

*The Dialogue with Hamlet: Paul-Eerik Rummo's  
"Hamlet's Songs" as an Example of the Existential  
Paradigm in Estonian Culture*

ANNELI MIHKELEV

**Abstract.** The article demonstrates different meanings of the motif of Hamlet in the Estonian culture. Hamlet as a literary figure has been very important and influential, a symbol of will and a fighter in a hopeless situation. Paul-Eerik Rummo's poem "Hamlet's Songs" (1964) forms the centre around which revolve not only written texts but also many such cultural texts as theatre performances and music, all connected by allusions to Hamlet. Rummo's poem is one of the most innovative poems from the 1960s in Estonian literature. The generation of the 1960s was influenced by several important contemporary theories, including existentialism. Many young writers systematically undermined the Soviet regime in their works. The use of the motif of Hamlet reveals a similarity between the existential and romantic rebellions. Rummo's dialogue with Hamlet in his poem expresses optimism in a hopeless situation in a way different from Shakespeare's.

**Keywords:** William Shakespeare, Hamlet, (Estonian) poetry, existential rebellion, choral music, theatre, political allegory

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.12697/IL.2013.18.1.18>

## Hamlet and Paul-Eerik Rummo

The motif of Hamlet has been one of the most influential and widespread motives all over the world. Although the meaning of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has changed through centuries we can still ask what *Hamlet* means today. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Allusion* the allusion to Hamlet can mean "someone who talks at length, expressing anxieties, doubts, or unhappiness" (Delahunty *et al* 2001: 288). The aim of the present article is to demonstrate different meanings of the motif of Hamlet in Estonian culture. The main text that my analysis focuses on is Paul-Eerik Rummo's "Hamlet's Songs" ("Hamlet'i laulud", 1964).

Paul-Eerik Rummo is one of the major authors of the Estonian poetry innovation of the 1960s. His poem “Hamlet’s Songs” was published in 1964 in his second collection of poetry, *Tule ikka mu rõõmude juurde* (*Always Come to My Joys*). The Estonian researcher Lauri Sommer has stated that Rummo’s “early writing was lyrical”, and that the “universal quality of his thoughts stems from their gently tragic, self-ironic and playful framing” (Sommer 2001: 131).

Another Estonian researcher Marja Unt has written:

Rummo’s earlier poetry, mostly what appeared in *Anchor Heaver* [*Ankruhiivaja*, 1962], has a brighter world view and more optimistic manner. The title suggests the main motif – setting off on a journey, filled with hope and looking towards the wide expanse ahead. This kind of mood perfectly suited the changed situation in the early 1960s, when the Soviet regime was somewhat mellowing and all kinds of restrictions were relaxed. Hope and perception of the wider world carried on to the next collection, *Always Come to My Joys*, although the youthful zeal seems to have retreated here and more serious tones have crept in, together with a sense of danger and realisation of life’s fragility, which is especially typical of the short cycle *Hamleti laulud* (*The Songs of Hamlet*) (Unt 2006: 6).

It is obvious that more serious aspects, together with a sense of danger and realization of life’s fragility, are represented in the second collection, especially in the poem “Hamlet’s Songs” (see also Olesk 2001: 444). This poem was innovative in Estonian literature and (choral) music at the beginning of the 1960s, and it would be also the prologue to the innovations in Estonian theatre in the second half of the 1960s. Paul-Eerik Rummo’s play *Cinderella Game* (*Tuhkatriinumäng*, 1969) which alludes to Prince Hamlet is one of the significant plays in the development of Estonian drama (see Kruuspere 2006). Luule Epner has pointed out the key-words of the turn of the Estonian drama in 1960s: play, myths, especially literary myths, and ritual. The most important mythical and symbolic figures were Antigone and Hamlet, but Hamlet became more significant (Epner 1988: 170–176).

Consequently, Hamlet as a literary figure has been a very important and influential motif in Estonian literature and culture, and Rummo’s text forms the centre around which revolve not only written texts but also such cultural texts as theatre performances and music.

