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THE STAGE AS PURGATORY: SHAKESPEREAN MORAL DILEMMAS

Abstract

This article was inspired by Trevor Nunn's 2011 production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London. As the performance and the title of the play transpire, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are detained in Purgatory after being killed in England. The aim of this article is to explore the reasons why Tom Stoppard keeps them in Purgatory and repeatedly exposes them to the crucial moments from their earthly lives. The necessary theoretical framework is set out by Stephen Greenblatt's study *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2002), and Gareth Leyshon's B.Th. thesis *The Purpose of Purgatory: Expiation or Maturation?* (2005). The conclusion we would like to propose is that the purpose of their detention is maturation, meaning the ability to make morally right choices when faced with Shakespearean moral dilemmas.

Key words: theatre, Purgatory, Greenblatt, Leyshon, Shakespeare, Stoppard, moral dilemmas

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*I thank him that prays for me when the bell tolls,
but I thank him much more that catechises me, or preaches to me,
or instructs me how to live.*

John Donne

1. Introduction

In his book *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2002), Stephen Greenblatt endorses the views of John Gee, a 17th century Protestant, on “the degree to which idolatry, superstition and credulity defined Catholic spirituality” (Shami 2003: 195) in his time. As a convert from Catholicism, in 1624 Gee published a book, *The Foot out of the Snare*, in which he documented and illustrated many deceptions, public spectacles, and vices (fear of Purgatory being one of them), allegedly practiced by Catholic priests in order to ensnare common folk. The book came to be known as *Somers Tracts* and became widely popular among Protestants. Jeanne Shami identified the dominant comparison used by Gee in order to subject popish practices to public ridicule. In the chapter “Sermons and the Moral Marketplace” of her study *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the Late Jacobean Pulpit*, she says: “In fact, the Tract compares these public spectacles to theatrical stage plays and interludes” (Shami 2003: 195). Shami is right to notice that Gee was the first to establish this connection between religious practices and the theatre. Therefore, it seems that Stephen Greenblatt got the idea for his research into the phenomenon of Purgatory directly from John Gee and his perception that Purgatory in the end reached the Renaissance stage. In the last paragraph of his book Greenblatt comes to the same conclusion: “The space of Purgatory becomes the space of the stage” (Greenblatt 2002: 257), which he repeats in his Epilogue (261), leaving his readers no room for doubt as to whether Hamlet is in a metaphorical Purgatory or not. The goal of this paper is not principally to determine the presence of Purgatory in *Hamlet*, but to focus on the representation of Purgatory in its complementary play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Our aim is to prove that Stoppard places Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in a real, not metaphorical Purgatory in order to explore how they would react to a second opportunity to make a morally correct choice. Before looking at the text of the play in greater detail, it is important to set the background for this research by outlining the concept of Purgatory as shown in *Hamlet*.

2. Purgatory and Shakespeare

Greenblatt wrote *Hamlet in Purgatory* as if to put an end to the endless debate regarding the issue of the Ghost. Both Protestant and Catholic audiences raise the question of the origin of the Ghost. The play was staged for the first time around 1602, about half a century after the Protestant Reformation was completed and the Anglican Church established. By that time, Purgatory as part of Christian teaching had been eliminated from the official Protestant doctrine, and practices related to it were disapproved of, if not forbidden. Why Shakespeare then introduced a ghost into the original story remains the subject of dispute. If the Ghost is an earthly representation of the soul of King Hamlet, then it means that the King's soul is suffering in Purgatory, which is definitely part of the Catholic portrayal of the human lot. The evidence from the text supports this interpretation:

My hour is almost come,
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself...
...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 (Act 1, Scene 5).

These are the words with which King Hamlet rather conventionally describes his suffering in Purgatory. The Christian people of Europe, regardless of their religious persuasion, are all quite familiar with these images of torturing flames and sulphurous stench to which the soul of a sinner is condemned for a certain period of time. The King also reminds his listeners of the purpose of this punishment which is the purification of the soul so that it can ascend to the Holy Father in its pure state. Reminding is definitely unnecessary since to this day the readers, believers and non-believers alike, tremble at the stories of purgatorial agonies experienced either as realistic post-mortem perils or as vivid metaphors for the plights of this life.

