this an exaggeration? Can we talk about sin concerning the consumption of a fruit? – Well, if we think about Adam and Eve..." And there are some students who indeed get personally involved and give it a try. They respond to literature, either in verse, or in prose, sometimes through rewriting texts and sometimes in the traditional way, through literary analysis and research. This book testifies to the fact that they indeed have something to say.

At our Institute of English, there have been many student-volumes over the years. After *Encountering Short Stories* (2000), *Notes from the Tragic Underground* (2001), *Generations: Lost and Found* (2002) *Who Knows Why?* (2004), *Response and Responsibility* (2006), *We'd Prefer To* (2007), *Freely Given to the Waves* (2009) and *So Much Depends* (2014), our students again give voice to a varied and elaborate response to the stimulus of their studies.

The latin equivalent of "response" is 'something offered in return'. It is in the nature of a teacher's job that it is very hard to find its verifiable results, it is almost impossible to calculate or prove its productivity. What will become a good 'stimulus' is a matter of chance and surprise, sometimes never known

INTRODUCTION

or acknowledged. However, seeing such a volume with fifty-nine contributors, one has to realize that the job is worth doing. Whether in the field of literature, history, cultural studies, translation studies or linguistics, these responses strengthen a bond, start a new conversation and involve the reader of the volume in a community of thought. What more can be “offered in return”?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is significant to mention that this book was also edited and illustrated by students – a group of the constant members of the “Creative Workshop” of our Institute. I would like to thank Fónai Ádám, Haga Béla Erik, Káplár Péter, Milovszky Krisztina, Molnár Gergely, Obrankovics Dorina and Szanyi Tamás for the careful editing. Special thanks to Milovszky Krisztina and Haga Béla Erik for the organization of the editing process. The volume is greatly enriched by the beautiful drawings of Molnár Klaudia. Working together has been a uniquely rewarding experience. I would also like to express my gratitude to D. Nagy Nóra, who, some years ago, contributed to, and was the student editor of two of our volumes, and now, as a colleague has participated in stimulating responses, editing the last as well as this collection. She was the designer of the thought-provoking cover as well. I am very grateful to Elizabeth Walsh, Fulbright visiting scholar, who was present at the “Creative Workshop” meetings and helped with her thoughtful remarks throughout this academic year. Her expertise in teaching creative writing and editing, as well as her native competence and poetic sensitivity were indispensable to the birth of the volume.

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Budaest, 25 April, 2016.

Kállay G. Katalin

PREFACE

PREFACE

“We wish that these works may serve as an encouragement to fall in love with American literature.” I remember writing these words nearly ten years ago to the first volume I co-edited as a student editor, thinking how exciting it is to get office supplies, print out the covers at home, work long hours on formatting the text, and finally hold the finished product proudly in my hands. Much has happened since then. Another volume of student responses, more experience and less difficulties in editing... and then the greater things in life: having a beautiful child, moving twice, losing loved ones... and becoming a teacher of the subject I still feel so passionately about. Much has happened since then, but my wish has remained the same. Each time I prepare to come to class as a teacher now, my desire is to see sparkles in the eyes, butterflies in the stomach, connections made—to see students fall in love with literature for the first time, and just to say to them it is all right if they eat the plums from the icebox because they are delicious, sweet and cold.

D. Nagy Nóra

ABOUT THE ORDER OF THE WORKS

At first glance, this unconventional table of contents might confuse you, dear Reader, to the point of feeling utterly lost, but we are here to offer you a piece of thread to be able to find your way through this labyrinth.

Each prose and academic writing section is framed by a section of poetry. The academic papers either come in pairs with a prose work – which can be an original prose, the re-imagination of an existing literary work, or a translation – or they stand on their own as they follow a chronological order. Sometimes, there is even a loose connection between the contents of the sections.

The four big sections, besides providing a structure for easier orientation among the works, are meant to represent particular eras from Shakespeare’s time up to and including 18th century, 19th century, early 20th century and late 20th century respectively.

The main reason for this particular arrangement was to create something real, vibrant. The alternation of longer and shorter pieces creates a rhythm very reminiscent of a heartbeat, which is the proof that this book is a breathing,

