

Shakespeare – The Concept of ‘Najasa’ (The Bawd)

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Abstract: *Shakespeare’s universality places him beyond all ages. He is the only author, not born in our age but whose works guarantee on regular basis financial prospects. Shakespeare’s success story as a writer is unprecedented in human history. Apart from the prophets of the Holy Scriptures and the philosophers of antiquity, no one else but Shakespeare can claim an impact on human mind and heart of a mega scale that goes beyond any age, any religion, any language and any geography. Uncertainty of the political systems, ruthless growth of violence, sexual anxiety, dismemberment of filial bond and the essential spirit of improvisation in times chaotic, the very hallmark of our culture as well as of his drama, force us to see him in a post-colonial contemporary context to find a direction, a resolve and an asylum from the ‘neo-colonial’ disaster of the 21st century. Shakespeare’s treatment of the word imagery, giving word a graphic texture, does not allow his modern audience to approach his works dealing with the concept of ‘conflict’ in the Greek classical sense of the word. Conflict is not the soul of Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespearean tragedy transforms it into the ‘illuminationist’ principle of ‘diversity’. Shakespeare’s art is the ‘quintessence’ of mankind. Whenever justice is violated, his drama speaks for those who stand bewildered, lost and wronged. King Lear, arguably, is the greatest specimen of poetic art on earth. The play is gradual defining of a new sensibility where life is regarded as culmination of a process of transformation. A play where, ‘Najasa’ (a term to describe the fallen women; from Arabic Najas: the impure, unwholesome, filthy) the faithless-faceless-shameless ‘whore, the bawd’, introduces in the name of progressive disciplines its filth and corruption as normal walk of life. These fashionable the ‘gilded butterflies’, the worldly wise ‘court rogues’, if remain the role models, human civilizations stand no chance to grow intellectually and spiritually. These people represent a mindset, the mind of the outdated patriarchal system of cheap compromises, disloyalty, lack of dignity, competition for power play and possession of wealth. Shakespeare suggests a solution; matriarchal system.*

Keywords: *Shakespeare’s universality, word imagery’s graphic texture, drama of diversity and resolve, King Lear, patriarchal system, Najasa the faithless-faceless-shameless, ‘we can do it better, death of human civilization.*

Article History

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At the threshold of history, every culture of man has heard him knocking. So often he has been granted not only the entry to these cultures but their complete citizenship, it is sometimes difficult to claim that Shakespeare was an English writer. It is a modest thing to say that 'he is of all ages', he is beyond all ages. He goes beyond all that can be determined by any age, any religion, any language or any geography. In terms of appreciation, for example, Shakespeare had philosophically more responsive audience in Germany than in 18th century England. When he was about to be banned by the mid-17th century Puritans, Indians were about to incorporate his work within the galaxy of their infinite world of literature. He remained the national poet of the USA until the birth of its own literary tradition. By the end of the 19th century almost all the communist revolutionary movements were promoting his heroes as king slayers. And in the 20th century every single artistic movement includes talks about particular features of his art that brings it closer to the standard features of a particular movement. He is the only author, not born in our age, whose works guarantee on regular basis financial prospects for actors, directors, producers and even the owners of the publishing houses. Shakespeare's success story as a writer is unprecedented in human history. Apart from the prophets of the Holy Scriptures and the philosophers of antiquity, no one else but Shakespeare can claim an impact on human mind and heart of a mega scale that goes beyond any age, any religion, any language and any geography. Shakespeare, therefore, does not only matter to us, he belongs to us. Uncertainty of the political systems, ruthless growth of violence, sexual anxiety, dismemberment of filial bond and the essential spirit of improvisation in times chaotic, the very hallmark of our culture as well as of his drama, force us to see him in a post-colonial contemporary context to find a direction, a resolve and an asylum from the 'neo-colonial' disaster of the 21st century. The radical capacity of his works, specially the works like King Lear, allows Shakespeare to breathe the air that we inhale wherever we are and whenever we are.