## Hamlet and existentialism

The most influential part of the play *Hamlet* is the famous monologue of Prince Hamlet (Rummo's poem also refers to the same monologue):

To be, or not to be, that is the question;  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
 And by opposing end them (Shakespeare 2006: 284–285)

Hamlet's monologue expresses a complicated situation, in which there is no good solution, and the protagonist thinks about what to do, to be a rebel or to be a conformist, and this is an existential question for him:

By **to be**, Hamlet could mean (among other things) 'to live' or 'to exist,' with **not to be** thus implying 'to die' or 'to cease to exist'. It is important to note that the division here – being and not being – was one of the stable alternatives in philosophy at the time. Doctor Faustus, the cerebral title character of Christopher Marlowe's great tragedy (written about a decade before *Hamlet*), actually takes up this question in its Greek form – *on kai me on* ('being and not being' – pronounced 'own kai may own'). Faustus attributes this issue to Aristotle, and discards it as not pragmatic enough for his tastes. In this philosophical register, **To be, or not to be** provides a mutually incompatible contradiction; things have to be one way or the other: either they exist or they do not. A contemporary form of Hamlet's proposition in Latin reads *est aut non est*: that is, the question of whether something 'is or is not.' (Bruster 2007: 17)

According to Bruster "Hamlet's **question** [...] goes to the very heart of our life, rising issues of **existence** [emphasis mine – A.M.], agency, and the afterlife." (Bruster 2007: 69)

Hamlet's existential question has inspired several Estonian poets and writers, as has existentialism. According to Rein Veidemann: "In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many writers have influenced the development of existentialist philosophy and they in turn had an influence on the Estonian literature of the 1950s and 1960s. [...] Existentialism found an especially strong resonance in Estonian literature in the second half of the 1960s. It was promoted by the absurdity of the whole Soviet life..." (Veidemann 2000: 50), and that was illustrated by several literary works.

The 1960s were a turbulent time not only in Estonia, but also in other European countries. This period in European culture was characterised by political and social activism, youthfulness, and seething rebellion. Speaking about Estonian literature, “the high tide of radical textual innovations actually remains in the period 1968–1972. The radical approach can be found in authors of the younger generation, as well as in those who had made their debut some years earlier”, suggests Mart Velsker (Velsker 2000: 59).

So it was a rebellious generation, both in the homeland and in other countries, the writers themselves being the descendants of romantic rebellions. Romanticism was a very important phenomenon in European culture since the movement promoted the human wish to direct one’s own destiny, existence and self-awareness, and romanticism served as a basis for several important contemporary theories including existentialism, which adopted ideas similar to romanticism: existentialism glorifies the individual, the experience of choice, but it also involves the absence of a rational understanding of universe, with a consequent fear or sense of absurdity in human life. Not only was the destiny and freedom of the individual important, but also the destiny and freedom of every nation, as reflected in Herder’s (1744–1803) ideas from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Moreover, the ideas of romanticism helped several nations to gain their freedom. Estonian researcher Jüri Talvet has written that in romanticism the European culture found the ‘other’ and began a dialogue with it, but at the same time individuals as well as nations discovered themselves. It was a time when the individual withdrew into himself and discovered himself (Talvet 2005: 302–303).

This individualism and self-analysis was characteristic of the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can therefore admit that the individualism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proceeded from the romantic rebellion which is connected also with existential philosophy. According to Paul Roubiczek existentialism is “a rejection of the absoluteness of reason. [...] The Existentialist philosopher insists that what I really know is not the external world as such, but my own experience; for him the personal is the real” (Roubiczek 1964: 10). In my opinion the Existentialists and romantic rebellions have the same roots, because “[t]he absolute Existentialists, rebelling against an age which is dominated by determinism, want to establish man’s absolute freedom and the assertion that he can create himself is meant to prove this” (Roubiczek 1964: 121). Several researchers emphasize also the factor of choice concerning freedom: “Freedom exists for us in two forms which we could call, somewhat paradoxically, ‘freedom of choice’ and ‘choice of freedom’” (Roubiczek 1964: 122; see also Warnock 1989: 1–2 and Cooper 1999: 153–171). Along with freedom, existentialism also emphasises responsibility: freedom cannot possibly exist, if it is not possible to choose

between good and bad, right and wrong. Choice is the decisive aspect of human society; yet with choice responsibility comes, too. According to Roubiczek:

To feel responsibility is one of our basic experiences, and Existentialism will teach us that we have to admit experience as evidence; for unless we admit that we are able to choose freely between good and evil, right and wrong, we are not responsible for our actions, and thus unable to understand what we feel. [...] without freedom of choice and decision we are not responsible for our actions, and the whole conception of goodness and morality breaks down. [...] all totalitarian states act upon this principle; it has become, in our age, the basis of real, of terrifying actions (Roubiczek 1964: 5–6).