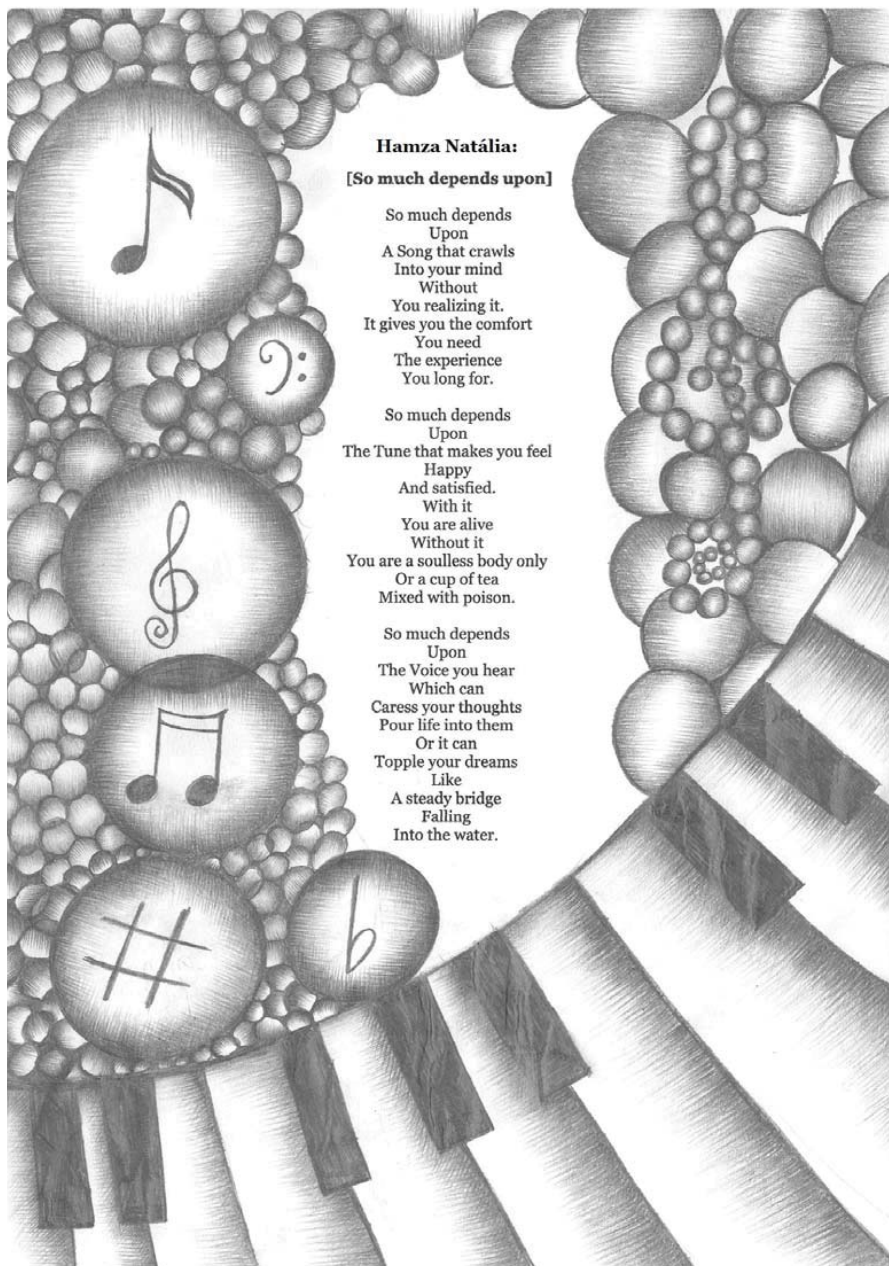
ABOUT THE ORDER OF THE WORKS

living collection. However, while it has gradually come to life on its own since the first days of its compilation, it will always carry a part of us: our works, passions, emotions, and interests.

Milovszky Krisztina
Student Editor

PART I





Hamza Natália:
[So much depends upon]

So much depends
Upon
A Song that crawls
Into your mind
Without
You realizing it.
It gives you the comfort
You need
The experience
You long for.

So much depends
Upon
The Tune that makes you feel
Happy
And satisfied.
With it
You are alive
Without it
You are a soulless body only
Or a cup of tea
Mixed with poison.

So much depends
Upon
The Voice you hear
Which can
Caress your thoughts
Pour life into them
Or it can
Topple your dreams
Like
A steady bridge
Falling
Into the water.

S(E)OUL SEARCHING



TÓTH VIRÁG

There were seven of them, for seven years. Seven boys. Seven friends. They weren't really friends but they referred to their small group as that because such a word that described what they were to each other had not yet been invented. On some days, the word felt like an exaggeration, a lousy attempt at justifying the reason they'd stuck together for all these years. At other times, the word just wasn't enough. It didn't *mean* enough to describe the relationship they had, or what they all could feel when they were together.

They couldn't remember how or why they became friends, all of them were so different that, for an outsider, it would've been hard to wrap their head around it. But no one was there to question this strange alliance.

They gathered whenever they could, they referred to each other with the first letter of their names, and they had two rules: they would meet if everyone could make it and none of them would talk about their lives when they were together like that. They were pretty easy rules to follow, until they were not.

