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ART AGAINST WAR, OR WAR AGAINST ART? VERSIONS OF MACBETH, PART I: NATO'S USE OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE 1999 ATTACK ON YUGOSLAVIA

UDC 820.09 SHAKESPEARE

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Abstract. *This paper traces the struggle over the meaning of Shakespeare evident in the different uses interpretations of his plays have been put to in the twentieth century. True to C.S. Lewis's claim that "In certain senses of the world 'love', Shakespeare is not so much our best as our only love poet", T. S. Eliot, Huxley, Orwell, Joyce, Virginia Woolf - major English 'modernists' of the first half of the twentieth century - used Shakespeare to reinforce their own pacifist sentiments and oppose war by celebrating, like him, life and love. The next generation of writers, who reached maturity in the second half of the century, 're-discovered' Shakespeare in the same way and for the same reason - through their efforts to find the most meaningful way to order their reactions to the wars they had witnessed or participated in: the Cold War, the Vietnam war. In the last year of the century Shakespeare was invoked by NATO's spokesmen in support of the illegal war undertaken by that military organization against Yugoslavia. A number of performances of Shakespeare's plays, inspired by the same ideology, and funded by the same sources, also appeared. This paper is an attempt to understand what these new uses of Shakespeare tell us about the post-modern state of this civilization, about the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the brave new world of the next one. It is about the war against art, about the mental fight for its meaning, the same one that another great English artist, Blake, fought, in defense of which, as he says, the sword in his hand never slept, and his arrows of desire never ceased to fly.*

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ART AGAINST WAR, OR WAR AGAINST ART?

- Nay, pray thee. Stay a little. I hope this passionate humour of mine will change.
It was wont to hold me but while one tells twenty. (*He counts to twenty*).
- How dost thou feel thyself now?
- Some certain drags of conscience are yet within me.
- Remember our reward, when the deed's done.
- 'Swounds, he dies. I had forgot the reward.
- Where's thy conscience now?
- O, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse.

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Act I,4.

The Lords appease us with images. They give us
books, concerts, galleries, shows, cinemas.
Especially the cinemas. Through art they confuse us
and blind us to our environment. Art adorns
our prison walls, keeps us silent and diverted
and indifferent.

James D. Morrison, *The Lords: Notes on Vision*

The NATO attack on Yugoslavia and the illegal, undeclared war America and its eighteen European allies waged against it in the spring of 1999, created an unexpected existential situation against which the relevance of my professional involvement with Shakespeare (and Anglo-American literature, and art in general) was tested. It was not a matter of being prepared to die with an appropriate quotation from Shakespeare on one's lips, nor was it that one thought of Shakespeare as the bombs exploded in the centre of Belgrade, starlit but otherwise engulfed by darkness after the destruction of its electricity supplies. As patients, in hospitals without water or electric power, died quietly in numbers probably equal to the unsuspecting civilians on busses, trains, bridges, or in private homes over which the self-proclaimed 'Angels of Mercy' flew, it was the general quality of the person I had become that was tested, my capacity to comprehend the events around me and bring them in line with the insights gained into the complexity of the Anglo-Saxon civilization which had master-minded the attack, and which I had spent decades studying.

Was familiarity with Shakespeare of any help to someone faced with this task? My answer is Yes. In my view Shakespeare's works (all of them, and not just the plays that deal with English, Roman and Greek wars) comprise, to borrow Erich Fromm's phrase, a very detailed and impressive anatomy of human destructiveness. The paradigm that Shakespeare followed in his attempt to understand cultural practices that make violence and war inevitable, reappears in the works of modern playwrights writing in America in the sixties: Arthur Miller, Jean-Claude Van Itallie, David Rabe, and Steve Tesich. In their plays, written in order to fathom the meaning of the Second World War, the Cold War, and the war in Vietnam, they strove to see those conflicts in their widest possible context. This lead them to examine the links between the most recent outbursts of violence and the violence of the distant past. In David Rabe's play *The Orphan* the Vietnam war and the Trojan war merge, identified as two dramatizations of a single, unchanged destructive ideology; just as wars do in O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*,

where the Civil War becomes an updated version of the *Oresteia*; and just as Shakespeare's plays, which deal with the Wars of the Roses, ultimately lead to the study of the Trojan war in *Troilus and Cressida*.

The historical sense these playwrights took the trouble to develop (T.S. Eliot warns that it cannot be inherited but must be obtained by great labour) can never cease to be relevant. The conscious present must be "an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show". If we know more than the dead writers, "they are that which we know", Eliot insists. The kind of knowledge Shakespeare and his heirs hoped to activate - "the perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" - if applied to what has happened to Yugoslavia, may produce interpretations of its drama entirely different from the one for which the media have manufactured general consent.

Since art competes with the ways of seeing and understanding offered by other human disciplines, I wish to insist on the claim that we have it 'because we haven't got enough without it'. Accounts and interpretations of wars are kept in history books and other official records. However, only when the doors of perception are 'cleansed' (as numerous artists continue to insist they are by art), revered cultural practices and explanations, which violate fundamental human needs and cause moral damage, become open to challenged and resistance; especially the ones that blind man to other possibilities and lock him in the never ending cycle of violence and war.¹ The word theatre is derived from the Greek theatron, indicating "a seeing place where one comes to possess a new knowledge". By implication, art is the activity that turns the mind of human beings into such a place. Shakespeare and his modern heirs merit attention because the far reaching examinations of western civilization carried out in their plays offer "new knowledge", new insights with which continued promotions and justifications of war and other modes of violence can be critically contextualized, re-examined and successfully resisted.

The fact that violence continues in spite of all the insights stored in art that might have stopped it, can be read as an indication that all the wars that exist are aspects of one major, undetected, ongoing offensive against art, against creativity, against the frame of mind dedicated to celebration (and not exploitation or destruction) of life. This invisible corrupting war of (Western) culture against nature is difficult to detect because, among other things, incessant highly visible, spectacular acts of military destruction occupy the attention of the general public's eye and mind. But it is precisely the initial violation, the individually performed damaging and perversion of human nature, that has to take place, before any other large scale act of destruction becomes possible.² All major works of art

¹ In an interview published in Bill Moyer's book *A World of Ideas: Conversations with thoughtful men and women about American life today and the ideas shaping the future*, (1989) Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe challenged some of the glaring hypocrisies evident to him during the political turmoil in his own country. In spite of the lucidity with which he exposed them, they continue to be in use. Since the lessons in democracy, which he criticized, continue to be given, the following point he made about its 'teachers' should be born in mind "When people say that we failed to practice democracy in Africa they assume that we were taught democracy during colonial rule and that we somehow betrayed our education. That is not true at all. The colonial regime itself was not a democratic system. It was a most extreme form of totalitarianism. ...We were practicing colonial dictatorship. So the colonial people really had no experience of the so-called democracy that they were supposed to have inherited. They did not inherit anything of the sort" (p. 340)

² In his essay "The Cultivation of Anxiety: King Lear and His Heirs" (collected in *Learning To Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, London, Routledge, 1992. pp. 80-98), Steven Greenblatt documents the practice by which the will of children, even only 15 months old, was subdued and broken, so that the question of authority could be settled as soon as possible. The Australian Nobel Prize winner Patrick White also spoke (and wrote)

strive to uncover the processes by which this hidden moral damage is accomplished, and man - weaned from the milk of human kindness - turned into the wolf to man, the killer that history records and glorifies.