So, choice and responsibility are the phenomena through which existentialists seek and discuss the border between good and bad, the definitions of crime and betrayal, and so forth.

Albert Camus writes in his essay *The Rebel* that romanticism introduced the cult of the individual and, even more, the cult of personality (Camus 1991: 56–58). According to Camus:

Romanticism demonstrates, in fact, that rebellion is part and parcel of dandyism: one of its objectives is appearances. In its conventional forms, dandyism admits a nostalgia for ethics. [...] But at the same time it inaugurates an aesthetic which is still valid in our world, an aesthetic of solitary creators, who are obstinate rivals of a God they condemn. From romanticism onward, the artist's task will not only be to create a world, or to exalt beauty for its own sake, but also to define an attitude. Thus the artist becomes a model and offers himself as an example: art is his ethic (Camus 1991: 59).

Camus named the romantic rebels dandies, although according to literary history these writers were not romantics, but modernists (Baudelaire, Lacenaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont), and modernist art is always ready to rebel against its predecessor style of art. Rebellion is always connected with conformation and adaptation in art and in reality: “To create beauty, he [the artist] must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects. [...] Art thus leads us back to the origins of rebellion, to the extent that it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history.” (Camus 1991: 242–243)

In terms of Estonian history we can also ask where the borders between adaptations and conformity, between adaptation and rebellion are. It is easy to understand why existentialism was an important philosophical trend in the 1960s in Estonian literature: “At the end of 1968 even polemics were released about the “suitability” of existentialism for Soviet society” (Veidemann 2000: 50), while “Paul-Eerik Rummo’s play *Tuhkatriinumäng* (*The Cinderella Game*, 1969) can be taken as an illustration of the fundamental questions of existentialist philosophy” (Veidemann 2000: 50).

Paul-Eerik Rummo’s poem “Hamlet’s Songs” is one of the most innovative poems from this period. Translations of modern European and American literary works influenced Estonian literature in the 1960s, and it was the time of the political “thaw”. The generation of the 1960s was influenced by several important contemporary theories, including existentialism. Several young writers systematically undermined the Soviet regime in their works. In this case, there is a similarity between the existential and romantic rebellions. While in this epoch many East European nations tried to take control of their destinies and attain freedom, it was actually an echo of romanticism. A similar situation, although necessarily hidden, also existed in the 1960s in Estonia and other East European countries. Romanticism was also important because it indicates that it was possible to adapt to some situations only up to a certain point. If the particular, invisible border was crossed, a revolt would occur. Romanticism cultivates continual non-adaptability, a continual negation of existence, and it is a very appropriate basis for innovations, as well as a reason for the artist to rebel against reality.

This literary rebellion in Estonian literature in the 1960s had a political character; it fused with several local tendencies and ideas from Western Europe, although the particular ideas were translated into the local cultural system and adapted to local conditions. And it is interesting and paradoxical that Estonian existentialism was more influenced by Camus’s ideas than by Sartre’s, because in the western European tradition Camus is considered to be less political than Sartre. The political rebellion in Estonia was influenced mainly by Camus’s philosophy, since superficially it seemed more innocent. At the same time, official criticism reduced the influences of existentialism in Estonian literature. The Soviet system provoked situations where different names had to be adopted, and, if somebody wanted to speak about existentialism, a substitution was needed. In the specific Soviet poetics, true ideas and thoughts were hidden between the lines (Velsker 2001: 423–424).

Mart Velsker explains the paradoxical situation as follows:

There is a contradiction between the typical treatments of literature and reality that can be accounted for in different ways. While in the Western culture an opposition of the mainstream and the counterculture was acutely felt in the 1960s, in the Estonia of the period three important factors have to be taken into account: Soviet literature, the national tradition and innovation. In such a situation the terms signifying different tendencies often get switched, the Soviet canon is called traditional, while the national tradition is dubbed innovation *etc.* (Velsker 2000: 59).

The situation was close to the absurd, because everything was confused, and it was difficult to see the difference between the true and the false, the good and the bad, the rebellion and the adaptation.

Concerning the romantic rebellion, it must be pointed out that every rebellion and every negation also contains affirmation (see also Camus 1991: 242–243, mentioned above): if artists try to transform their surroundings and create a new reality, they also are obliged to take something from the old reality, which means that at least to some extent they conform to the old world. This, paradoxically, means that every rebellion and every new reality created from the old reality contains something of the old that was the incentive for the particular rebellion. It is important for the rebel that every rebellion also needs a strategy, a way of balancing on the borders between rebellion and adaptation.