All the world's a stage of William Shakespeare who has played over the centuries on it many parts and has had his many exits and entrances. Shakespeare, even in 21st century, all alone can be counted on to bring an audience to the theater. Theaters, throughout the world, sometimes devote all their seasons to his works. He is an author who has seen an eclipse.

'By early 17th century Shakespeare had been eulogized in sonnets, alluded to in poetry, praised in prose, referred to in plays, and anthologized in books of quotations. A totaling of the figures cited in the Shakespeare Allusion Book (Oxford, 1932) indicates that there were 481 allusions to Shakespeare before 1649 and another 664 to 1700- and these 1145 concern the plays and poems only, there were many other references to the man only.... For instance, by 1600 there were already almost three dozen references to the 'honey tongued' Shakespeare by his contemporaries. Another quality was pointed out by the historian William Camden, who in 1605 listed Shakespeare among the 'most pregnant wits of these our times, whom succeeding ages may justly admire'. William Cartwright in 1647, gave 'nature' as the source of Shakespeare's genius and from Milton's line

'sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child' began a series of comments on Shakespeare's 'fancy'. And with Ben Jonson's refusal to give 'Nature' all the credit- 'Thy art my gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part'- begin innumerable references to Shakespeare's art. Shakespeare has been credited with great and small knowledge of well over a hundred subjects and his vocabulary has been given as an evidence of his remarkable mind. 'Most warrantable English', was a tribute from Edmund Bolton in 1610. In 1697, Dryden noted the 'purity of his language combined with the fury of his fancy which often transported him, beyond the bounds of judgment, either coining new words and phrases, or racking words..... In 1861 Max Muller compared his words with 300, the total used by 'ignorant labourers; about 4000 by educated Englishmen; and about 10000 by eloquent speakers.' Even Milton used no more than 8000 words in his poetry, and The Old Testament needed only 5642 words to tell its story. Other researchers found that Shakespeare used up to 25000 words; in 1943 Alfred Hart after a careful count arrived at a grand total of 17677. And what is more remarkable Shakespeare was able to use over 7200 of them only once and never again.

(Marder Louis, *The story of Shakespeare's Reputation*, John murray Ltd. 1963).

He 'fathered' the language that 'childed' us.

The words used by Shakespeare have their own psychological as well as physiological domain. His treatment of the word imagery, giving word a graphic texture, does not allow his modern audience to approach his works dealing with the concept of 'conflict' in the Greek classical sense of the word. Conflict is not the soul of Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespearean tragedy transforms it into the 'illuminationist' principle of 'diversity'. Shakespeare deals in the art of diversity, he is thus of all the nations and beyond them, of all the ages and beyond them. Shakespeare's art is the 'quintessence' of mankind. Whenever justice is violated and whenever truths turn false, his drama speaks for those who stand bewildered, lost and wronged. His drama defines the meaning of emotional, social and religious mischief and offers help to the victims of these conspiracies to 'beguile the time'.

The philosophical purposefulness of Shakespearean drama as social movement encourages us to liberate ourselves from the 'story', the soap opera. 'Story telling' is not the purpose of great literature, anyway. Story is a tool, a medium through which a great author recommends the art of exploring life as a set of possibilities. Exploring the nature of these possibilities, I have written in '*O Šekspirovim Tragedijama*' (Dobra Knjiga, 2013) that, 'Shakespearean drama is not about monarchs but the kings. Shakespeare believes that king is the name of a character, the spiritual state and the intellectual capacity of an ultra-human being. It does not come from the lineage it comes through the process of suffering. Suffering is the key word to understand three fundamental concepts of all Shakespearean drama. First of all love for one's beloved and one's own self cannot qualify in substance without 'suffering'. Secondly, responsibility towards those one loves and towards one's own self cannot evolve without suffering into its ultimate substance, 'the leader'. And finally, alignment with the Will of all the wills that makes man a shadow of the King of all the kings remains unaligned substance without suffering. Fortinbras (Hamlet) the bearer of all the three features is an Edgar (King Lear) in making; and Edgar is a Polixenes (The