It started out like every other night they spent together. They met at their usual place, a cozy little diner on the outskirts of the city. The waitress, who was busy humming and tapping along to the cheesy love song coming from the radio, immediately burst out "THE SEOUL SEVEN! Fries and beer, coming right up!" They smiled at her and sat down at the nearest empty table.

They started talking and laughing about absolutely nothing because they knew about nothing. Nothing was easy to have a conversation about. They didn't seem to care that two of them had bloodshot eyes, one of them had bruises all over his face, and another one's fingers were covered in band-aids. They weren't supposed to talk about it and they didn't.

When the food and drinks arrived, they got quiet for a minute, but the minute lasted long enough for A to notice that something wasn't quite right. L, who was one of the youngest boys in the group, seemed uneasy. He had almost

drunk his beer but he barely touched his fries and he was just longingly staring at the waitress.

A, who wasn't fond of breaking the rules, especially the ones he set himself, found himself feeling sorry for his friend. He took a deep breath and put on his best fake smile, the one he always used when he had to deal with a particularly difficult customer, then he stood up and stretched out. "OK, guys, I need a smoke. L, would you like to accompany me?"

L's head shot up. "What? Why?" He asked with creased eyebrows and his mouth slightly hanging open.

"I'm scared to be out alone in the dark," he replied, leaving the others in fits of laughter and L even more puzzled. A was 6'1" tall and kind of mean looking so there was no way that a guy like him would be afraid of the night, but curiosity got the best of L so he followed his friend outside.

A grabbed the cigarette that he kept behind his ear and pulled a lighter out of his jacket pocket.

"Want one?" He asked L. The boy shook his head and leaned against the stained wall of the diner.

"Those things are going to kill you," L said and let out a breath to see if it was cold enough for it to be visible. It wasn't.

A snorted. "Everybody has to die from something, right? Or isn't that what people say when they're doing something that's bad for their health?" He lit the cigarette.

"So you might as well cough up what will be left of your lungs in 30 years?"

"I might as well," A said, letting out a hot, relieved breath. "So, why were you gawking at the waitress in there and why did you look like a puppy that just got kicked?"

L's mouth fell open for the second time in 2 minutes. He had experienced A's bluntness before but unlike this time, his words didn't exactly come out of the blue. He'd been expecting them to finally come out for months.

L began to wonder what it would be like to tell someone. Would he feel alleviation? Would talking it out make his gruesome thoughts go away? Or would saying it out loud just make everything more unbearable? No, he certainly wouldn't be able to handle that, not now, not ever.

He felt A's gaze on him so he quickly averted his eyes and started studying the concrete. "You know the rules, A," he replied quietly.

"Yes, I do, I made them."

"Then you know damn well you shouldn't have asked."

A threw his cigarette on the ground and stepped on it, then inched closer to the other boy. "I shouldn't have done a lot of things," he said softly.

L, who was still busy staring at the ground, took a sharp a breath. “Yeah, you shouldn’t have. I told you I wasn’t ready.”

He pushed himself away from the wall and before A could have said anything, he re-joined the others inside.

The rest of the night went down as usual; after their late night dinner, they got on the bus to go to the city and have some fun. Their definition of ‘fun’ that night was buying popcorn from the nearest movie theater and grabbing liquor from the store right next to it and getting wasted until the point where, after somehow managing to find O’s pick-up truck, they drove into one of the underpasses and all hell broke loose. The boys not only held up traffic by stopping horizontally at one of the entrances, but they got out of the vehicle and started vandalizing the other cars by kicking and pouring stuff on them and L even brought along a few bottles of spray paint, which he quickly but generously applied on the walls and the side of an old van. Thanks to O’s driving and their fast legs, they could get away just in time and they hadn’t stopped until they reached N’s apartment where they threw themselves a party.

In the morning, they didn’t even acknowledge the chaos and mayhem they’d caused and everyone went on their separate ways, except for L, who seemed to have already left by the time the others woke up. None of them thought this was odd or a big deal. They were used to some of them missing when they got up. So, when N’s phone rang at four in the morning the next day, he was taken by surprise, to say the least.

He picked up but having been sleeping just a few seconds before, he was understandably disoriented. The only thing he managed to make out was that it was A and that he’d already told the others to pack up what they needed because they were going to head down to the coast for the weekend. Having nothing better to do, N agreed and an hour later, they all met at O’s place, ready to spend the upcoming couple of days together.