King Hamlet (or his ghost) is fully aware of his own foul crimes and the need to purify himself through fire until all sins are burnt away and his soul remains clean and ready to meet its Maker. The only problem with

this standard representation of Purgatory is that doctrinally it should have been unacceptable to Shakespeare's audiences which Shakespeare was definitely aware of and yet he chose to make the nature of the Ghost the crux of the problem. Greenblatt points out that Hamlet, as „a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament, is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost” (Greenblatt 2002: 240), which could mean that at the turn of the century Protestantism was still being haunted by Catholicism. Deeply rooted images and practices are not easily eradicated, nor is it unusual for old customs to surface in a new guise centuries later, as often happens with pagan rituals. Still, it was daring of Shakespeare to open his play with intimations of Purgatory, unless he wanted to warn against it and show how devastating the effect of such a belief is: Prince Hamlet goes mad, and eight people including him die over the course of the play. It would stand to reason that he does indeed go mad and cause the death of eight persons, haunted as he is by the request of the Ghost, being unable to reject the moral obligation imposed upon him by his father's ghost. Consequently, at least part of the audience would get the message that Catholicism, with Purgatory which the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, may be devastating to people's mental or physical being.

Other questions that arise in this context are equally intriguing. Is the Ghost the workings of the Devil; why does it confuse us by demanding vengeance instead of simple Catholic remembrance; did Shakespeare perhaps want to thrill the audiences as a strategy to increase ticket sales, or perhaps he intended to take a subversive stand against the Protestant authorities because, though he was a conforming member of the Church of England, he was secretly a Catholic? It is well-known that these questions related to the nature of the Ghost are not the only unanswered ones in Hamlet, but there are also other questions related to the nature of Purgatory which beg to be tackled in view of the fact that Stoppard makes Purgatory the setting for his play: why did the Anglican Church reject Purgatory and what is its canonical purpose today?

It took Stephen Greenblatt a book of over 300 pages to answer the first question, relating it to *Hamlet*. Briefly,

Though it received its full doctrinal elaboration quite late – the historian Jacques Le Goff places the “birth of Purgatory” in the latter half of the twelfth century – the notion of an intermediate place between Heaven and Hell and the system of indulgences

and pardons meant to relieve the sufferings of souls imprisoned within it had come to seem, for many heretics and orthodox believers alike, essential to the institutional structure, authority, and power of the Catholic Church (Greenblatt 2002: 13-14).

This means that the rituals and paraphernalia of Catholicism relied heavily on the institution of Purgatory for good reason. It was believed, and this belief was reinforced by all classes of the clergy,¹ that the souls of sinners suffered such unimaginable torments in Purgatory that any means of relieving them of these pains was acceptable. That is how the system of indulgences and pardons was developed where a person would willingly part with their last penny in order to save their soul from the scorching flames. Suffrages also included prayers, fasts, almsgiving and masses which could all be purchased. This favour could be extended to the departed as well, and since almost all souls were imperfect, shortening their stay in Purgatory through suffrages became a lucrative side-activity for the Church. The living could thus reduce the duration and intensity of the soul's agony which the Church encouraged by spreading the fear of Purgatory. To hasten their souls through it, people parted with their wealth, commissioned prayers and bought whatever relics were placed before them by the clergy or impostors. Their fear was ungrounded, Purgatory itself imaginary, but the money they paid was real. As Greenblatt phrases it: "purgatorial fire, though a figment of the imagination, brings real gold and silver into the coffers of the Catholic Church" (Greenblatt 2002: 39).

When the institutional practices related to Purgatory spread out of control and beyond pragmatic argument, they made the Catholic Church vulnerable to the attacks of Protestants. The extent of corruption of the clergy became intolerable to lay folk and nobility alike, and the reformation of the church was inevitable. The intense exploitation of human fears which had lasted for almost five centuries was suppressed by other practices imposed by the newly established Church of England. Purgatory evolved into an emblem of the corruption of the Catholic Church. However, the human imagination was already deeply possessed by horrible images which, strangely enough, seemed to be more appealing to it than the representations of heavenly bliss. The Anglican Church rejected it, but

¹ Greenblatt lists bishops, abbots, priors, deacons, archdeacons, suffragans, priests, monks, canons, friars, pardoners, and summoners (Greenblatt 2002: 10).

Purgatory lodged itself in literature so that even Shakespeare resorted to the images of Purgatory knowing that the effect would be powerful.