Ultimately, this war behind all wars, in my view, concerns the conflict of interpretations of the nature of nature, and more specifically the nature of human nature. It is a war of contrary teleologies. Besides *Antigona*, one early but very clear sign of its existence is the trial and execution of Socrates. What his death was meant to eliminate from the cultural field of Athens, the cradle of Western democracy, was the responsibility of the individual for the state of his soul. The good of the soul was officially equated with the good of the state, and that 'good' defined and enforced by the holders of political power.³ Attentiveness to private experiences (dreams, for instance) was discouraged; the inner voice of conscience (or God) silenced, separation from the inborn, intuitive knowledge of the Good enforced, unsupervised self-questioning made illegal, because all these could lead to knowledge that would align the individual, teleologically, with the creative powers of the universe rather than the prescribed interests of those in control of political power. Self-knowledge was to be replaced by obedience to external authority and institutional decrees. Socrates was killed because he could not be turned into Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, or Osric.

After Socrates, the replacement of the originally possible self-reliant man by the required dumb waiter, or obedient paid killer, in whose breast divinity no longer resides,⁴

about the hidden damage various accepted social practices inflict, and the psychiatrist Allice Miller has dedicated numerous books to the effects of poisonous pedagogies on children, i.e. *For Your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-rearing* (London: Faber, 1983), or *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child* (New York: Meridian Books, 1991).

³ "Socrates' theory starts and ends with the soul", writes Anthony Gottlieb (*Socrates*, London: Phoenix, 1997). "Since the soul's welfare is paramount, no other sort of harm is so important. Socrates therefore has no fear of the court which is trying him. He will not stoop to dishonorable behavior in order to win acquittal, for the difficulty is not so much to escape death; the real difficulty is to escape from doing wrong" (p.37)

In Hans-Jurgen Syberberg's, *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1977) we have a chance to hear NAZI radio broadcasts informing the Germans that the Jews represent the plague and rot of society, and that it is their 'moral obligation and patriotic duty' to exterminate them. At the same time they are reassured not to worry about their souls: the more arduously they perform that moral obligation and patriotic duty, the purer their souls will be. The tradition of equating the good of the soul with political interests is very old. For instance, the Pope used the same argument to justify and encourage the massacres the Christians were expected to commit in the First Crusade.

In order to expose this 'tradition', writing about Syberberg's film ('Cinema, history, and structures of feeling', chapter 10 in *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, ed. Robert A. Rosenstone, Princeton University Press, 1995), Rudy Koshar emphasizes that Syberberg unhinges images from their proper historical context in order to find new ways of recontextualizing their sources and new ways of making historical connections. Syberberg's intention was to suggest new ways of talking about the horrific cross-fertilization of Nazism and contemporary life. In his film the juxtaposition of Nazism's attack on 'culture', book-burning, Hollywood, East German repression of cultural expression, and West German commercialism in the film industry, raises the issue of what Nazism shares with the whole "structure of feeling" in the contemporary West. Koshar praises the cinematic truth which Syberberg's film achieves, because it is the truth "that remains closed off to written history" (pp. 154-173)

⁴ Twyla Tharp's *Bum's Rush* is an interesting, although almost certainly unintended, illustration of this ideology. Tharp (the choreographer of Forman's *Hair* in 1979) places on the stage a ballet dancer moving inside a truck-tire. This is Tharp's metaphor for what human beings are - tubes full of foul air (bad breath, farts, etc.). The religious idea that a divine spirit inhabits and moves the material body is abandoned. Undoubtedly, to many, Tharp's cheerful and attractive presentation of this ideology brings relief, because it makes killing human beings easy and inconsequential, there being no violation of the sacred in the act of letting the bad air out.

continued to mark the progress of Western civilization. Some notable stations on the way are the persecution of Pelagius, the executions of St. Joan and Giordano Bruno, Voltaire's exiles, excommunications of Spinoza and Tolstoy, the burning of Wilhelm Reich's books and his imprisonment and death in 1956 and 1960.⁵ The ethical views held by these indomitable individuals were irreconcilable with the political interests of the usurpers of authority and power, whose rule of legalized criminality (slavery, religious persecutions, capitalist exploitation, colonialism, which we are taught to equate with civilization), could continue only if the original possibilities of human nature were reshaped to serve their ends and subjected to permanent control. Shakespeare had no love and no respect for the usurpers. Every play he wrote opens a door to the discovery of the pernicious, inhuman processes they promote and enforce. A close reading of his plays, from this perspective, reveals that the values he thought life should be lived for, and lived by (against which the violations we commit become recognizable) are the same values cherished by the valiant 'heretics', consigned to the black-list and death-list above.

My work on Shakespeare, along these lines, began over a decade ago. It was provoked by the ubiquitous evidence of the importance of Shakespeare for practically every major twentieth century artist. What first attracted my attention, I recall, was the obvious importance of Shakespeare for the full understanding of Orwell's *1984*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and Huxley's *Brave New World*. For the artists who invoke Shakespeare, it is evident, Shakespeare is a vibrantly alive and potent presence. His relevance to their lives, as they discover it, is very different from the greatness assigned to him officially by the academia. The students at the University of Nis, therefore, have two Shakespeares. The first one is read and reconstructed during their historical survey of English literature, as one of the great Renaissance masters; the second they encounter, in their senior year, is Shakespeare as the greatest artists of the twentieth century resurrect him.

I came to see that even this presence of Shakespeare in the twentieth century may be related to the 'war' against art which I have detected. The works of modern artists deliberately (and often very explicitly) connected with Shakespeare present an indirect comment and challenge to the pedagogy of literature which neutralizes and devitalizes him through various brands of formalism and pedantry.⁶ In his Introduction to the second volume of his *Plays* published by Methuen, Edward Bond finds himself provoked enough to eschew indirection and very directly mention a conversation with a professor "whose job it was to teach the meaning of Shakespeare's writing to students at a university". Bond found it very disturbing that students are still taught that Shakespeare had no opinions of his own and that he understood and retold everyone's opinions but left it to others to judge. Quite contrary to this view, and in spite the fact that he often finds faults with Shakespeare, he insists that what impresses him most about the bard is precisely the enormous intellectual strength with which Shakespeare addresses all the complex ethical

⁵ See the documentary footage concerning these events in Reich's life intercut into Dusan Makavejev's, *WR: Mysteries of the Orgasm* (1971).

⁶ "Hunting is not those heads on the wall", the title under which a version of this paper was presented on August 27, 2000 at the fifth ESSE conference in Helsinki, is borrowed from an essay by Amiri Baraka originally published in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1966), reprinted in *The Poetics of New American Poetry*, eds. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 378-383. In it Baraka insists that "Art is one of many products of thought", and claims that the academicians and aesthetes worship things rather than thought processes. "The academic Western mind" he says, "is the best example of the substitution of artifact worship for the lightning awareness of the art process."

dilemmas on whose positive resolution our physical and spiritual survival depends. To counteract the misleading pedagogy he had encountered, he sat down and wrote his own Shakespearean plays, *Lear* being perhaps the most memorable.

For the relevance of this line of thought ample supporting evidence can be found in the numerous other 'modern versions' of Shakespeare's plays I teach together with the originals - plays that artists (such as Eugene Ionesco, Jean Anouilh, Heiner Muller, John Herbert, Howard Barker, Arnold Wesker, Tom Stoppard, Robert Lepage, Robert Wilson, the Mabou Mines, Paula Vogel, various feminist collectives, etc.) based on Shakespeare's works, using different strategies to highlight what they identified as relevant aspects of his art.