Winter's Tale) yet to 'happen'. All these images finally culminate into Prospero (The Tempest). All these are images of what we may call the 'monk king' or a 'Dervish' in office. When the king lives the ideal what Socrates preached and the prophets reflected upon, then only truth resurfaces, the truth of 'the dignity of poverty'. Poverty is dignified only when it is adopted by the role model; it remains a curse if it is inflicted as social injustice. Shakespearean drama teaches us how to succeed in times when evil of injustice is inflicted. It shows us the way to defeat the evil, attain power and then live the life of the monk-king, of a Dervish. Shakespearean drama encourages us to get rid of the only sin that has destroyed the worlds' civilizations throughout, the sin of self-glorification. I hope that Shakespeare's influence increases in its real sense beyond RSCs and 'New York National Theatres'; beyond Hollywood and universities academics. I pray that Shakespearean drama speaks to people in this hour of desperation in its own voice and helps us to regain what we lost long ago, dignity and humanity (amen).'

In this regard King Lear is a good case study. King Lear perhaps the greatest example of poetic art on earth, beyond all the scales of time and bounds of geography, a living organism, breaths its evolution with every step taken forward or backward by the mankind. Carefully designed linguistic decorum, purposefully makes this play like many other of his works, a gradual defining of a new sensibility where life is regarded as culmination of a process of transformation. In the following speech Lear, transformed from a king to a shelter less beggar, addresses poor naked wretches wherever they are. He transcends the bounds of time and space. This speech will qualify as a contemporary work of art as long as there are poor and naked wretches, the living examples of ancient unjust systems of distribution of wealth, in our 'modern-humanitarian' societies. As long as there are those twenty percent who exploit eighty percent resources of this world to keep hunger and poverty alive, Lear's words will remain a relevant criticism of all our new 'world orders':

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.
(III.4.28-35)

This speech determines the psychological complexion of the later part of the play. The play rises above the family feuds, feudal rivalries and wars of egos of the earlier Acts. Right before this speech, King Lear was a simpler play to perform and easier to comprehend. It dealt with the theme of the honest suffering at the hands of the Machiavellian. It was a renaissance play about the power politics, a

brutal human invention where out of two combatants one ought to stand as victimizer or else falling itself as a victim. In this game of power there are no martyrs but only victims and survivors. It was a traditional play about collapse of the values that nurture integrity and honour. It was a social tragedy where death of human character lead to death of human society. A play where, to use one of Shakespeare's favorite expressions for ‘Najasa’ (a term to describe the fallen women; from Arabic Najas: the impure, unwholesome, rotten) the faithless-faceless-shameless, ‘the whore, the bawd’, introduces in the name of progressive disciplines its filth and corruption as normal walk of life. And thus leaves the noble, the enlightened, the honorable stand in awe, reluctant to participate in the filth of the ‘normal’ of Najasa, yet envious of the whore's success and sorrowful of its own destruction. In King Lear, Shakespeare connects all these strains of emotional, moral, social, institutional chaos with one fundamental thread – the Political instability.

Collapse of our political set ups worldwide offers us many examples today that would easily fit within the mold of political chaos of Albion of King Lear. Bosnia Herzegovina, however, matches perfectly the DNA as true descendant of it. Bosnian political organization is an exact copy of what we witness in political disorganization of King Lear:

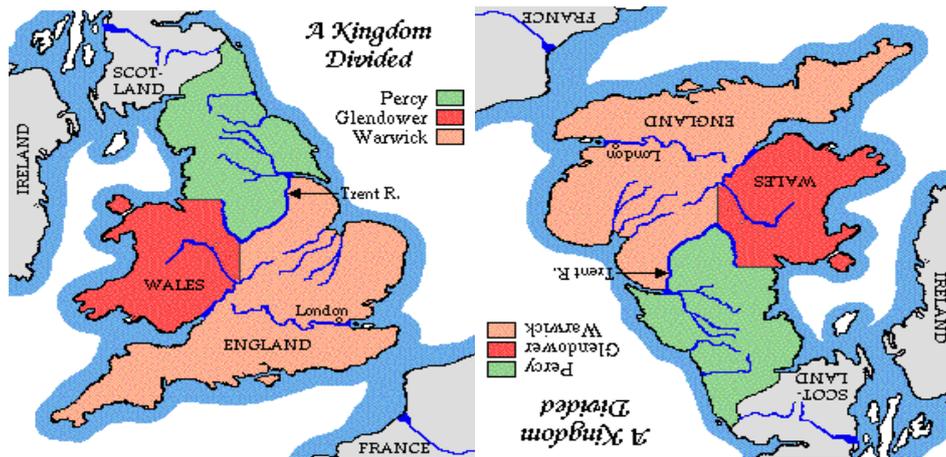
1. A country disputed over by three ‘inheritors’ of the land;
2. A country with two political entities within to mark a state within state;
3. A country where traditional set of human values crumbles in front of growing social injustice and emotional disbalance.



Bosnia and Herzegovina before the Dayton Agreement

(<https://www.rferl.org/a/lasting-ethnic-divisions-in-bosnia/27363192.html>)

Since the Dayton Agreement in 1995, Bosnia Herzegovina is literally, not just ethnically but officially stands vaguely divided. Many maps form the war period show clear markings. Red is assigned to the Serbian, green to the Muslim and blue to the Croatian controlled territory. Most of the green falls in the middle of the maps, as if the connecting link between the other two parts of the country.



Lear's map of Albion if seen upside down, is almost a mirror image of B&H (<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/reference/maps/tripartite.html>)

King Lear's map is similar. Parts of France and area all around Dover was Cornwall's dukedom. At the other end of the map appeared the boundaries of Albany (Scotland) and Cordelia's kingdom was supposed to be in the middle. The connecting link between the other two kingdoms, her name is derived from the French root 'cord', the connecting string. Around her there are the forces of establishment who do not want her to succeed. The two sisters represent the element of Najasa, the whore against whom entire Shakespearean drama is not just the most vocal protest ever recorded in history but the also a means to learn the method to survive against her evil and ultimately to defeat her.

In Shakespearean English the words 'whore' and 'hour' had identical pronunciation and thus it gave poets opportunity to play pun on the word. 'From hour to hour we ripe and ripe and from hour to hour we rot and rot', is a popular line from *As You Like it*. It becomes even more valuable if pronounced, 'from whore to whore we ripe and ripe and from whore to whore we rot and rot'. It then becomes an intended joke on the royalty where a 'whore' causes people to rot. In the light of Shakespearean use of the word, I have come up with the definition of the term 'whore'. Whore is a person who is faithless-faceless-shameless. Since this person loses all the faith in goodness within human character and starts living in a moral vacuum, its own nature evolves to secure its own narrow interests only at the cost of the life of emotional and social balance. Since, love, honor, dignity and grace all are dispatched to pieces, its shamelessness can make it do anything against literally any one, any time. This whore exists all around us. It can be of any age, gender and social stature. The range of the whore covers all walks of life from religious scholars to hardcore criminals, from politicians to beggars, from literate to illiterate, drug addicts and traffickers, ordinary men, women, girls and boys, a whore can be anywhere and in any garb. We must be watchful of the whore and the moment we see the faithless-faceless-shameless, it is our social-moral obligation to distance ourselves from it, isolate it and declare it as an enemy of human civilization. This

compound phrase, faithless-faceless-shameless, is the mirror to see our own face as well, we can now easily evaluate our own truth and at least to our own self we may confirm if we are among the whore or not.