The second question, about the significance and meaning of Purgatory today, is more difficult to answer, even if one is a practicing Catholic. The B.Th. thesis of Gareth Leyshon, *The Purpose of Purgatory: Expiation or Maturation?* (2005), can offer some basic insights into this matter. Following doctrinal requirements, Leyshon asserts:

- a) There is a *post-mortem* state in which souls *expiate* their debts.
- b) Truly penitent souls undergo ‘purgatorial penalties’ in lieu of the penances they were unable to complete while alive.
- c) Living persons may contribute suffrage towards this expiation by applying Mass, prayers or alms.
- d) In order to avoid this state, one must ask the Lord’s mercy before one comes to judgment.
- e) But one will only receive mercy to the extent one has been merciful to others. (Leyshon 2005: 41).

Evidently, all these elements of Catholic dogma have been preserved virtually unchanged from the earliest times of Purgatory. The living soul passes through the process of purification, and stays in Purgatory proportionally to the heaviness of its burden of sins and possibly the suffrage offered by those left behind. However, this period is not just a punishment, but a cleansing of the soul. Leyshon’s terminological equivalents for punishment and cleansing are expiation and maturation respectively, where maturation is part of the development of an individual soul, while expiation is a penalty justly imposed. Further, Leyshon proposes a new paradigm and introduces two new terms: Detention and Refinement. He relates Detention to expiation and Refinement to non-penal purification: “Detention, which is an expiatory state which effects maturation; and Refinement, which is purely for maturation” (Leyshon 2005: 50).

Making use of these distinctions, an interpretation of Stoppard’s play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* will now be attempted.

3. Purgatory and Stoppard

It seems that the title of this play has not been given full critical consideration. In *Hamlet*, these are the words with which the English ambassador informs

Horatio, since the King is already dead, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been executed. Stoppard chooses to quote these words as the title of his play and thus sets a clear context for its understanding: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead! They are not metaphorically dead, they will not die at the end of the play, their deaths are not impending, and they are not headed for death: they are dead but not quite gone. The fact that Stoppard does not repeat these words in the text of his play should not create any misunderstanding, though it evidently does. None of the many critics of the play, at least to our best knowledge, acknowledge the title, but read the text as signifying the main characters' fear of death, or the absurdity of life, or a metaphor for death.² We contend that the title is an integral part of the play and as such should at the start make the reader ask the logical question: if they are dead, and still the main characters of a complex play with a great deal of action, where are they situated?

It could have been expected that after Greenblatt published *Hamlet in Purgatory* (2002), his title would give rise to new interpretations of Stoppard's play, and answer the above question. The two plays are intrinsically connected, and their main characters find themselves in similar situations, but with one difference: Hamlet is in a metaphorical Purgatory seeking answers to his moral dilemmas while Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in a real Purgatory, doing exactly the same thing. So, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead, as the title indicates, and detained in Purgatory.

As much as Hamlet is a play about death,³ *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is even more so. Although for the whole length of the play Ros and Guil keep avoiding the grim realisation that they are dead and in Purgatory, this seems to be the glaring truth. At the beginning of the play they are in

² The authorial intention is as irrelevant as always. It seems that Stoppard intended the play to be a metaphor: 'The more doors there are for you to open, the better the play. Take *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, if the metaphor had been specific, the play would not have had the freedom to go where it wanted. Some students don't see it as a metaphor but a puzzle to which I have the answer, and if I were to impart it they would get an A.'

³ An interesting reading of Hamlet sees it as a play about death: "Death pervades the play. Of the 11 principal characters, one is already dead (the Ghost) 8 die during the course of the play (Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia, Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet), one attempts suicide (Horatio, who is stopped by Hamlet) and one is responsible for the death of thousands (Fortinbras). Death is referred to or someone dies in 18 of the 20 scenes of the play. The exceptions are the scenes of Laertes departure (1.3) and Polonius with Reynaldo and Ophelia (2.1)

“a place without any visible character” (R&G: 2), passing the time tossing coins which keep landing heads up. The run of ‘heads’ is impossible, they are aware of the oddity of it, but they refuse to draw logical conclusions. Stoppard gives clear instructions: Guil “is worried by the implications; aware but not going to panic about it” (R&G: 3). What is this ‘it’ and its implications that worry Guil, if not the fact that they are dead. The very place where they are denies description, it is not like any other place, and it does not resemble any place where they have ever been, for they have never been in Purgatory. In his brilliant 2011 production at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, Trevor Nunn places them in a void, on an empty stage, as the best approximation to the horror of Purgatory. There is nowhere to go; there is a lack of environment. It is an alternate universe where their existence is continued without their grasping what has happened, very much in the manner of the films *The Others* (2001) or *The Sixth Sense* (1999), with the difference that they remain unenlightened to the end.