The efforts of all these artists, who ally themselves with Shakespeare in order to articulate art's way of seeing and assessing the meaning of life, challenge the official ideologies and pedagogies of all the anti-life establishments and, in doing so, often indicate clearly what the 'war' I am concerned with is about.⁷ Orwell's Winston Smith wakes up from dreams of his mother, the Golden Country, Julia and love, with the words Shakespeare on his lips. The novel focuses on how the values that these represent are betrayed and replaced by his love for Big Brother. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf's Clarissa invokes Othello's recognition of love as "soul's joy", and "content absolute" again only in order for her betrayal of such riches (for undemanding conveniences and mundane comforts) to be more obvious and lamentable. In the same novel the provincial poet Septimus Warren Smith goes to war in defense of values represented by Shakespeare, and when the violence of war takes away his most Shakespearean trait, his ability to feel and love, although the official 'doctors of the soul' try to convince him that life without feelings is not only normal but desirable, he kills himself because he refuses to be sentenced, for life, to such diminishment. In the first half of the twentieth century, and during and after the Vietnam war, Shakespeare was used by modern artists as a touch-stone - for the recognition of various betrayals of life and love we, civilized creatures, have become capable of; for the preservation of memory of Divine Love which

⁷ One obvious phase of the 'war' was the persecution of American artists and intellectuals by the House Un-American Activities Committee, founded in 1938 but especially notorious under Senator Joseph McCarthy in the fifties. Much has been written on this subject, both in respect to what it did to the American stage, and to the American film and Hollywood. Finding this episode in American history relevant for his argument about the state of American culture today, in his lectures published as *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999) the art critic of *Time* magazine Robert Hughes writes: "McCarthy's success lay in unlocking the vast reserves of American monism, the long-hoarded nativist intolerance of difference" (p. 44). The same "vast reserves" continue to be tapped, since, Hughes laments, "like fungal spores in the soil, repressive tendencies are always there, always latent and capable of fruiting overnight, given the right conditions." This tenacity deflates one's optimism about moral progress in twentieth-century America, says Hughes, and quotes as evidence of its continued life, the memo sent to Richard Nixon by his young speechwriter Pat Buchanan. It concerns the advice to use the divide-and-conquer politics for the success of the election campaign. "If we tear the country in half, we can pick up the bigger half," writes Buchanan to his President. Hughes deplores the method because it harms America, but fails to recognize and condemn it when it is used as an instrument of American foreign policy, to harm and destroy Yugoslavia and other target nations. Those who have been the object of this hideous practice know well that "to divide a polity you must have scapegoats and hate objects - human caricatures that dramatize the difference between Them and Us." It is no consolation that before doing harm to others America inflicts it first upon itself, and that during the McCarthy era, as Hughes admits, it demonized and persecuted "the brightest and best" of its own citizens.

his contemporary Bruno, also preached, and died for.⁸ When, in the spring of 1999, discrete allusions and inferences gave NATO's reports of daily military triumphs over Serbia a Shakespearean flavor and resonance, it was once more clear to me that, besides the undeclared war on Yugoslavia, the other undeclared war, the one against art, was also on.⁹

VERSIONS OF *MACBETH*: FROM THE SIXTIES TO THE NINETIES

Those who control public opinion through the control of the daily press and the other media have numerous means at their disposal to achieve control of interpretations of Shakespeare as well.¹⁰ Indeed, through control of education and especially through the increasingly widespread new forms of 'cultural management' the meaning, the purpose, and 'consumption' of art have been put under virtually absolute control of those who finance it. Again, persons with a developed historical sense may remember Blake's Preface to *Milton* in which he writes: "Rouse up, O Young Men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court & the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call. Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fashionable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive advertizing boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying" Or his Annotations to Sir Jashua Reynolds's Discourses (Simulations of the Hypocrite who smiles particularly where he means to Betray, as Blake characterized them) in which he repeats the warning: "Degrade first the Arts if you'd Mankind Degrade, / Hire Idiots.../ Give high Price for the worse, leave the best in disgrace, / And with Labours of Ignorance fill every place". In spite the fact that this process is still going on, as even Jim Morrison discovered, the readers of Shakespeare's plays, or of Blake, or the modern artists from their 'tradition', cannot easily be confused or blinded by it to what is really going on in their environment. On the contrary, as 'consumers' and creators of art, they can identify the Destroyers with much greater precision, and understand where the need and the delight in destroying come from.

One additional observation about the war against Yugoslavia needs to be made, because it is related to the argument above: while the attacked people quite spontaneously lived the moral resistance Shakespeare celebrated in many of his great plays, NATO

⁸ In the Introduction to his study *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992) the recently deceased British Poet Laureate, Ted Hughes, refers to the ideological connection between Shakespeare and Bruno (pp. 18-25).

⁹ Shakespearean references and allusions were detected and reported by senior students who watched various Satellite TV programs during the months that, due to war, the second semester of their Special course on Shakespeare, was disrupted. The author is currently checking over 40 tapes of news-material, recorded during the 78 days of bombardment, for specific details.

¹⁰ Volumes have already been written on this topic. It would, perhaps, be interesting to mention Canadian artists Daniel Brooks and Gillermo Verdecchia, who put together a performance *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1991). It was their personal contribution to the fight against various insidious forms of thought control in democratic societies. The performance brings to light Canada's role in manufacturing consent for deplorable causes and practices, by presenting evidence, and providing detailed accounts, of crises the US have caused (and Canada supported) in the twentieth century, in numerous strategically important areas of the world, but particularly South America and the Near East.

personnel, as I have already stated, made use of him with inordinate frequency - for multiple effects, but mainly to create the impression that art endorses the moves, and shares the moral and ideological motives of Western war-lords and politicians. Through intricate but ultimately intellectually insulting analogies (one such being Slobodan & Mira Milosevic = Nikolae & Elena Ceauscescu = Macbeth & Lady Macbeth = public execution of the monsters), both the means and ends employed in the destruction of Yugoslavia were to be interpreted as precisely the things the greatest artists, like Shakespeare, would have had in mind, and approved. The war decisions of Bill Clinton were to be seen as bringing to life the true meaning of Shakespeare's words, at least for the modern television audience watching his speeches and the broadcast of the war 'live'.

The contrast between these NATO interpretations of *Macbeth* from the nineties, and the politically inspired *Macbeths* of the sixties, is quite striking. In 1973, the April-June issue of *Theatre Quarterly* carried an article by Robert Brustein, the Dean of the Department of Drama at Yale. The text was entitled "Contemporary American Theatre: The Impotence of Freedom". In it Brustein examined the freedom of theatrical expression in America against various possibilities embodied in the different historical periods in the West, in order to encourage, he claimed, "its proper employment and caution against its abuse." Brustein felt he was addressing a people whose freedom to express themselves "including their sense of mortification and despair over their political impotence, had become virtually unlimited". Interested in discovering how the proclaimed freedom of the arts in America is related to the political impotence of art he could not fail to observe, Brustein (who had brought Megan Terry's legendary *Viet Rock* to the Yale Drama School in the sixties) re-assessed, for his readers in the seventies, the historical importance of one more symptomatic theatrical event of the previous decade - Barbara Garson's play *MacBird*. He took the time to remind them to this insubstantial skit (which placed Lyndon Johnson in the role of Macbeth and John Kennedy in that of Duncan) because he wanted to stress that "the singular act of courage" with which Garson challenged the political establishment of America responsible for the Vietnam war - seemed for some reason no longer possible.¹¹

The alarming impotence of art Brustein so eloquently warned his readers about in the seventies, continues to manifest itself in the nineties in many forms. One manifestation are the "undirected excesses" that at the moment parade as revolutionary and politically relevant art, but which basically serve, to borrow Brustein's words again, "to consolidate an authority they ostensibly challenge". Here is an example. This year, the second of July issue of The New York Times reported - on the same stage that Brustein once tried to keep independent and critically free from the American political establishment - the success of the play *Belgrade Trilogy*, showing, as the review put it, "Serbian Madness At Yale". At the time when it is no longer able to supply its readers with fresh war reports of NATO victories in Yugoslavia, the New York Times continues its wartime mission by directing its readers' gaze to where the sequel to the recent war-efforts can be found. The text does not provide a complete presentation of the current theatre scene in Belgrade, or Yugoslavia, but, choosing to concentrate on a detailed enumeration of what are called "Eruptions of Dissent Onstage", lavishes praise on the plays of Biljana Srbljanovic, singled out as an "outsider" of special interest to the West.