Paul-Eerik Rummo and other Estonian poets who will be analysed below adapted to the surrounding reality, but attempted to change it, using the artistic world they had created, which was based on personal memories and historical memory, and the existential rebellion. Paul-Eerik Rummo focused on the idea of freedom, which was more important to him than any risk or adaptation. Personal and social motifs and interests are connected in Rummo's poetry, and his own pains represent the pains of all nations. The historical and political situation in Estonia was, for many centuries, very similar to that in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, represented in the First Folio's phrase about Denmark being a prison. The dialogue between Hamlet and his friends Guildenstern and Rosencrantz before the players give the performance is very significant. Rosencrantz says to Hamlet:

... the world's grown honest.

HAMLET Then is doomsday near – but your news is not true. But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore? (Shakespeare 2006: 254–255)

Folio-only passages of *Hamlet* contain the famous lines about Denmark and prison which explains the word “true”:

HAMLET ... Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERNE Prison, my lord?

HAMLET Denmark’s a prison.

ROSINCRANCE. Then is the world one. (Shakespeare 2006: 466)

This dialogue, especially the Folio-only passage characterises a totalitarian society, such as the Soviet Union, Soviet Estonia and other Eastern European countries or the Russian Empire (see Thompson, Taylor 2006: 115–122; Shakespeare 2006: 466). One of the best examples of Hamlet as a symbol of political resistance is Boris Pasternak’s (1890–1960) banned novel *Doctor Zhivago* (1957). Pasternak’s novel ends with the poem “Hamlet” where the poetic ‘ego’ of Pasternak identifies with Hamlet’s and Christ’s destiny and mission (see Pärli 1999: 558).

The Estonian prose writer Jaan Kross’ (1920–2007) novel *The Czar’s Madman* (*Keisri hull*, 1978) contains implicit play with the motif of Hamlet: the protagonist of the novel “Timotheus von Bock is declared mad for criticising the Czarist regime, a fate which also befell dissidents in the Soviet times” (Kronberg 2005: 68). Kross does not use direct reference to Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, but there are similar conflict and motives of madness and / or non-madness or pseudo-madness in both literary works. Mardi Valgemäe indicates that Kross plays with Soviet censorship: it seems the plot of the novel *The Czar’s Madman* is about Russian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but actually it is the connotation and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire means 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet regime. The protagonist Jakob in the same novel used the similar scheme in his diary: if he writes about Russian romantic poet Zhukovsky he actually concentrates on the life of Timotheus von Bock (Valgemäe 2005: 74). It means that Vassili Zhukovsky stands for Timotheus von Bock in Jakob’s diary and 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire represents totalitarian Soviet regime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kross’ novel is a perfect political allegory which uses also the motif of Hamlet to refer to madness or to the schizophrenic situation which may lead to madness.



### “Hamlet’s Songs” and beat poetry

The first strophe of Rummo’s poem “Hamlet’s Songs” establishes a dangerous and threatening atmosphere: something is ominous, and nature creates a tangible feeling of fear. The cutting grass and a child who has injured his hand on the cutting grass represent that situation; it is an inexplicable feeling. The atmosphere is quite similar to the atmosphere of Shakespeare’s play:

The sea withdraws into itself. It is ebb tide.  
On the dunes a steak of storm – foam fades.

Listen: what is the breeze rustling,  
Ominous and lurking?

Sawgrass, oh friend, sawgrass.  
And a gathering before us a cloud-mass. (Rummo 2006<sup>1</sup>: 8)

The next lines of the poem introduce an unexpected contrast:

a couple of lovers who run fearless  
along the beach, barefoot,

barefoot and in their veins the windwine - - -  
Sawgrass, oh friend, sawgrass. (Ib.)