The strangeness of the place is highlighted by the improbability of the lucky coin tossing which neither luck, nor the law of probability, the law of averages, the law of diminishing returns or any other law can explain. Guil subconsciously realises that speculating about these issues cannot be particularly rewarding because he fears that the spell of their illusion of being alive might be broken. He criticises Ros for not asking any questions, for not pausing to think, not having any doubts, and not being ready to go any further, while these are also his own shortcomings. He fears that their existence is not real in the worldly sense, and wants Ros to touch and hug him. Ros does not feel fear, the crack that might flood his brain with light, as Guil says, and he is the dumber of the two, since there is good reason to be fearful.

Further, the dimension of time also seems to be missing from the universe which they now inhabit. They seem to be tossing coins forever, not being able to remember when the game started, being unable to remember when the day started. Time has stopped dead, all things are forgotten, and Guil’s pseudo-scientific dithyrambs cannot fool even himself: “The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear” (R&G: 11). Various options which he explores are unconvincing, and however much he struggles, the strangeness of the

Hamlet is obsessed with death. In every one of the 13 scenes in which he appears there is a reference to death or someone dies. ...The play ends on a final note of death, with the body of dead Hamlet and the others being carried off (5.2. 388-395).”

place and the things happening in it lead Guil to the conclusion which he will not explore, that all these must be indicative of something.

Finally, Ross's comment about the fingernails and the beard growing after death starts an exchange of deliberate misunderstandings whose purpose is to obscure the fact they have died. Guil is on the verge of realising this fact, but Ross always picks up a wrong reference and focuses on the irrelevant detail, trying not to give any significance to the fact that he cut his fingernails 18 times while he never cut his toenails. Guil entertains the idea that a mystical experience can become as thin as reality if witnessed by more people, which then takes away its startling dimension. Yet, he cannot exclude the option that they are now "within un-, sub- or supernatural forces" (R&G: 10), basically meaning outside the realm of ordinary experience. They try hard to understand how it all began and Guil remembers the messenger, which gives a clue to Ross to conclude: "That's why we're here" (R&G: 13). This conclusion is so terrifying that he must qualify it immediately: "Travelling."

All the scenes mentioned above take place at the beginning of Act 1, before the arrival of the players, and yet on these 15 pages Stoppard asks and answers all the important questions which will be developed over the course of the play. Further on, the evidence of Ros and Guil being in Purgatory accumulates, but that having been established, it is also important to see what the form of their suffering is. Traditionally, purgatorial purification takes the form of cleansing fires as the torments of purifying punishment. Leyshon adopts the traditional categories of duration (analogous to time on earth) and intensity (analogous to the heat produced by a fire):

In Purgatory, we posit, a soul endures a varying (but non-zero) intensity of purgation for a finite time. The purification required by a soul is determined solely by the state of detachment of its will at the time of death. The penalty depends on the sins and good works committed since baptism and the suffrage applied on behalf of the soul (Leyshon 2005: 14-15).

The form of purgation to which Stoppard exposes his characters is excruciating though it may seem to be milder than the flames. Throughout the play Ros and Guil are either exposed to or involved in events that they do not understand. It is like a carousel that spins faster and faster, people jump on it, interact with them, jump off, and leave them in ever

greater confusion. The first of these events is in fact the first memory that they manage to recall, that of the messenger waking them up to tell them they have been sent for. His arrival and their prompt departure are of the utmost significance because they mark the beginning of everything that came afterwards. It is easy to confuse this event as the beginning of the actual plot of Stoppard's play because it parallels the plot of Hamlet. However, Ross unintentionally gives us a clue that this is just a flashback, not something that is happening now. He first says: "Which way do we...?" meaning which way do we take now, but immediately corrects himself in order to follow the events as they really happened in the past: "Which way did we...?" meaning which way did we take, when they hastily left for Elsinore fearful lest they came too late to please the king. Both questions are interrupted and left unanswered because it would be too dangerous to answer them. The grammar would reveal the truth, and their existence then would become unbearable even more so than it already is.