¹¹ Robert Brustein, "Contemporary American Theatre: The Impotence of Freedom", *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. III, No. 10, Apr.-June 1973, pp. 31-35.

The article, which parades as democratic (fair, complete, unbiased) reporting, in fact represents a one-sided, incomplete and distorted account of a complex historical moment. Only those Yugoslav artists who are ready to turn against the political tradition that had made independent Yugoslavia possible are of interest to The New York Times. As Brustein observed, dissenters (who are encouraged to challenge the authority of the current Yugoslav establishment) in fact operate in order to consolidate the authority of the American establishment, creating, as they do so, the erroneous impression that artists in America, (like Leni Riefenstahl in respect to her Hitler), have nothing to complain about, but exist in order to adore their political Lords and celebrate and beautify their nation's exemplary history and ideology. Just as the whole story about Yugoslavia is never told, whenever possible the whole story about the great American artists (Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Jack London, Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee) is also never presented.¹² Various forms of evasion or omission are used to turn them into politically correct figures, but more violent modes of silencing of any kind of dissent are also employed and justified, as the case of the black artist Paul Robeson, for instance, illustrates.¹³

If independence of art from the maimed and maiming frame of thought of bureaucratic political establishments is important, then the need to assess the factors responsible for the current impotence of art in America is much greater now than at the time of Brustein's perceptive essay. This need is left unattended and, as could be expected, the unexamined American brand of 'impotent freedom' is, at the moment, on sale throughout Eastern Europe. In line with this project, the plays of Biljana Srbljanovic appear in an anthology entitled *Eastern Promise: Seven Plays From Central and Eastern Europe*. The promise (of westernization after 'liberation' from communism, one is inclined to assume), can maintain its appeal only after a deliberate oversight of all the types of slavery western 'democracies' were, and are, based on. The consequences of such willful blindness (the collusion with the thesis that the evils of communism automatically make capitalism preferable and right) are catastrophic. Yet, that line of thought is enforced incessantly. Various types of 'resistance movements', and non-government organizations that US government supports, are always expected to oppose their own political establishments, but willingly prostate themselves before the American. They are encouraged to jump from the frying pan into the fire and welcome (and call freedom) the opportunity to serve - American interests, and American masters. America, which has

¹² This refers, for instance, to the documentary films made about some of these writers in the Guidance Associates' American Authors Series, produced by the US Information Agency.

¹³ In the Winter/Spring issue of *Theater*, published by the Yale School of Drama /Yale Repertory Theater in 1990, Eric Bentley reviewed Martin B. Dubleman's biography of Paul Robeson, in which the role of the FBI in his destruction is analyzed and documented. In the title essay of his new book *The Crucible in History and Other Essays* (London: Methuen 2000), Arthur Miller also gives a brief but illuminating account of Robeson. His courage to make a "forthright declaration of faith in socialism as a cure for racism" made him, Miller says, "the rare exception" among artists silenced by the general fear of HUAC investigations (p. 30). The forthrightness and outspokenness were, one is again lead to conclude, the major reasons for his destruction. In *The Crucible in History* Miller puts his personal experiences of the McCarthy era (his appearances and disappearances as a writer, caused by the "sudden turnarounds" during that ideological war), in a historical context. Those personal experiences made it easy for him to commiserate with Soviet, Chinese, Czech, Hungarian writers who had, like him, seen their names obliterated from the rosters of living authors. They also made him realized that "if there was a unique element in the American repression it was the widespread assumption that it did not exist" (p. 14). The moral integrity with which, at the age of eighty five, he remains loyal to his sense of self, and keeps intact the clarity of his moral vision, are a great inspiration and encouragement.

emerged from the changes that have taken place since the sixties, has no use for plays like *Macbeth*, or *MacBird*, or *MacClinton*. Corruption of political power and atrocious moral aberrations are now always happening elsewhere - Yugoslavia, for instance, or wherever the interests of American foreign policy require. The New York Times does not need to mention any other theatres in Belgrade except those where (without any impediment) the plays of 'dissidents' like Biljana Srbljanovic are staged, or where politically correct and useful NATO-versions of *Macbeth* multiply.¹⁴

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Of course, attempts to 'appropriate' Shakespeare are not a novelty. Any new reading or interpretation of his work is a kind of appropriation. In 1992 Terence Hawkes published a book on how we mean by Shakespeare.¹⁵ Much earlier in the century, in the opening of his 1927 lecture on "Shakespeare and the stoicism of Seneca", T.S. Eliot made the following comments on the "recrudescences of Shakespeare" that he had had a chance to observe: "There is the fatigued Shakespeare, a retired Anglo-Indian, presented by Mr. Lytton Strachey; there is the messianic Shakespeare, bringing a new philosophy and a new system of yoga, presented by Mr. Middleton Murry; and there is the ferocious Shakespeare, a furious Samson, presented by Mr. Wyndham Lewis in his interesting book, *The Lion and the Fox*... About any one so great as Shakespeare it is probable that we can never be right," he continued, "and if we can never be right it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.....If the only way to prove that Shakespeare did not feel and think exactly as people felt and thought in 1815, or in 1860, or in 1880, is to show that he felt and thought as we felt and thought in 1927, then we must accept gratefully that alternative".¹⁶ After these seemingly good humored observations Eliot went on to discuss the limitations of human understanding which, according to him, the mentioned interpretations of Shakespeare demonstrate.

More recently, in 1994, in an essay entitled "How Brecht read Shakespeare"

¹⁴ It is quite interesting to observe how artist, offering services to NATO's peace-time operations, are graded. Those whose loyalty is beyond dispute get to see, in print, their full name and detailed accounts of their projects. Those who have not achieved such indisputable status have their works paraphrased or alluded to, without full credits. Another example of the cultural policy employed in the colonization (or if you wish liberation) of Eastern Europe is found in the article "A Global Experience" in the March 7, 1997 issue of *American Theatre*. In any number of places in the U.S., the article claims, antidotes for Americans' "cultural myopia" are sought. Five writers (from Sri Lanka, Macedonia, India, Australia and Bolivia) toured America in order to help cure Americans from their propensity to "forget that there is a world beyond their own." It is interesting to see what Americans were, in fact, happy to hear in this multicultural exchange. Mircevska, from Macedonia, a former province of Yugoslavia, reported how the actors in government run troupes and companies (who were "accepted into the theatre community and guaranteed work") finally freed themselves from this bad set-up. According to her it only made them bad actors - because it gave them security and made them cease to explore and train in their craft. Now, "a Western style audition system has replaced the old ways, leading to more competition and a finer quality of acting", Mircevska was happy to inform her funders. Is "a Western-style audition system" really all that is necessary to ensure the creation of good actors and the fair recognition of artistic gifts? Or is this something Americans like to hear, interested though they may pretend to be in the "different ways" pursued by other people?