The coast was just a few hours away but the boys got restless after about two, so they tried to entertain themselves by annoying each other to death and fooling around with E’s polaroid camera. The pictures they took weren’t the kind of photos they could show to other people, and not just because of I’s beaten up face or S’s always red eyes. The photos belonged to them, to this group, to this part of their lives. No matter how innocent and ordinary the photos were, somehow they were too private, too intimate, too special for outsiders to look at. These memories, these moments frozen in time only belonged to the seven of them.

With making two stops along the way and spending at least an hour finding the perfect place to settle, the group arrived just in time for lunch, which

ended Seoul Seven style: in a huge food fight. A was the first to escape, he ran all the way to a nearby beach diving board that rose at least 10 meters high up to the sky. If it had been summer, they would have jumped into the sea by now but since it was late October, the water was too cold to even consider doing it. They were known for their reckless and sometimes even crazy behavior but none of them were stupid enough to try it in this weather. In a flash, A cleaned himself with the water that felt almost icy against his skin and hurried back to his friends.

They acted like children all afternoon, they laughed at dumb things, shoved each other in the sand, made sandcastles, and when the sun went down, they built a bonfire and roasted marshmallows for dinner. For the outside world, it probably seemed like an idyllic picture: a group of friends getting away from their monotonous, work or school filled weekdays for a little while to enjoy their youth. But, to them, it meant a lot more. They were getting away from much more than just their dull existences in the world.

They were all just quietly staring at the dark, calm water when S's sobs broke the silence. A, who was sitting right next to him, put an arm around his crying friend's shoulders while the others were just glaring at him with understanding in their eyes.

"I don't know about you guys, but tonight feels like a perfect night to break some rules," A said. Some of the boys turned their heads back to the sea but they didn't say anything, which meant they didn't oppose it. They always spoke up when something didn't sit right with them but this time they remained silent.

"What's wrong?" A asked S but his question was directed at all of them.

With watering eyes and his voice heavy from crying, S said, "Me."

"What's wrong with you?"

"My mind is broken. I'm broken," S replied and with trembling hands, he pulled out a bottle of pills from his pocket. "I can't function without these," he whispered and started violently sobbing again. The small plastic bottle fell into the sand but no one bothered to pick it up.

A tried to soothe him but S was inconsolable. His tears just wouldn't stop falling, so they decided to let him cry.

"I feel like I'm drowning." N squeezed his eyes shut, then turned around to face the fire, and the others did the same.

"And I feel like I'm on fire," O replied and looked down at his band-aid covered hands. "There's this burning sensation in my soul that just doesn't seem to want to go away, no matter what I do. It's like having a bonfire living inside me and it constantly needs feeding. But it seems to be insatiable."

When he looked back up, they were all looking at him but N was the only one who stared right into his eyes. He nodded. He understood O the most.

After N and O's confession, there was no going back; they all blurted out their deepest, darkest secrets that up until then, they were all scared to admit even to themselves.

A thought he was depressed because of his low-paying job where people kept treating him like dirt, and he also told them he felt miserable because he'd fallen for someone but that person couldn't be with him, at least not now.

I confessed to going out late at nights to look for trouble. He would deliberately pick a fight with people to get beaten up and even though most of the time he would be able to hit back and win, he wouldn't do it. He ended up in the hospital several times and was told he was going to get himself killed one day but he didn't think he could stop. He was addicted to pain.

E admitted having gone through a long and horrible break-up and he was still trying to pick up the pieces but he was confident he was going to be okay. He seemed like the only person who had a plan on how to get out of their misery and he was on the right track to get there.

When it came to L's turn, he stood up and walked away, all the way to the diving board. Sharing a deeper connection with him, A ran after him.

They'd been standing there for a few minutes with their eyes glued to the water when L opened up. His voice was calm, unlike the other boys', when he talked.

"I stabbed him."

A gulped.

"Multiple times. He was beating her, A. I suspected it but when I got up yesterday morning and went to her apartment, I saw it. He slapped her so hard that she fell. I was still drunk, I didn't think. There were empty beer bottles lying in the hallway and I grabbed one and smashed it against his head. He started bleeding but I didn't care, I stabbed him in the stomach with the broken glass. And then he was *bleeding*, like really bleeding. I got blood all over my hands and shirt. I didn't know someone could bleed so much." A tear rolled down his cheek.

A's head started spinning and he felt like he was going to throw up but he knew L hadn't finished yet.

"Her face..." now L was properly crying, "I will never forget her face. The way she looked at me. Like I was some kind of monster. And perhaps I am." He wiped his face and slid his hands into his pocket.

"Is he dead?" A breathed.

L shook his head. “No, he’s at the hospital. They had to stitch him back up but he’ll live.”

“Good,” was all A said.

“That’s just the thing. I don’t know if I want him to live. Maybe I really did want to kill him. And if that’s true, I really am a monster, A.”