These flashbacks are numerous and they constitute the plot of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Ros and Guil do not meet the Players but remember having met them on their way to Elsinore. They do not go to the court but remember watching *The Murder of Gonzago*. They never wonder how they got to be in all these different places, because there is no logical explanation for their teleportation. The flashbacks come in swift succession, Ophelia, Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius, the Tragedians, the pirates; they enter and exit the stage many times, they cry, pray, act, and talk, the scenes change, the court, the road, the boat, and confusion mounts all the time until Ros feels so frustrated for living as though he were in a public park that he is on the verge of tears: "Never a moment's peace! In and out, and they're coming at us from all sides (R&G: 86)... Incidents! All we get is incidents! Dear God, is it too much to expect a little sustained action?" (R&G: 146). Ros and Guil are mentally tormented to the very end of the play by all these life-like mirages meant to communicate the truth they fail to grasp. Their world is without meaning, without logic, and their agony without end. They disappear into the dark only to begin a new cycle anticipated by Guil's words: "Well, we'll know better next time" (R&G: 155). However, the reader realises that this will not be the case, that the same hectic activity will be repeated again, the scenes acted out again without catharsis. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern will remain in their permanent Purgatory.

4. Shakespearean moral dilemmas

The crucial point of the purpose for which Stoppard places Ros and Guil in this horrible Purgatory where they are made to relive their lives over and over again pushes itself to the foreground. At the end of the play, the two of them are all alone on the stage/Purgatory as they have actually been all the time and the spotlights are above their heads, signifying the need for them to think. In his desperation, Ros asks the right question: “We’ve done nothing wrong! We didn’t harm anyone. Did we?” (R&G: 154). Finally he comes to the most important moral issue concerning the consequences of one’s acts, whose recognition may mark the beginning of the process of purification. One more 3D rewinding of the film of their lives would have allowed them to understand where they went wrong and who they harmed had they not been afflicted with moral amnesia. Guil’s answer is the easiest one, “I can’t remember” (R&G: 154), and at the same time the worst one for it will detain them in Purgatory.

Leyshon’s paradigm of Detention and Refinement can explain their present position. Refinement cannot apply to Ros and Guil because they do not qualify for it: “God provides a process of Refinement which has the sole purpose of maturation (purification), enabling those souls which need make no expiation to become sufficiently detached from all lesser goods to enjoy the totality of the Beatific Vision” (Leyshon 2005: 50). Ros and Guil are not “merciful souls who begged for God’s mercy during their earthly life” (Leyshon 2005: 50), for which reason they are not allowed non-penal purification in order to reach maturation. However, their implicit commitment to God allows them to go through the process of Detention and expiate their sins in the hope that this will effect maturation. Therefore, Stoppard keeps them in Purgatory and exposes them to the decision-making moments of their experiences which have influenced the course of their lives. The first one was when the messenger came to take them to the king. He was a foreigner and they could have refused to go even though he mentioned official business and no questions asked, but their remarkable obedience to figures of authority left them with no dilemma as to whether to go or not. They mask their submissiveness with the pursuit of duty. Throughout the play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go back to that time realising its moral momentum: “He was just a hat and a cloak levitating in the grey plume of his own breath, but when he called we came. That much is certain – we came” (R&G: 38). All other uncertainties that follow begin

with this certainty, they came, knowing there are alternatives but believing there is no choice. That is when they begin to wear their daily mask.

The second decision-making moment happens at the court when the king and the queen ask them to spy on Hamlet. Ros and Guil willingly obey: “But we both obey, and here give up ourselves in the full bent. To lay our service freely at your feet, To be commanded” (R&G: 36). They are spurred by the promise of reward into forgetting that Hamlet was their childhood friend who trusted them most, and into disregarding the connotations of the king’s ominous words: “the need we have to use you...” (R&G: 35). Their compliance with this request disturbs the order of their previous existence, which cannot escape Guil. There was a kind of harmony and a kind of confidence which is recognised as nature so that acts deviating from it have to be treated as unnatural. Their loyalty to the secret wishes of the king is equivalent to their betrayal of Hamlet, thus the natural order is broken, very similar to the way the legal and natural practice was offended by king Claudius’ adultery, murder and throne usurpation. The loss of order also affects the breakup of the language. Consequently, Ros and Guil cannot compose a simple phrase, that they will be ‘high and dry’ soon because of the wrong decision they have made. The comedy of the scene cannot hide the tragedy of their situation even though Guil quickly comes up with a rationalisation: “To exchange one set for another is no great matter” (R&G: 38). When he refers to one set (of questions and answers), he alludes to the system of values they have shattered along with the stability of their existence. Contrary to his perfunctory conclusion, everything changes with this exchange of values. They lose all sense of direction, and are left with questions without any answers. From the first hasty and unwise decision to follow the messenger, they lose their authentic selves, everybody confuses them, and in the end they do not know who they are any more. Ros refuses any responsibility saying they do not owe anyone anything, but witty Guil has a better understanding of the human condition: “Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else, and is set off by it” (R&G: 39). What they are to do to Hamlet cannot remain without moral consequences. Still, he abuses his own intelligence and decides that it will be just a game they will play, asking the right questions and giving away as little as possible, as if playing with a person’s life equals playing a game. What makes this game morally reprehensible is the fact that they play it for money and not out of fear. Knowing all the facts of the injustice that occurred at court, they still play the part of the “two smiling accomplices – friends – two spies” (R&G: 99) who will probe Hamlet.