¹⁵ Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁶ *Shakespeare Criticism 1919-1935*, selected by Anne Ridler (London: Oxford U.P., 1965), pp. 209-225.

(published in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*)¹⁷, Margot Heinemann begins by observing that : "Even sophisticated readers used to the idea that there's no one 'right' interpretation of Shakespeare may well have been slightly startled to see the recent appreciation of him by the Right Hon. Nigel Lawson MP, Mrs. Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer". When interviewed about his own political philosophy Mr. Lawson quoted lines from Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* because, for him, "the fact of differences and the need for some kind of hierarchy are exposed more powerfully there than anywhere else in literature." For Mr. Lawson Shakespeare was without any doubt a Tory, and he finds watching or reading *Coriolanus* gratifying because "the Tory virtues, the Roman virtues as mediated through Shakespeare are written from a Tory point of view."

Heinemann quotes Lawson's 'appreciation' in order to indicate "more clearly what the struggle over the meaning of Shakespeare is really about" and to present the case of those who, like Brecht (in her view one of the most perceptive Shakespeare critics of this kind), are not ready to "hand Shakespeare over as a reactionary writer to be used or misused by the defenders of capitalism in decay".

The 1999 appropriation of Shakespeare by Jamie Shea (the spokesman of the powerful military organization that carried out the bombardment of Yugoslavia) makes the distance traversed by the Western civilization, in its moral progress through this century, clearly discernible. Vietnam was attacked by one country - the USA. In the last year of the century a European country much smaller than Vietnam was attacked not *just* by the United States of America, but by the NATO-united eighteen former colonial powers of Europe, *and* America. In the interim between Vietnam and Yugoslavia, the nation whose unjust war had horrified the world in the sixties - overnight and miraculously - became the inspired moral leader of a just one, undertaken to save the world from the satanic Serbs.¹⁸

The miraculous transformation can be attributed to the fact that now, as Blake had foretold, "Labours of Ignorance fill every place". At least three Americans have recently come up with observations that can throw light on this phenomenon. Robert Brustein,

¹⁷ Margot Heinemann, "How Brecht read Shakespeare, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore (Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 226-255.

¹⁸ The National Theatre in London was quick to throw the first stone and stage, in November 1997, a play *Srebrenica*. Although, today, additional evidence (such as Aichman's memoirs), seems needed to prove that the Holocaust really happened, every atrocity attributed to the Serbs needs no proof, and is to be believed unhesitatingly. *Srebrenica* probably made the RNT feel very proud of the promptness with which it could become politically engaged and use 'art' to support and justify its government's role in the war. Thirty years earlier, in 1967, when Peter Brook staged *US* in the Royal Shakespeare Company (turning it, after *King Lear*, into a film appropriately entitled *Tell Me Lies*) the views he felt he wished to expressed through his art, and the views supported by the media, definitely did not represent such a united front. As Brook writes in *The Shifting Point* (London: Methuen, 1988) - in response to his anti-war project he discovered everywhere (and particularly from those who insisted on hearing "both sides") self-censorship that, as he says, "prevented people not so much from saying things as hearing them." The great debates lead nowhere. Persuasion did not persuade. Despite all the newspapers and the paperbacks, he was struck by "how little wish there was to be informed". Concluding his analysis of the reactions to his performance, Brook notes: "Truth is a radical remedy. It has a dangerous snowballing effect. Truth hurts when people or nations have grown accustomed to telling lies. A nation which has been told it can do no wrong when it comes to fighting Communism is likely to react with anguish and terror at the loss of the Battle of Vietnam". The publicity man from his group came up with the suggestion that a button should be made saying 'Tell Me Lies About Vietnam, 'Cos the Truth Makes Me Nervous"' (pp. 206-211). In 1970, the International Centre of Theatre Research was founded in Paris: at that time, Brook, who was criticized for criticizing the Americans in England, found himself welcomed in France.

who is now a professor at Harvard and artistic director of Boston's American Repertory Theatre, wrote about it in *Dumbocracy in America*, but touched on the same problem in an earlier essay, "Dreams and Hard-back Chairs."¹⁹ In it he tried to fathom why "something in American schooling remains indifferent to the arts", indifferent to developing the imagination. Just as the hard-back seats he observed in the new culture center inaugurated in a private boy's school he was visiting, discourage the mind from wandering, so American schools in general make no provision for daydreaming, which is, he says, "the stimulus of the noncompetitive imagination." He adds that even Shakespeare is honored "for his wisdom, for his language, for his understanding of character, for his comic instinct, and for a host of other attributes - yet rarely for his visionary invention."

Like Brustein (and completely in line with my concern with the 'war' against art) the Pulitzer prize winning playwright Tony Kushner concludes the private survey of American education he took the trouble to undertake with a modest proposal of measures that might save American children from intellectual starvation - caused by many pernicious methods deliberately used to do them harm. "The transfigomification of liberal arts education into vocational training is," Kushner writes "intended to destroy any possibility of a troublesome, restive student population. ...We are being dumbed down. We are being trained, but not trained to think."²⁰

Travel writer Bill Bryson worries about the same process, and when he asks where the dumbness comes from (in his *Notes From A Big Country*) he claims to be "quite seriously certain that there is something in modern American life that is acting to suppress thought, even among more or less normal people." As could be expected, he mentions the role of the newspapers, periodicals and broadcasters, whose "intention to spare readers having to grapple with challenging or unfamiliar notions (like where the heck is Scotland, or I may add Yugoslavia) has the powerful and insidious effect of lobotomizing the audience," destroying their ability to think.²¹ To these three reports precedents can be found in Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, written in 1871,²² or Frank Lloyd Wright's mid-century

¹⁹ Robert Brustein, *Dumbocracy in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994) and "Dreams and Hard-back Chairs", *Reimagining American Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), pp. 248-251.

²⁰ In his play *Angels in America* (New York: TCG, 1992), Tony Kushner managed to activate a 'historical sense' that generates brilliant insights into the nature of contemporary America. The play, as could be expected, makes much of the McCarthy era. The Angel, bringing to the protagonist good news about the 'perestroika' that might heal and save America, says: "A marvelous work and a wonder we undertake, an edifice awry we sink plumb and straighten, a great Lie we abolish, a great error correct, with the rule, sword and broom of Truth!" Kushner's essay "A Modest Proposal" appeared in the *American Theatre*, January 1998, pp. 20-89.

²¹ Bill Bryson's *Notes From A Big Country* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) follow his *Notes From A Small Island*, which record his life in Britain from 1973 to the nineties. The quotations in this text are from an article "Simple tales of stupid folk" (excerpted from his book on America) published in one of the leading British daily newspapers.

