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**PARADIGMATIC AND SYNTAGMATIC MODELS
OF INTERPRETATION IN SHAKESPEARE**

PhD DISSERTATION

DISSERTATION STATEMENTS

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THE SUBJECT OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation starts from the premise that there are fundamental similarities between the Renaissance and the Postmodern. It can be assumed that both periods can be characterized by epistemological crisis, ensuing from the clash and gradual exchange of great models of interpreting reality. When scrutinizing the epistemological crisis of the Renaissance I started mainly from J. Lotman's typological division of cultures, but I also considered similar suppositions by Bakhtin and Foucault. Lotman divides cultures, as systems modeling reality, into two large groups according to their relationship with the sign and signification. Thus he distinguishes „Medieval type” and „Enlightenment type” cultures. In „Medieval type” cultures every portion of reality becomes a sign, a meaning, the whole life of the individual is characterized by a panmetaphorical attitude. Each small event of life refers to another one, and that in turn refers to yet another, into the infinite. All existing things are parts of a great chain which stretches from the mineral world, through the human world, into transcendence. Thinking is permeated by sympathies, antipathies, similarities, correspondences between things, plants, events, character-traits, even planets. The interpretation of the world is characterized by high semiotic consciousness. The world is a great book, and the main task of Man is to interpret the signs of this book and finally to find the Ultimate Signified, God. This model of interpretation can be called paradigmatic, because it is mainly based on the observation of the correspondences of items of the same class which are nevertheless organized hierarchically.

Contrary to this, „Enlightenment type” cultures can be characterized by an intense suspicion towards signs and signification and a minute description of reality, arranging everything in clearly defined taxonomies, based exclusively on the visible aspects of things. This model of interpretation orders things contiguously, near each other, that is why it can be called syntagmatic. According to Lotman, during the Renaissance the Medieval-type is already cracked to a certain extent, although it is still firmly in place. At the same time, a strong need for a new epistemological model emerges. Thus the two contradictory world models coexist for a while.

Alessandro Serpieri claims that Shakespeare's plays present the gradual disintegration of the paradigmatic world model. It is characteristic of them that the "medieval type", paradigmatic and the "enlightenment type", syntagmatic world model coexist in them. . In my dissertation I will investigate to what extent the two world models play a role in the metaphorical structure of Shakespeare's plays. Since in my opinion the representation of the human body serves as a model for all epistemological activities in most cultures, in my analysis I will follow different representations of the human body in *Macbeth*, and I will compare these with conceptualizations of the body in the work of Posthuman artists. The spectrum the artists discussed is relatively wide, in some cases even their status as artists can be questioned. One of these is Gunther von Hagens, a German anatomist, whose travelling exhibition of plastinated cadavers attracted much acclaim and nearly as much controversy. A similarly irregular medium is used by the French performance artist, Orlan who undergoes a series of plastic surgeries in order to achieve a special artwork, made up of the beauty ideals of various ages. The other artist discussed are representatives of the relatively scarcely discussed field of Virtual Art. Computer technology plays an important part in their work, but their main object of interest is the human body and the different possibilities to modify this body.

METHODS OF SCRUTINY

I tried to follow Attila Kiss's semiographic method in my dissertation. I observed the tropes related to the representation of the body mainly in the text of *Macbeth*, but occasionally I extended the scrutiny to relevant loci of other Shakespearean plays. I tried to insert the images into the general logic of representation of the period by analyzing together the play's metaphors related to the human body, contemporary emblems and representational strategies of Renaissance theatre. I consider both the emblems and Shakespeare's theatre "multi channel" semiotic devices because both exert simultaneous influence on various senses. As in the case of the emblem, when only the simultaneous contemplation of the picture, the motto, and the verse can lead to the most complete understanding, in the Renaissance theatre it is impossible to separate the text from the spectacle, or sound effects. The postmodern artist Orlan strives for a similarly complex effect. In the course of her plastic surgeries she reads