The third situation in which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are guilty, of omission rather than commission, is when they finally meet Hamlet and fail to take his side and redress the previous wrong decisions. He welcomes them as the best of friends, while they clumsily try to find out his secret. Hamlet is naturally superior to them and not easily deceived, so it is with good reason that Ros and Guil feel ridiculous after this unsuccessful encounter which left them high and dry. The next time they see him, they have the idea of accosting him directly and asking him as friends what is going on. It is a perfect opportunity but they miss it because they now feel unnatural knowing that their spontaneity is part of somebody else's order, and the occasion passes. They confirm their submissiveness to the king when they set a trap for Hamlet with their belts and when they ask him where Polonius' dead body is, but Hamlet always outsmarts them, and leaves them frustrated.

The last time Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fail Hamlet by failing to make the right decision happens on the boat to England. Having opened the letter to the king, they dispel all uncertainty about its content and their role in the implementation of Claudius' plan. Without delay, the king of England should have Hamlet's head cut off which practically makes Ros and Guil Hamlet's executioners. In the natural order of things, this makes no sense, and Ros cannot comprehend it:

The position as I see it, then. We, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, from our young days brought up with him, awakened by a man standing on his saddle, are summoned, and arrive, and are instructed to glean what afflicts him and draw him on to pleasures, such as a play, which unfortunately, as it turns out, is abandoned in some confusion owing to certain nuances outside our appreciation – which, among other causes, results in, among other effects, a high, not to say, homicidal, excitement in Hamlet, whom we, in consequence, are escorting, for his own good, to England. Good. We're on top of it now (R&G: 138).

What will happen is neither logical nor just, but pragmatic Guil easily manages to convince Ros that this is the best course of action. His philosophical discourse on death serves only one purpose – to justify their cowardice, greed, and disloyalty. Guil hides behind the mask of a small ignorant man who is just a cog in somebody else's wheel, knowing that otherwise they would probably head for their own execution. After this brainwashing, Ros comes up with a different argumentation:

The position as I see it, then. That's east unless we're off course, in which case it's night; the king gave me the same as you, the king gave you the same as me: the king never gave me the letter, the king gave you the letter, we don't know what's in the letter; we take Hamlet to the English king, it depending on when we get there who he is, and we hand over the letter, which may or may not have something in it to keep us going, and if not, we are finished and at a loose end, if they have loose ends. We could have done worse. I don't think we missed any chance... Not that we're getting much help (R&G: 138).

Ros's logic is now relativistic, materialistic, evasive, hypocritical, egoistic, and opportunistic. The past is forgotten, responsibility either resigned or delegated, and the moral world seen as non-restricted and non-inhibited: "We can do what we like and say what we like to whomever we like, without restriction" (R&G: 143). They do not question, they do not doubt, they act in submission to another's authority. Their moral world becomes one-dimensional, and all room for dilemma is eliminated. This lack of mercifulness keeps them in Purgatory after they have been stabbed to death by the English guards. Unlike their friend Hamlet who was torn by many moral dilemmas, to be or not to be, to kill or not to kill, to love or not to love, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not see any alternatives. It is not a question of either him or us, and still they sacrifice Hamlet believing it is all beyond them and beyond repair. For this unmerciful act they are detained in Purgatory.