²² Talking about conscience, "the primary moral element" (in the section of *Democratic Vistas* entitled "What Is an American?"), Whitman warns: "If I were asked to specify in what quarter lie the grounds of darkest dread, respecting the America of our hopes, I should have to point to this particular. I should demand the invariable application to individuality, this day and any day, of that old, ever-true plumb-rule of persons, eras, nations. Our modern civilizee, with his all-schooling, and his wondrous appliances, will still show himself but an amputation while this deficiency remains." See section on Whitman in *American Poetry and Prose, Volume II*, eds. Foerster, Grabo, Nye, Carlisle, Falk (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), pp. 461-2.

assessment of America, eloquently elaborated in his *Genius and the Mobocracy*.²³

The appalling ignorance and inability to think, caused by this 'closing of the American mind', made it very easy for two very different justifications of the undeclared war against Yugoslavia to be possible. One was based on the assumption that the Northerners (Serbs) can be successfully presented as enslaving the Southerners (Albanians in Kosovo) - in which case the ideology of the US anti-Communist liberating intervention in Vietnam could finally be justified and, by popular demand, repeated; hopefully victoriously this time, with the approval and applause of the entire 'free' world. The other casting, for the 'liberals', allowed the interpretation that the Serbs were now to the Albanians in Kosovo what the ugly Americans were to the people of Vietnam, in which case America was to proceed not in triumph but repentance. It was to undertake the bombing of Yugoslavia in order to correct its own Vietnam mistake. By punishing those who were doing in the present the wicked things it had itself once done in the past, the memory of it as the censured war-maker in the sixties, could be replaced by the new image of America as the universally supported peace-bringer in the nineties.

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The Orwellian war-is-peace paradox involved in the decision to bomb Yugoslavia went mostly undetected in the western mobocracies and dumbocracies: there was nothing to prevent NATO's Angels of Mercy from employing internationally forbidden cluster bombs and radioactive weapons on Yugoslav civilians. Harold Pinter protested tirelessly, but, for the audiences habituated to the discourse of the media, the political doublespeak quite easily converted these illegal weapons into legal means for the achievement of the proclaimed 'humanitarian' ends.²⁴ In the sixties, an impressive number of individuals had

²³ Frank Lloyd Wright, *Genius and the Mobocracy* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949). A separate article should be dedicated to this marvelous book which Wright wrote when he was eighty. At this point only a few relevant references can be made. The most significant is the one concerning the belief in the ethical core of man's nature (the Socratic daemon, or the soul). Thus, in the section entitled "Honor", Wright insists: "The nature of a building material is its honor. The individuality of the man, his Nature and his stature, is his honor! No imitator knows honor. ...Our dishonor is our mobocracy. Its main support is imitation. Mobocracy swarms and swamps what genuine democracy we have built ...There is no short-cut to the profound. The function of a master is not to teach but to inspire. Instead of a 'form follows function' scientist, I shall give you a great lyric poet" (p. 8). In the very Socratic section entitled "The function of education is to teach men to understand themselves," he continues: "When men do understand themselves they may dedicate themselves to causes, they will never copy effects. ...The whole matter of causes has been left out of education. A layman lives wholly in effects. ...All forms of art-schooling or art-exposition have become unwholesome, infested by these agents of 'effects'. Wright calls American universities "professional dealers in the infinite substitute" (p. 15), and has this to say about America: "We as a tirelessly exploited - and exploiting - people must find some release for whatever native love of beauty the god of creative impulse passed along to us by Nature. ...We find it in shoddy sensationalism, in new-fangled inventions or superficial beautifications by the commercial 'designer' no higher than those of the professional beauty parlor... 'We' think we find - and we try to find - beauty in urbanism's streamlined machination; satisfaction in push-button power; entertainment in gadgetry, gag-ism; and happiness in preoccupation with so-called utilities of every kind that have no more spiritual significance than gangsterism itself, ...or an all-day sucker in a baby's mouth" (p. 14). Spirit only could control and remedy the situation, but, as Wright wrote in the Preface, "Sprit is a science mobocracy does not know" (p. XIII).

²⁴ *American Theatre* published in its February issue in 1991 a review of William Lutz's book *Double-Speak: How Government, Business, Advertisers and Others Use Language to Deceive You*. The reviewer, Eric Overmyer, quotes Lutz' definition of double-speak as "language that pretends to communicate, but really doesn't...that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive or at least

the ability to "see better" - acquired through knowledge, lived experience or art. These individuals were able to detect the hypocrisies involved in the promotions of the Vietnam war, and did react. One case in point was David Rabe.²⁵ In the seventies, after a prolonged and epiphanic shock of recognition related to the war-for-peace actions he witnessed in Vietnam, Rabe wrote four dramatic meditations on that war.²⁶ He did not cease to think about it and, in the eighties, continued to search for its causes in the properties and paradoxes of what we normally call peace. His 'peacetime' play, set in Hollywood, first called *Guy's Play*, eventually became *Hurlyburly*. "One morning" writes Rabe in the Afterward to the version of the play published in 1995, "I awoke to find myself thinking that I should look in *Macbeth* and I would find justification for the title there. I opened my favorite copy....and there it was in the first four lines, "When the hurlyburly's done, When the battle's lost and won".²⁷ After the completion of the play, Rabe found - in both Shakespeare and Jung - confirmations of what he claimed "instinct had conceived for him": that the one battlefield that leads to all the rest lies in the "personality at war with itself", disoriented and confused by contradictory commands the so-called peace engenders and disguises.²⁸

The interest in *Macbeth* of artists thinking about war is understandable. In spite the fact that it is rooted in local history it is a play about larger issues, about the way we define loyalty, misdirect it, and in its name become traitors, betrayers and destroyers of life. It is a play that dramatizes the moment when killing, internalized through various traditional practices, become so normal and easy that it becomes second nature to men and women who are unable to resist the political lies that sanction and promote it. It is a play about the inner defense against this perversion, about the struggle between man's first and second nature, about the choice that needs to be made between the derided milk of human kindness and the glorified but barren crown. It is about the conflict of the conscious mind, which can be made to rationalize any transgressions, and the deepest self that forgets and forgives nothing. It is about the suppression and denial of the inner voice, (and the resulting confusion of values and loss of meaning) that turn the gift of life into a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. *Macbeth* has gone far in this direction when he encounters the witches: they only confront him with what his nature has already become, visualize for him where the road he has unthinkingly embarked on, is taking him. After all, we first hear of him as the man who has, more than any other, managed to excel in killing. The play is about the process through which the original ethical matrix of man is eroded, culture turns against nature, and gold comes to be valued more than life. The quotation from *Richard III*, with which this paper begins, has its equivalent in all of Shakespeare's major plays.

tolerable...that avoids or shifts responsibility, that is at variance with its real or purposeful meaning, that conceals or prevents thought, rather than extending it." One example of doublespeak which he quotes is the claim that the U.S. Army doesn't kill the enemy anymore - just "services the target".

²⁵ The great American Shakespeare-lover Joseph Papp considered the staging of Rabe's plays, in his Public Theatre, the greatest service he had done America.

²⁶ David Rabe's Vietnam plays are *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* (1971), *Sticks and Bones* (1971), *The Orphan* (1973), and *Streamers* (1976). "Rabe's Vietnam War plays explore issues far broader than the label might suggest and, in fact, are best understood as part of a wider cultural examination" claims David Savran in his introduction to the interview with Rabe published in *In Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights* (New York, Theatre Communication Group, 1988), pp. 193-206. The date of *Hurlyburly* is 1984..

²⁷ David Rabe, *Two Plays: Hurlyburly and Those the River Keeps* (New York, Grove Press, 1995), pp. 370-371.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 362, 364.