“That doesn’t change anything,” A replied, quietly yet firmly.

L’s lips curled into a smile. “Well, it should. This... what I’ve done... it should change everything. No, it *will* change everything. Just don’t tell the others, please, A. Please.” And with that, L made his way to the bonfire, leaving A behind. Shortly after L’s confession, A also walked back to the others and went right to sleep.

N was woken up by a chorus of boys screaming. At first, he didn’t realize where he was but then it all came back to him, their road trip to the beach. He opened his eyes to find the source of the loud noise: it came from his friends who were all looking up and shouting at something. N followed their gaze only to realize they weren’t shouting at something but at *someone*. And not just someone but L, who climbed all the way to the top of the diving board and had his arms up in the air, ready to jump at any moment.

He picked up his camera just in time to take a photo of the fall. It was the last picture he took of any of his friends and that was why he cherished it and kept it with him still. It meant an end and a beginning, it was proof that nothing lasted forever and that nothing *should* last forever, and that one simple act could change everything.

That photo, that small piece of paper, singlehandedly described what life meant to him.

THE SUICIDAL THEME IN HAMLET FROM A JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE

—◀▶—
VASADI ZSÓFIA

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one of the most influential literary pieces in the Western world. The play also has a significant effect on Japanese audience as probably the most popular Western piece of literature, even though, it was introduced much later in Japan than in Europe. In spite of this, *Hamlet* is still considered one of the most influential Western plays in Japan that has not lost its appeal even today. But what could be the reason for this? Is it because Shakespeare has managed to touch upon topics that are so universal, that their interpretation does not change at all, no matter who is reading it or where? Or did this particular play manage to reinvent itself in a way that is especially appealing to the Japanese society? This paper will investigate how the interpretation of the suicidal theme changes if we take into consideration traditional Japanese values, and in what way these values could have made it more appealing to a Japanese audience.

The question also emerges, whether such an important theme in the work such as what it would mean for a human being to take their own life would have the exact same meaning in a Japanese environment? Or do the Japanese have a traditionally very different approach to this question? And if this approach is significantly different, would that alter the underlying principle of the whole play as well?

When considering non-Western cultures, an important factor to examine is whether the local religions and world-views can have an impact on their understanding. Because of this, it is necessary to see what influences Buddhism and Shinto have on the Japanese way of judging suicide. Another important cultural heritage that is necessary to be considered here is what the *bushido*, the samurai recipe for life, says about suicide. The consideration of suicide in Japanese traditions is especially relevant today, when the suicide rate is one of the highest here in the entire world. This paper will attempt to shed new light for the Western audience on how the interpretation of one of the most

important questions in Hamlet — that is, whether an individual has the right to take their own life — can be answered very differently on the other side of the globe. Another question needed to be answered is whether this different approach is the reason why Hamlet has managed to stay so popular in Japan.

THE SHINTO APPROACH TO DEATH AND SUICIDE

To understand the Japanese approach to the question of suicide, it is necessary to go back to the roots, to the religious foundation of the nation, Shintoism. It is important to know that for the Japanese, Shinto is in some aspects more than a religion, while in others it could be considered less. It is sometimes mentioned as a complex belief system, since it does not really teach people how to live their lives in a way that is morally acceptable. This lack of a proper moral framework was what allowed other belief systems (such as Buddhism) to penetrate into Japan, and this also allowed a strange co-existence with other religions. Still, Shinto is still a huge part of the heritage of the Japanese, and although it does not really teach about how believers should live their lives, there are instances from which the Shinto approach to suicide can be understood. Although Shinto does require humans to respect the *kamis*¹, there is no real worth put on human life (Barry 57). In the Shinto hierarchy we can be witnesses to a pattern where there are higher values — such as honour, patriotism or romantic love — than human life (ibid). According to Barry, in Modern Japan personal suicide is more common than the previously mentioned reason for the taking of life (ibid, 59). This also shows in the way they execute the act (and themselves). Whereas previously suicide was a painful ritual — where it was required of the person wishing to die to cut into his stomach, draw the dagger all the way to the other side and then up, while at the same time refraining from any painful noises — nowadays people wanting to commit suicide are more inclined to choose less painful ways of dying (ibid, 58-59).