In Shakespearean drama there are role-model women who appear as the future forecast of a matriarchal system but at the same time those stereotypes of women who do not abide by their belonging, fall for cheap compromises, stop playing their role in society as its spiritual and intellectual mentor, and lead themselves to physical and spiritual corruption, appear side by side in equally large number as a warning to mankind. These are those characterless Najasas against whose manner of life Cordelias and Rosalinds must protest and offer their alternative model of life as hope of rescue for humanity. Beside these Najasas, it is the ruling elite in Shakespearean drama that is portrayed as ‘whore’. Shakespearean drama forces us to think (wherever we are), how to define our 21st century political elite. Shakespeare’s political message is based on emotional commitments, broadmindedness and most of all, economic justice. ‘Take physic pomp’ advised Lear to the rulers, urging them all to ‘give thy superflux’. I often think, would it be a big ask, too unnatural a desire, if the ruling elite of the poor nations include in the constitutions one minor condition that the representatives of the people will grow in their assets as much as the people, they represent, grow. So to say if the annual growth of a nation’s GDP is 3 percent, so shall be the growth allowed in the personal assets of the parliamentarians. They all shall vote to include an oath that if the nation does not grow economically, they will not grow either. Only then accountability is a possibility in democratic process.

Shakespearean drama urges us to see that accountability should be an institution within the constitutional frame works and within every walk of social-civic life. People by their own cannot implement accountability as people and their ruler are mere reflections of each other, ‘handy dandy, which is the justice which is the thief’? Without social and political accountability entire meaning of life becomes a relevant concept, Najas at its worst. It is in fact any one in any office or in any capacity, if certain amount of power can be exercised, takes after the image of the ruling elite as a role model of success. The fear element cast through images of power spreads in every walk of life. We see the most grotesque and crooked forms of it in our educational institutions where teachers have learned to behave as bureaucrats, police personnel who can start pretending to be medieval lords all of a sudden, minor municipal corporation offices with clerks having air of being kings and queens in their tiny cabins. Shakespeare calls them all mockingly ‘gilded butterflies’, ‘court rogues’. As long as these people are the role models, civilizations stand no chance to grow intellectually and spiritually. These people represent a mindset, the mind of the outdated systems of power play and possession of wealth. If they do not change themselves, the history has taken its course already. They will be wiped out along with all that they stand for. Shakespeare’s Lear and Cordelia stand against all in these systems that is obsolete; from dating methods (in this world of mafias and traffickers this system introduced around the first world war cannot offer security to the females any more, Lear’s idea of ‘amorous sojourn’ of two suitors within his residence

offers far more revolutionary freedom, sensible liberty and deserves lot more serious consideration from readers than any other modern cheap dating system of the world can) to marriage and upbringing of children, from banking to education and from political manipulations to religious shrewdness all is doomed to collapse.

Shakespeare foresaw that the ancient patriarchal systems was exhausted and soon had to be replaced by a revived-modified matriarchal system. King Lear is not the death of a society but of the system that the society endorsed, rather inflicted upon its citizens. Today, the havoc caused by the patriarchal system has reached the level where the entire globe and every single soul living on it are on the verge of extinction. Four centuries after Shakespeare's forecast we are waiting for those women to appear whose role models are not men; whose dream is not 'we can do it' but 'we can do it better'. For this kind of woman to be born a different set of values independent of patriarchal system is needed to be introduced, a set of values where the nonsense of the 'normal, traditional and routine' adopted by Najasas is dispatched for good. If it happens somehow, somewhere on this earth, the mankind may still have a chance to avoid what is the most obvious, the death of human civilizations.

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The Map of King Lear's Kingdom:

(<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/reference/maps/tripartite.html>)

The Map of Bosnia Herzegovina

(<https://www.rferl.org/a/lasting-ethnic-divisions-in-bosnia/27363192.html>)