In the play *On the Open Road*²⁹ (written in response to Vietnam, but also about the nature of America in general), playwright Steve Tesich situates his characters on the same path of ethical decline that Macbeth has taken. Like Macbeth, Tesich's protagonists are also offered a chance to rise by falling. They can hope to enter a 'superior' civilization (the Land of the Free) only if they murder Jesus, destroy in themselves the best of what makes them human. Although they, too, have already gone far in this direction - they decline. They come to realize that what defines human beings is the ability to love without a motive, and by refusing to betray that knowledge, they find that they no longer feel lost, even if they continue to be out of reach of salvation. What Macbeth is made to lose in Shakespeare's play, they discover: a sense of (ethical) identity that gives meaning and a sense of orientation to their lives.

This process of unacknowledged and unattended moral disorientation and confusion (which afflicts most human beings and which Jim Morrison compulsively tried to record and reveal in his *Notes on Vision*), became obvious to Rabe during the two years he spent in Vietnam. In the text entitled *Vietnam Shadows*, published in the *American Theatre* in 1994³⁰, Rabe speaks of Vietnam as the moral water-shed in American life because, he says, specifically in response to this war, the nation openly denied the atrocities it committed, while it watched itself committing them on television. Arthur Miller's autobiography *Timebends*³¹ is full of similar critiques of the American penchant for denial, evident to him in earlier war-related situations: among those who denounced and betrayed their friends during the Cold War and the McCarthy era (by indirection of the seventeenth century Salem witch trials 'found' in his play *The Crucible*) and those whose denials made Auschwitz possible (built, operated, justified and rationalized), along with all the other terrible deeds of destruction committed during the second World War.

Rabe's and Miller's studies of the denial syndrome identify it as an accepted and deeply traditional Western practice. Noam Chomsky is right to point this out in the fourth chapter of his book *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo*,³² and right to cite examples of past and present cases where its operation is evident. The power of the syndrome can be seen, among other things, in the fact that *all* the media-enforced interpretations of the war on Yugoslavia were calculated to make America appear to be fighting for the liberty and justice for all. No one seemed to be bothered that, as Shakespeare would have noticed, the media 'protested too much'. America planned and carried out its actions in Kosovo with the same hypocrisy with which it had traditionally defended liberty and justice in the past. What was new, in an otherwise old situation, was the context created for this established practices by the new technologies developed in the second half of the twentieth century. The old hypocrisies travel today faster, and can be cast broader than before. Moreover, the three decades of technological progress since Vietnam have, to a great extent, yielded the desired results: turned the world into a global village, populated by "well informed corner-stones of democracy", unable and unwilling to see better than their networks and their media Lears.

Again, in the sixties, the situation was very different. The Open Theatre's principal

²⁹ Steve Tesich, *On the Open Road* (New York: Applause Theatre Book, 1992).

³⁰ David Rabe, "Vietnam Shadows", *American Theatre*, July-August 1994, p. 88. The essay is based on his afterword to the second volume of *The Vietnam Plays*, published in June of 1994 by Grove Press.

³¹ Arthur Miller, *Timebends: A Life* (London, Methuen, 1987), pp. 519-521,

³² Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1999). Chapter four is entitled "The Denial Syndrome", pp. 81-104.

writer Jean-Claude Van Itallie was capable of conceiving the brilliant triptych *America Hurrah!* (1965), and enlightened enough to make an entire section of it (the second play *TV*) deal with the media and the Vietnam war. He saw television as "the perfect expression of a life without transcendent values, of a society in which role has replaced identity and a world in which language is a primary defense against the real and hence against a moral apprehension."³³ For Open Theatre's leader, Joseph Chaikin, too, television was the origin of "recommended personal fantasies to be shared by all," aimed at manipulating the imagination through establishing a common premise and promoting a uniform inner life.

David Rabe could accuse the Americans that the war they watched on television in the sixties (as they did the attack on Yugoslavia in the nineties) was a "probe into the depths, an X-ray knifing open the darkness with an obscene illumination against whose eloquence we closed our eyes."³⁴ After this closing of the eyes to Vietnam, Rabe claims, "deniability" was established as a desirable political goal, and soon became a requisite capability. The "compasses march" of the dazzled and deluded citizens he saw around him, entertaining themselves with deception, "with endless barrage of images whose main criteria are that they must distract, and that they must be false" - brought him close to despair.

The same moral outrage drove Arthur Miller to began to search "for a form that would unearth the dynamics of denial itself, ...the massive lie of our time"; As he could not then know, he was contemplating this at the time when America was getting ready to fight a war in Vietnam, and preparing methodically to "deny it was a war and ... deny the men who fought the war the simple dignity of soldiers."³⁵ For all these reasons the characters Miller created in his plays are not allowed to follow the accepted practice of fabricating escapes from the self, but are forced to quest for the path into the self through genuine self-knowledge and conquest of denial.

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In the American political arena, however, intellectuals of greatest authority are enlisted to do the opposite. The promotion of the post-modern cult of "deniability" is still on. Arthur Schlesinger, described on the cover of his book *Violence: America in the Sixties* (Signet, 1968) as "eminent historian, special advisor to President Kennedy, author of *A Thousand Days*" is quoted to have asked at one point: "What kind of people are we, we Americans? The most frightening people on this planet". His report on the state of the nation, in the seven chapters of his slim volume, is full of statistical data and other evidence of "the terrible things we do to our own people, the terrible things we do to other people". He is aware that "two hundred million Americans did not strike down John Kennedy or Martin Luther King or Robert Kennedy". But, he insists, "two hundred million Americans are plainly responsible for the character of a society that works on deranged men and incites them to deprived acts".

That was in the sixties. In 1994, in the comment on the inauguration of Bill Clinton as

³³ In C.W.E. Bigsby, *Beyond Broadway: Volume Three of The Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama* (New York: Cambridge U.P., 1985) pp. 107-109.

³⁴ Rabe, "Vietnam Shadows": all quotations in this paragraph are from this essay.

³⁵ Miller, *Timebends*, pp. 520-521.

the 42d US president, published in *The World Almanac* for that year, talking about "America's Role in the Post-Cold War World", the same historian sees America differently: he points out that, in view of the fact that Americans represent only six percent of the world's population, it is necessary "to recognize the limits of American capacity to regenerate a corrupt world". It is true that he also raises the question of how the United States can hope to disarm Somalia when it cannot disarm Los Angeles or Washington DC, but he also makes a claim - absurd in light of America's recent involvement in Yugoslavia - that "the American people have no inclination to be the world's policeman, rushing to arrest or occupy other countries every time the alarm bell rings" and that "the notion of a world to be ordered unilaterally by the United States is lunacy".

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Appropriations of truth, art, and history - similar to the examples given above - continue. After NATO spokesman Jamie Shea quoted Shakespeare on the afternoon before the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was bombed, quick to take advantage of this unchallenged line of thought, one contemporary Yugoslav playwright (artistic director of one of Belgrade's theatres, professor at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, and colleague and current 'partner' of Miss Srbijanovic) found it possible to say, in public, that the American political system is the best system in the world and that Americans are happy people - holding in his hands, as he spoke, a book on Edward Albee and Harold Pinter, every line of whose plays has been written to challenge and problematize such untenable political and cultural claims. The students who were present in the audience, and who had just finished reading Albee's *The American Dream*, were appalled.