It is necessary to mention that the suicide rate is incredibly high in Japan. But as Barry mentions, strangely, there are not many existing studies about this in Japan (ibid). But if there is no religious obstacle that would prevent suicide, why does it seem like it is still a taboo subject? The reason might spring from another common source of suicide among the Japanese: shame. For the Japanese, bringing shame on the family name still means the same thing as in feudal times, just in other ways. It can be observed that the suicide rate is incredibly

¹ Shinto deities

high among the younger generation as well. This is somewhat understandable if we imagine that this is the time in life where it is most common to bring shame to the family. Barry mentions that it is very common for the children to feel guilty about not fulfilling the expectations (ibid, 60). Also, this feeling about not reaching the expectations of the parents is quite common because the older generation worked in the time of the miraculous economic boom of Japan, where it was common for them to do better than their parents. Now, after the bubble economy busted, this is not the common pattern anymore. So we can see that the same feeling of “bringing shame to the family name” still persists, and is very similar to what we see in feudal times. This dilemma is also a central question of Hamlet, since there are many characters who, according to Hamlet, have done the same. There is Gertrude, who married her late husband’s brother and murderer, Claudius, the king who committed this shameful act, and Hamlet himself, who is ashamed not to act according to what the family name requires. We can also witness this struggle of Hamlet’s between revenge and taking his own life in his inability to act. There are several instances in the play where Hamlet contemplates how ashamed he is of this. One example is when he is faced with the bravery of an army of men, who are not afraid to sacrifice their lives, but Hamlet is still hesitating about becoming a means to an end:

HAMLET
 How stand I, then,
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,
 Excitements of my reason and my blood,
 And let all sleep, while, to my shame, I see
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men
 That, for a fantasy and trick of fame
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
 Which is not tomb enough and continent
 To hide the slain? O, from this time forth
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!
 (4.4.59-69)

Another similarity between the Shinto approach to human life and Hamlet’s is that they both allow the existence of the supernatural. In Shinto tales the appearance of ghosts is quite common (Leeuw 57), and we can see that *Hamlet* has the same approach, with the ghost of Hamlet’s father being a key figure in the play, since he is the one who asks Hamlet to take revenge for him:

GHOST

I am thy father's spirit,
 Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night
 And for the day confined to fast in fires
 Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
 Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
 To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
 I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
 Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
 Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their
 spheres,
 Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
 And each particular hair to stand on end,
 Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.
 But this eternal blazon must not be
 To ears of flesh and blood. (1.5.14-28)

GHOST

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. (1.5.31)

We can see that the ghost clearly wants to be avenged, but what is striking is that this is not a very Christian approach to the question, while at the same time this need for vengeance would work very well in a Japanese environment. Furthermore, the ghost mentions that his soul seems to be stuck in Purgatory, which might seem strange for a Western Christian viewer. Why would his soul be released from Purgatory, if his murder was revenged? Prayer could help according to the Bible, but there is nothing there about revenge releasing someone from Purgatory. On the other hand, an answer might be found in Shinto folklore.

Interestingly, Shinto does not talk about the afterlife. The only way it is mentioned is in the form of becoming a ghost (Leeuw, 54). The myths of Shinto mention tens of thousands of *kamis*², which is possible because everybody has the potential to become a kami (Picken, 238.). The problem of ghosts arises in Shinto when the individual who passed lived a sorrowful life, or had been murdered. These so-called *Yūrei* — or “hungry ghosts” — have some unresolved business because of which they wander the human realm (Bocking, 31). If we base our interpretation of Hamlet on this, we could say that from a Japanese point of view, we could think of the ghost of Hamlet's father as one of these

² deities

“hungry ghosts”. *Yūrei* are concerned with their murder being avenged, but there is an even more harmful type of spirits, the *Onryō*. According to tradition, these do not only want to be buried or avenged, but want to cause physical harm to people (Bocking 31). In the play Hamlet seems suspicious of the spirit he has seen and talked to, which is why he wishes to confirm the statements of the ghost:

HAMLET

The spirit that I have seen
 May be the devil: and the devil hath power
 To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps,
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
 More relative than this. The play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.
 (2.2.627-634)

This, of course, could be explained with the Christian framework, but his suspicions would also be understandable if our associations concerned the aforementioned *Onryō*, whom the Japanese audience would already suspect of deceiving. Since these are “hungry ghosts” seeking revenge and wanting to cause trouble, Hamlet’s suspicions are understandable. According to Shinto folklore, these *Onryō* come from a place the Western audience would associate with Purgatory. They inhabit a realm between life and death, where they wait for those problems to be solved that kept them from the peace of death in the first place.

Another crosstalk between the text and Japanese Shinto traditions is that the Ghost describes the Purgatory from which he cannot escape without being revenged. As mentioned before, this is not really understandable in a Christian framework, since according to Christian beliefs, being revenged is not a way out of Purgatory. On the other hand, the Shinto framework would fit this, since after avenged, the soul would be free to move forward (Wetmore, 85).