The lovers express positive and optimistic emotions in the poem; they do not fear the stormy sea and cutting grass, although these are dangerous:

All those who wish to remain children

hoping that the cloud, the large black one,  
never touches their love, –  
[...]  
for a moment heaven got mixed up with earth  
for a moment I understood: no longer

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<sup>1</sup> Transl. by J. Talvet and H. L. Hix.

can I stand hesitating and silent where one should  
 simply cry the bad into the good - - -  
 (Rummo 2006: 8–9)

The second part of the song sounds like an answer to Shakespeare's protagonist Hamlet:

Yes, to be, to be, certainly to be  
 [...] and from the scabbard of doubts and boredom  
 [...] to draw the sword, when meanness and stupidity  
 [...] threaten to drown my childish childhood streams  
 [...] in the mud of deceptions. (Rummo 2006: 9)

Between these lines above the lines in brackets and italics (see also Rummo 1964: 62) repeat as a refrain:  
 (Ah, only one lap, only one lap on which to rest  
 my head!) (Rummo 2006: 9)

Most probably the refrain alludes to the contradictory and tense dialogue between Hamlet and Ophelia in the second scene in the third act of Shakespeare's play:

HAMLET Lady, shall I lie in you lap?  
 OPHELIA No, my lord.  
 HAMLET Do you think I meant country matters?  
 OPHELIA I think nothing, my lord. (Shakespeare 2006: 304–305)

Although there is a dialogue between Rummo's and Shakespeare's texts, the meanings of Rummo's and Shakespeare's texts are opposites. Rummo's text was written at the beginning of the 1960s in the Soviet Estonia, it sounds like a beat poem from USA or Western Europe in the mid 1950s to 1960s. The last strophe intensifies the idea of anti-violence or anti-war:

Then to be, and at the same time to know  
 that life is not our struggle, to know  
 that what is coming is greater than me  
 and also greater than my enemy. Then to be,  
 and at the same time  
 to think of the children yet unborn whose laughter  
 destroys the swords of both of us. (Rummo 2006: 9–10)

It seems the main idea of this poem is “Make love not war!” or, as Frank Sinatra sang and alluded to the monologue of Hamlet in the song *Let’s Fall In Love*, in 1960: “to be or not to be, let our hearts discover”. Rummo’s poem was a new approach to the topic of anti-war in the Soviet context, because the idea of love and children express the main idea of the poem. Rummo brought more humanity and bright feelings to the poetry of Soviet Estonia, and that poem expresses also the influences from the Western Europe culture.

The composer Veljo Tormis wrote the choral work *The Song of Hamlet* in 1965 (words by Paul-Eerik Rummo, music by Veljo Tormis). Tormis has explained that he used the principle of two choruses: one chorus expresses nature as a background element and the other chorus expresses Hamlet’s thoughts (Kuusk 2000: 120). Tormis’ music and Rummo’s text express a dialogue between nature and the human being, and also Rummo’s poetic ‘ego’ which identifies with Hamlet in this poem. Here lies the similarity between Rummo’s and Pasternak’s poems.

The same Rummo’s poem has also influenced Estonian theatre: the performance *Hamlet’s Songs* (directed by Mati Unt) staged on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April in 1978. That performance dealt with Estonian poetry from 1960 to 1970, not only Paul-Eerik Rummo’s works. It is significant that the motif of Hamlet became a symbol which connected different Estonian poets and poems, but at the same time the title of the performance indicates also to Rummo’s poem. So, it is an ambivalent play with the motif of Hamlet, and we can ask if it seeks a dialogue with Shakespeare’s text or with Rummo’s or maybe both. But it is a fact that Hamlet always exists at least symbolically in Estonian theatre.

“Hamlet’s Songs” (1964) and “The Prologue of Hamlet” (1913)

Rummo’s poem also points to the reception of other Shakespeare performances in Estonia. The first Shakespeare play on the Estonian stage was *The Merchant of Venice* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January in 1888 by the semi-professional theatre Vanemuine in Tartu. The next Shakespeare play on the same stage was the

comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1889. The next step towards more professional production was taken by the theatre Estonia in Tallinn, which had begun working as a professional theatre in 1906. In 1910–1913 Shakespeare's tragedies *Othello* (1910), *King Lear* (1911) and *Hamlet* (1913) were presented in the same theatre, all directed by Karl Jungholz. There was an assembly of particularly talented and legendary actors of the time in the theatre Estonia, and the greatest success of the cast of the Estonia Theatre was the production of *Hamlet*. It was presented at the inauguration of the impressive new theatre building, with its large stage and spacious hall, and the text of the tragedy was translated from the original language (both *Othello* and *King Lear* had been translated from German). So, the Estonian translation of *Hamlet* (by Aleksander Ferdinand Tombach in 1910) was the first play by Shakespeare translated directly from English.

In a cultural sense that was indeed rather late, but there were several complicated political and historical factors which had dominated in Estonia till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The actors Theodor Altermann and Erna Villmer, who played Hamlet and Ophelia, had attained great mastery by that time, and Shakespeare was one of the most popular playwrights in Estonia (Kask 1964: 263–265).