Still, he might have done them a service, clarifying the reasons that drove Saul Bellow to comment (in the foreword to Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, subtitled *How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students*) on the "disheartening expansion of trained ignorance and bad thought...in the thought-world which has gone very bad indeed."³⁶ The refusal of my colleague to acknowledge the paradox of his argument is a matter of political convenience which will reap him ample rewards: although in his praise of the Western political system, and the way of life it has engendered, he takes no account of the adverse testimony Albee's and Pinter's plays provide, he knows that his own plays will be used as evidence in the censure of his own country, whose system he hopes to see replaced by the American as soon as possible. Because of the politically 'correct' message, his voice as artist, critic, and 'freedom fighter' will, of course, be honored, heard, and made much of in the West.³⁷ It will blend smoothly with the views of those who may have not wished us the bombs, but thought themselves well-meaning when they wished us their political system. As though the bombs were not a part of it, and as though their fall was not the most significant method through which the 'rise' of the West was accomplished in the past.

³⁶ In Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind: How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 17.

³⁷ New York Times articles about Belgrade theatres, Sunday July 2, 2000.

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The two fundamentally opposed readings of Shakespeare and war (the one I propose, and the one embraced by Jamie Shea and NATO) rest, as I have already stated, on fundamentally different conceptions of the nature and function of art. The defenses of art, that continue to appear since the Renaissance, indicate how urgently new strategies are sought though which the issues involved can be clarified, and the dangers involved adequately presented. Heidegger's essay "What are poets for"³⁸ belongs to this tradition. The question he asks, and answers with incredible refinement and subtlety, should be contemplated even in its crudest form: What are artists for, we might ask today, if governments set aside for them annual budgets 22 times smaller than the sum spent for the construction of a single B-2 bomber?³⁹

The answers artist give to this question continue to revolve around the act of seeing. "Poets should give new eyes to human beings", writes Saul Bellow, "inducing them to view the world differently, converting them from fixed modes of experience"⁴⁰, involving them in thought struggles. Bellow's thought struggles are not very different from the mental fights Blake never stopped fighting for the cleansing of the doors of perception. Jim Morrison yearned for "bands of perceivers" for the same reason Heidegger did for poets capable of "seeing the threat of the unhealable, the unholy, as such". Shakespeare and Blake, as insistently in their own way as Morrison and Heidegger, saw art as the activity that preserves man from "the threat that assaults man's nature in his relation to Being itself" - and not as a preoccupation with the "accidental perils."⁴¹ From this point of view, Jamie Shea's appropriation of Shakespeare (translated, in Morrison's terms, into the use of art not to cleanse the doors of perception but "to confuse us and blind us to our environment") could be the greatest danger we are facing at the moment. The events that brought Shea, Shakespeare and Yugoslavia together could be seen as a test of this civilization's capacity to respond to this danger, and discern - for its own good - where the truly "unhealable and unholy" threats lie. Shakespeare knew the importance of distinguishing between what seems and what really is, as well as the danger of not realizing that one may smile and smile and be a villain. He **did** manage to become wise before he grew old, among other things from his own perceptive reading of history, from the historical sense he developed through his dramatic meditations. If there is a struggle to reverse this process, and turn the meaning of Shakespeare's art (and the wisdom it has to offer) into one more tool in the hands of the destructive and the unwise, all the alarms ever sounded on the pages of the defenses of art are justified.

In a brief speech delivered at the Shakespeare Festival in Weimar on April 23, 1988,⁴² Heiner Muller summarized the centuries that separate us from Shakespeare as the "long march through the hells of enlightenment through the blood swamps of ideologies". In his own time he saw, as I do in the events that have befallen my own country, "the battle between revolution and counter-revolution as substructure for the mammoth catastrophes

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Harper, 1975), pp. 91-142.

³⁹ American Theatre, September 1997, p. 21. The text refers to arguments presented by Victor Navasky in the article "Showdown in the Berkshires: The Nation vs. National Review" - which reported on the debate held on Arts funding and America's cultural future.

⁴⁰ Bloom, p. 17.

⁴¹ Heidegger, p. 117.

⁴² Heiner Muller, *Theatremachine*, translated and edited by Marc von Henning (London: Faber, 1995), pp.100-102.

of the century". Shakespeare, he added, "is a mirror through the ages, our hope a world he does not reflect any more. We have not arrived at ourselves as long as Shakespeare is writing our plays for us."

Muller found Shakespeare impressive because, he claimed, Shakespeare saw "history in the context of nature." The dead have a place on his stage, "nature has a right to vote". In spite of the terror of the possibly endless repetition of the same tragic errors that Shakespeare (and Nietzsche) saw, truth in Shakespeare, Muller insists, travels between decks, the abyss is hope. Repetition is not inevitable. The seeds of new departure do exist, hidden in the possibilities of time. "Our task," said Muller, "or the rest will be statistics and a case for computers, is the work on this departure. Hamlet, the failure, did not achieve it, this his crime. Prospero is the undead Hamlet: at least he breaks his staff, a reply to Caliban', the new Shakespeare reader's indictment of all preceding culture: YOU TAUGHT ME LANGUAGE: AND MY PROFIT ON'T IS, I KNOW HOW TO CURSE."

Shakespeare was a wise critic of all preceding culture because he was a great lover. He identified love as the essence of man's being and saw throughout history what culture had done to man's capacity to love. Against this violation he prescribed not bombs or two-minute hates but hours spent in the seeing place of art. Quite rightly does the Doge, in Howard Barker's play scenes from an execution, say, in envy, to the artist: "I have such power, but not such power."⁴³ This civilization has yet again, in every century, to decide which of the two powers is mightier than the mightiest, and which truly becomes us, and our 'crowned monarchs': the power to destroy and control through war, or the power to preserve and create, i.e. the power of 'art'. Quite in line with what Blake says about the Devourers and the Prolific⁴⁴, there is nothing arbitrary, relative, or post-modern about these positions. These two classes of men, or attitudes to life, he insists, should be enemies, and whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence. Thus, what we need are not false peace-makers but, on the contrary, true seers who can encourage and enable others to see clearly, and choose. Even if (or, perhaps, precisely because) the act of choosing continues to be considered heretical.

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⁴³ Howard Barker, *Scenes From An Execution* (London: John Calder, 1986). The quote is from the closing scene of the play.

⁴⁴ William Blake *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, A Memorable Fancy Plate 15-17, in *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 154-5. Among other things Blake writes: "The Giants that formed this world and that are the cause of its life & the source of all activity are in the chains of the cunning of weak and tame minds, which have power to resist energy: according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning." Blake sees the Prolific, who overflow with excess of delight, as human beings in whom God Acts & Is, since God, for Blake, has his being only in existing beings or Men.

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UMETNOST PROTIV RATA, ILI RAT PROTIV UMETNOSTI? VERZIJE MAKBETA: UPOTREBA ŠEKSPIRA U NATO NAPADU NA JUGOSLAVIJU

Ljiljana Bogoeva Sedlar

Rad poredi interpretacije Šekspirovih dela sa početka, sredine i kraja dvadesetog veka. Šekspir, u delima savremenih umetnika koji se na njega pozivaju da bi umetnost sto jasnije stavili na stranu života i stvaralaštva, razlikuje se od Šekspira regrutovanog da brani vojnopoliitičke interese ideologija i teleologija potpuno suprotnih umetnosti. Rat protiv Jugoslavije predstavlja samo deo rata koji se od Sokrata pa do danas vodi protiv umetničkog pogleda na svet, odnosno protiv oblika svesti čije su početne premise da su ljubav i kreativnost osnovna matrica naše prirode. Odnos prema Šekspiru može pokazati šta se sa svešću Zapada trenutno dešava i kako se sukob ove dve interpretacije ljudske prirode, ili dve ideologije, danas manifestuje.