aloud, has music played, even has the clothes of the surgeons designed by top fashion designers.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is divided into two larger sections, unequal in length, as the Postmodern section is shorter. This is partly due to the fact that wherever the Postmodern counterpart of a comparison (e.g. the face in the Postmodern) logically follows the train of thought treating the Early Modern, I choose not to break the line of reasoning by divorcing the Postmodern element from its Early Modern pair, as a result they are both in the first section. I scrutinized the early modern body from two main directions. The first one foregrounds the relationship between early modern anatomy theatre and dramatic theatre. It also tries to find in the texts of the plays references to dissection, as a cultural practice aimed at gaining knowledge. The other method of investigation starts from early modern humoral theory, which was of crucial importance in the period. According to several scholars (Bakhtin, Gail Kern Paster, Schoenfeldt and others) in the early modern age the individual stood in a dynamic relationship with his environment. The environment implemented alterations in the humors of the individual, as a consequence the individual's behavior changed and exerted influence on the environment in turn, which lead to a perpetual circuit of effects and counter-effects. As a result, the individual was less isolated from the environment, less in possession of rigid boundaries than it was supposed by many. Traces of this dynamic relationship can also be found in dramatic texts. I will observe the same concept of the body in the case of Posthuman artists.

FINDINGS

Starting from the above assumptions I scrutinized the text of *Macbeth*. A thorough analysis of the metaphors related to the body reveals that the claim that in Shakespeare's

dramas the “medieval type” paradigmatic and “enlightenment type” syntagmatic interpretational models are equally present is substantiated. In the text of *Macbeth* there are recurrent organic metaphors presenting the human body as plant, as tree, or as flower. This can be considered traces of the paradigmatic world model. At the same time, it is true to a lesser degree, metaphors of the mechanic body can also be found, which are the representatives of a new interpretational model. In the World-Mechanism the component parts are arranged in juxtaposition to each other, their value does not depend on a mysterious “inward quality”, but they exclusively derive from their function, from the place they occupy. I think the same change can be detected when the importance of auguries, the understanding of hidden relations between things is just as much emphasized as the need to classify Nature (in this case dogs) scientifically¹. It can also be interesting that the new, mechanical world picture is considerably less emphatic than the old analogico-symbolic model, substantiating the claim that in Shakespeare’s age the “medieval” world picture is relatively stable, despite the fact that it began to crumble as a result of the new, scientific challenges.

The next step was to compare representations of the body emerging from *Macbeth* with the image of the body as it appears in Posthuman Art. The analysis seems to confirm the presupposition that early modern conceptualizations of the body present parallels with postmodern representations of the body. The most important finding is that in both ages the body is open, or there is an urge to open it. There are apparent similarities between early modern anatomy theatres and Professor von Hagens’s travelling exhibition and his public dissection. For the Renaissance anatomists it was not the practical knowledge gained by the dissection. It can be assumed that they wanted to “peep into” God’s secrets by reading the human body. The principal aim of Professor von Hagens cannot be the mere popularization of science or making financial profit. He is planning to extend the boundaries of the body, the correction of creation when he is about to assemble a two-hearted plastinated cadaver with extra ribs. The intentions of Posthuman artists are very similar. In their work they also foreground the malleability of the human body, the instability of its boundaries. Their conception of the body is almost identical with the early modern body, directed by its humors, being in a dynamic relationship with their environment. In their opinion the human being constitutes only a stage in evolution, and the appearance of a new race as a result of the merging of the human with technology or as the result of genetic modification is imminent.

¹ cf. *Macbeth*’s speech to the Murderers

PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PAPERS RELATED TO THE TOPIC OF THE
DISSERTATION

Csepregy Henrik: *Macbeth, the Subject of Language*.- conference paper,
„Shakespeare and Philosophy in a Multicultural World”, international
conference: Budapest, 2003

Csepregy Henrik: *Shakespeare in Hungarian Secondary School textbooks*-
conference paper, „The State of English in Hungary.” Conference: Budapest,
2007 (under publication)

Csepregy Henrik: *Paradigmatic and syntagmatic models of interpretation in
Shakespeare*. – conference paper, „New Concepts and Approaches in English
and American Studies.” Conference: Budapest, 2008 (under publication)