HAMLET

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;

No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause: there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life;
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office and the spurns
 That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
 When he himself might his quietus make
 With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action.--Soft you now!
 The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
 Be all my sins remember'd. (3.1.56-90)

In the famous soliloquy we see Hamlet hesitating between life and death. From a Japanese perspective, his hesitation could be understood as fearing becoming a vengeful ghost who, since he failed to take revenge according to his father's will, might be damned to wander the Earth alone until he fulfils his original purpose. Since Shinto does not really specify what is going to happen after death — especially after committing suicide — Hamlet's hesitation between going on with his life or taking it can be understood even from a Christian standpoint. Interestingly, the lack of dealing with an afterlife is an aspect of

Shinto which made it possible for Buddhism to become widespread in Japan, since Buddhism makes spiritual funerals possible.

THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SUICIDE

Buddhism was introduced as a religion in Japan around the 6th century, and since then it has been a significant part of their cultural identity (Matsuo 16). As mentioned before, it is the tradition for a Japanese person to be buried “according to Buddhist ritual” (ibid, 2). This does not mean that most Japanese are strict believers of Buddhism, but that the moral teachings of the religion have had a great impact on their way of viewing life. Japanese Buddhism has a distinct way it relates to death, which makes it different from Buddhism in other countries, since here the Buddhist monks are involved in the funeral rites, whereas this is considered a taboo in other parts of the world (ibid 14). According to Matsuo, this is the reason why Japanese Buddhism has received the nickname of “funerary Buddhism” (ibid).

Buddhism, in all its forms, teaches first and foremost against intentionally harming any living being and that murder is the worst act humans can commit (Attwood, westernbuddhistreview). According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha told stories about rotting corpses to make his followers realize how evanescent their bodies really are, and that the mind needs to be cultivated while bodily pleasures better be restrained (ibid). After one of such stories many of his believers committed suicide, since they did not want to live in these rotting earthly bodies anymore. Afterward, The Buddha calls the rest of his followers together and gives them a different teaching. But, interestingly, he does not touch upon the suicide of the believers. Some assume that his lack of reaction can be attributed to this being the plan all along, since the Buddha could have told the story to these people, knowing that he will make their decision to commit suicide easier (ibid). The Buddha also tells the story of a married couple who, upon knowing that they will get separated commit suicide, hope that they will be reunited in a future life (ibid). This suggests that a common incentive for Buddhists who commit suicide is the hope of a better next life.

We see that on one hand the Buddha is very much against violence and, according to his teachings, the biggest sin of all is to take somebody's life. On the other hand, the Buddha seems unsurprised and unconcerned about the mass suicide of his believers. Some suggest that this contradiction can be attributed to the Buddhist idea of *karma*, which would suggest that although suicide is not admirable, it is unavoidable. Our *karma* can be shaped according to our decisions

and actions but, when a person reaches the point where they seriously consider suicide, their whole life has been a build up until that moment and their downfall cannot be avoided (Karma, BBC). This is very similar to the teleological view of the tragic hero's storyline, which can be seen in the case of *Hamlet* as well:

HAMLET

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
(1.2.133-138)

Right in the first act Hamlet is already contemplating taking his own life, but decides that his religion would forbid this. For a Japanese person, the association would not be Christian, but Buddhist, since we can see that this religion which has values holding Hamlet back from suicide could be Buddhism as well. Hamlet is a tragic hero, whose downfall is inevitable. His tragic flow is not a usual one, since he is not impulsive like many others, but the exact opposite: he is too contemplative (Hammersmith, 247.). What is strange here is that his tragic flow is one of the key aspects of Buddhist religion. Hamlet does think a lot before acting, which is a virtuous act in Buddhism. Still, it seems that Hamlet's *karma* — and therefore his downfall — is unavoidable. This dichotomy is especially interesting if taken in a Japanese context since we can see more than one moral framework existing here simultaneously. Therefore Hamlet's decision about life and death can be understood as more than a Christian religious stand since he is hesitating about what the correct ethical frame is. In a Japanese context, he is choosing among the teachings of the many religions which so far have not been clashing, and this could be the reason for his hesitation. Here, he has to make a clear decision which would separate him from other cultural heritages that have been an integral part of his life so far. This, for a Japanese person would not only be life-altering, but it would also require them to break with national traditions, therefore tearing him out of his Japanese identity. This need of action is symbolically against Hamlet's nature, who is a man of thought faced with the need to make a decision (ibid, 250).

Another interesting connection between Buddhist teachings and the text is that Hamlet talks about his "sullied flesh". As we could see previously, The Buddha's teaching about the body being unclean and rotten was probably the

reason which led his believers to commit suicide. Here, Hamlet seems to be contemplating the same thing, by stating that he feels sullied in his own flesh. He also mentions that he has no use for pleasures of this world and that he is “weary” of them. This statement has a very strong Buddhist connotation to it. Hamlet seems to hail the teachings of The Buddha, and has already deemed this world unprofitable for him, which is the main drive among Buddhists who commit suicide.