5. Conclusion: purgatorial rehearsals

The doctrinal definitions of Purgatory listed by Leyshon are more than relevant in the case of Ros and Guil. What they cannot accept to the end of the play is their post-mortem state in which they expiate their wrongdoings for which they have not asked forgiveness in life. What is even more important is the fact that they are not even penitent souls for they do not realise they have sinned. They exist in a state of denial, downgrading and finding excuses for themselves: "Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths? (R&G: 152). Nevertheless, they have to undergo purgatorial penalties which in the play take the form of repeated exposure to the scenes of their wrong moral decisions. Leyshon clarifies that the

“Scriptural image of fire applies strictly to Refinement; its appropriateness for Detention is traditional but undefined” (Leyshon 2005: 43). Thus, the “salvific fire *may* be coterminous with the experience of seeing one’s poor works ‘burnt up’” (Leyshon 2005: 42). Not using this traditional imagery of purgatorial fires, Stoppard’s play in fact corresponds to Leyshon’s paradigm, and places Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Detention whose purpose is to make them realise where they went wrong and repent for their sins, so that their immoral choices are ‘burnt up’ and maturation reached. Since nobody is contributing suffrage towards their expiation, the length and intensity of their suffering in Purgatory depends exclusively on them. The focus of the play is individual responsibility which is as crucial in earthly life as it is in the post-mortem existence.

The final point to be made concerns the idea of a two-stage life after death and the possibility of the second death, explored by Keith Ward in his book *Religion and Human Nature* (1998). At the end of his study Ward claims that “temporality continues after death, both in the intermediate world, where time is needed for souls to progress (or regress) in understanding and purification, and in the resurrection world” (Ward 1998: 307). The intermediate world is the term he uses for Purgatory, where all souls still have the opportunity to repent and in that way progress. Further, progress in understanding or maturation enables one to see things as they are and to redeem the past by fully knowing it. Therefore, there is some time for possible development after death which allows the soul to make amends for its sins.

Being detained in Purgatory, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are given this extra opportunity to develop their potentiality for mercifulness which was frustrated on earth. They are made to relive their moments of moral failure in order to grasp their own shortcomings and reshape their characters so as to move on to the second stage of life after death by being released from Purgatory into the life in Heaven. They can still exercise their free will and choose good in this post-mortem existence, and yet they choose to turn a blind eye to the images of betrayal and to repeat the same mistakes. Keith Ward explains that “To relive that moment redemptively is not just to watch an old film of a violent event” (Ward 1998: 317), which is what Stoppard makes them do, as if in the hope that maturation is only a few rehearsals away. Although Guil cries: “No, no, no! – if we can’t learn by experience, what else have we got?” (R&G: 109), it seems that the repetition of experience will not be enough. Occasionally they both come

close to the full understanding of their condition, but quickly back away before surrendering to it. A new rehearsal begins in which they take part in all the painful moments of their lives, so that instead of being in Purgatory they feel almost like being in Hell: "Hell might be the disintegration of life into isolated moments of suffering and anguish" (Ward 1998: 317). The power of passivity is such that despite being warned of their imminent deaths unless they change their moral stand, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern still unmercifully persist in betraying their friend. The possibility of the ultimate refusal to repent is also an option, leading to the second death, the death of the soul, from which there is no return. Unless they learn how to live, which is what John Donne wished for, no purgatorial rehearsals can protect them from this infinite loss.

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ПОЗОРНИЦА КАО ЧИСТИЛИШТЕ: ШЕКСПИРОВСКЕ МОРАЛНЕ ДИЛЕМЕ

Сажетак

Инспирација за овај чланак била је поставка драме *Розенкранц и Гилденстерн су мртви* у режији Тревора Нана, коју је лондонско позориште Ројал Хејмаркет изводило 2011. године. Као што се из представе, али и из наслова драме може видети, Розенкранц и Гилденстерн су задржани у Чистилишту после смакнућа у Енглеској. Циљ овог чланка јесте да истражи разлоге из којих их Том Стопард смешта у Чистилиште и непрестано из тера да преживљавају најзначајније тренутке свога живота на земљи. Неопходни теоријски оквир чини студија Стивена Гринблата *Хамлет у Чистилишту* (2002) и дипломски рад Гарета Лејшона *Сврха Чистилишта: испаштање или сазревање?* (2005). Дошли смо до закључка да сврха њиховог задржавања јесте сазревање, у смислу развијања способности да доносе морално исправне одлуке када се суоче са шекспировским моралним дилемама.

Кључне речи: позориште, чистилиште, Гринблат, Лејшон, Стопард, моралне дилеме