There are two implicit allusions in Rummo's text which connect "Hamlet's Songs" and the Estonian poet Gustav Suits' poem "Hamleti proloog" ("The Prologue of Hamlet", 1913). The first allusion would be the motif of nature, because both poems begin with nature motifs, which represent the spirit of the poems. Rummo begins with the image of the sea, and Suits' poem begins with autumn. Both images are serious and thoughtful. "Hamleti proloog" was published in Suits' second collection *Tuulemaa* (*The Land of Winds*, 1913). That collection reflects historical events and feelings:

The post-revolution mood of decline, the disappointment of the poet and his generation, and a sense of premature ageing. [...] The personal feeling of Suits as someone living away from his native land is also strongly felt. It can be said as well that *The Land of Winds* expresses something universally human or typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century man: doubts, disappointment in rationalism, feelings of insecurity. The wish to find a place of one's own in the windy world – or to create one's own Land of Winds – nevertheless persists. Contemporary, as well as later, reviewers have paid great attention to the meaning of the image of the Land of Winds. Is this Estonia, suffering in the winds of time, or the refuge of the poet's own mind and spirit? The symbolist image allows both interpretations, being simultaneously a general vision of the whole world and life as an unpredictable and forever changing domain of winds. The only choice is to

accept this volatility which, for a man who has distanced himself from nature and traditions, means finding the lost unity again. The poem *Under the Trembling Aspens* displays the most vivid recognition of the initial togetherness of man-nature-creative work-cosmos (Süvalep 2003: 19–20).

Actually Suits' poem is also an occasional poem, celebrating a very important event in Estonian culture. On the 24th of August in 1913 the new building of the theatre Estonia opened in Tallinn. It was a drama theatre, and later it became an opera house. Gustav Suits wrote a poem entitled "Hamleti proloog" for the opening of the new theatre house. It is a very important day for Estonians and also for Hamlet, the Danish prince; he became a historical symbol as a man who fights during a complicated and hostile time (see Oras 2003: 20–21). "Hamleti proloog" contains seven poems, and each poem has its own unique structure, but all of the strophes contain three lines displaying Dante's *terza rima* from *Divina Commedia* (1472).

Gustav Suits (1883–1956) was a poet, critic and professor of comparative literature. He was one of the leading innovators of Estonian literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was the ideological leader of the Young Estonia (Noor-Eesti) group from 1905–1916. Suits was influenced by the French symbolists, as well as Russian and Finnish poets (symbolists and other modernists). The first two poems in "Hamleti proloog" allude to Suits' collections of poems *Elu tuli* (*The Fire of Life*, 1905) and *Tuulemaa* (1913). These collections are connected with the revolutionary situation in Russia. *Elu tuli* is hopeful and youthfully optimistic, but *Tuulemaa* presents the atmosphere after the suppression of revolution. Nature is a very important motif in Suits' poem; he uses nature to express revolutionary emotions as well as the depression after the revolution.

"Hamleti proloog" is an optimistic poem in that collection like Rummo's "Hamlet's Songs" later: Suits presents in the fifth poem the ghost of the great William Shakespeare who finally has arrived in Estonian theatre and culture, and the protagonist Prince Hamlet is the symbol of that time, "being one o'th' worst" (Shakespeare 2006: 466).

## Conclusion

Paul-Eerik Rummo's poem "Hamlet's Songs" connects Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and also other texts from Estonian literature and culture. The protagonist Hamlet has different meaning in Estonian culture than in Western European countries. Hamlet became a symbol of will and a fighter in the hopeless

situation in Estonian culture, and that is the reason why one text about Hamlet indicates also to other poems on the same topic. Rummo's dialogue with Hamlet in the poem expresses the optimism in the hopeless situation and it is opposite of the original text, and at the same time the image of romantic rebel relies often on the motives of *Hamlet* in Estonian culture. The existential question of Hamlet "to be, or not to be" gets a certain and vital answer: "Yes, to be, to be, certainly to be", and that answer brings a new meaning in the context of the existential paradigm which had a strong influence on Estonian culture in the 1960s.

**Anneli Mihkelev**

*milenna@hot.ee*

Tallinna Ülikool

Eesti Keele ja Kultuuri Instituut

Narva mnt 25

10120 Tallinn

EESTI

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