THE BUSHIDO’S APPROACH TO SUICIDE

Besides the two main religions — Shinto and Buddhism — it is necessary to consider another framework also influential in Japan when it comes to their judging of suicide: the Bushido. The mystery surrounding the samurai’s way of life fascinates the Western audience, and this strange fascination is the reason why it is the bushido’s approach to suicide that is the most well-known of the three ethical frameworks. According to Nitobe, Japanese people will remain a mystery to the outside world, unless they understand the main concepts of the Bushido (Nitobe, Preface IX.). According to him, “Bushido, then, is the code of principles, which the knights were required or instructed to observe” (Nitobe, 4.). The literal translation of Bushido is “the way of the warrior”. The roots of it can be found in feudalism, where the *bushi*³ gave their lords the utmost respect and loyalty, and in return could be respected members of the society. But according to their code, the samurai not only had to be loyal to his sovereign, but also to his country (ibid, 13). Taking this into consideration, we can see how important Hamlet’s identity crisis is, since when choosing an ethical framework, from a Japanese perspective, he is also choosing between loyalty to the country and loyalty to himself. According to Reischauer, the majority of the Japanese people uphold the traditions when it comes to Buddhism and Shintoism, while at the same time do not consider themselves religious (Reischauer, 215.). But, Nitobe still claims that the moral teachings of the Bushido are still the most influential of the three (Nitobe, Preface V.).

By today, the phrase “hara-kiri” has become a commonplace, but the phrase must be considered in order to understand the way the samurai relate to suicide. The Bushido teaches of a ritual suicide, the *seppuku*, which is to be done when the warrior’s honour is at stake. This clearly shows that, according to the samurai traditions, honour and patriotism are placed higher than an individual

³ the warrior

human life. To best sum up the Bushido's opinion about suicide: "it was an institution, legal and ceremonial. ... it was a process, by which warriors could expiate their crimes, apologize for errors, escape from disgrace, redeem their friends or prove their sincerity" (Nitobe, 105). Here, we can see a connection both with Shintoism, which surrounds the afterlife with mystery, and where becoming a "hungry ghost" could be avoided by committing suicide, and with Buddhism, where the next life could be more pleasant than the current one. Here we can observe how these three could tolerate each other, since neither of them is directly against the other.

The idea of this heroic suicide is also very important in the famous story of Chūshingura, where the 47 samurais have to withhold the time of their suicide until they can avenge the death of their lord.

HAMLET

Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.
(1.5.35-37)

This is very similar to what happens to Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. He contemplates suicide several times, but still decides against it. One of the reasons could be the religious one previously mentioned. Besides this, Hamlet also wants to avenge his father, whose ghost's bloodthirsty ideas have got into his head. This loyalty and revenge before suicide is what connects these two works and, according to Westmore, this is one of the reasons why Hamlet is so popular in Japan (Westmore, 257). He also mentions that, because of the similarity, Chūshingura is often performed not only as a kabuki drama, but also as a Shakespearean tragedy (ibid).

CONCLUSION

We can clearly see that viewing Shakespeare's famous tragedy from a Japanese perspective gives another dimension to the play. By examining the most important ethical frameworks' teachings about suicide, we can observe several instances, where crosstalk between the original play and the traditional Japanese world view is possible. This crosstalk is part of the reason why Hamlet still remains as one of the most influential Western pieces of literature in Japan. We can observe that from a Japanese perspective, the meaning of a motif in the play

— such as the ghost for example — can have a much deeper meaning than first imagined. We can see that the popularity of the play can partly be attributed to Hamlet's similarity of the famous Japanese work, *Chūshingura*, which deals with the question of loyalty, honour and suicide in a similar manner. Examining the ethical frameworks of Shintoism, Buddhism and Bushido is important in order to understand the Japanese way of thinking about suicide. It is also clear that this is a relevant topic nowadays, since the rate of suicide is still very high in Japan, and this has a cultural-religious background deeply rooted in the aforementioned frameworks. The reasons of this can be approached from trying to find out what lies behind the popularity of Hamlet not fading in Japan, since it spreads light on some important Japanese cultural characteristics for the Western viewer as well, and also sheds new light on the well-known play.

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Majláth Dániel

[Poems]

This is just to say

i was always scared
of being alone
and yet sometimes
2 is the loneliest number

so much depends upon

so much depends upon
the way you experience love
i am just a trice of hunger
someone who happens every day
over and over again
because life is just a moment
a beautiful moment of hatred