

Social Hamlet: Time and Culture in the W. Shakespeare's Tragedy

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Sociocultural factors affect language lexis directly contrary to its phonology and grammar structure where such influence is moot. The tragedy Hamlet by Shakespeare, as a specimen of discourse, reflects the various aspects of the social environment ranging from medieval cosmology to pastimes and entertainments. A detailed statistical and semantic analysis of the original Hamlet text (First Folio) has been done by mixed method research. All the items related to the cultural background have been thoroughly gleaned from the text, interpreted, and studied by their semantics, structure, and figures of speech. The research reveals that the most numerous semantic group under consideration refers to 'special areas of activity' (31.75%), which includes such domains, as hawking, hunting, sea, military, pastime (games), theater, law, and arrow shooting. This group is followed by that of cultural references to customs, traditions, realia of the time, and historical events (17.46%). Then in the descending order, go the notions that refer to scientific views of the time (11.9%), those of superstitions (11.11%) and prejudices (10.32%). The group of medieval cosmology and that of religion are less numerous – 9.52% and 7.94% correspondingly. Structurally, communicative units, sentences and sets of those (58.73%), prevail over lexical units (35.71%) and idioms (5.56%). Among figures of speech, animal metaphor, transfer of different human qualities and that from concrete to abstract notions, along with flower symbolism as metonymy are most numerous.

Keywords: *cultural environment, Hamlet, medieval belief, obsolete sense, reference, Shakespeare's language*

Introduction

Bringing to light the relation between language and culture (or society in terms of sociolinguistics) has always been the Holy Grail of researchers. 'Culture' belongs to one of the most complex words in any language. Its definition depends on a science that deals with it – anthropology, sociology, esthetics, semiotics, etc. In the present study, culture, after Eagleton, "... *can be loosely summarized as the complex of values, customs, beliefs and practices which constitute the way of life of a specific group ... 'that complex whole', as the anthropologist E.B. Tylor ... puts it ..., 'which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'*" (Eagleton 2000, p. 42). This definition stresses the idea of synchronic cross-cut of the late Tudor England, while 'time' in the study refers to hallmarks of the language in diachronic dimension, different from the present-day English.

The early sociological framing of language goes back to the beginning of the 19th c. (Coulmas 2017, p. 18). The 'strong version' of the Sapir and Whorf's

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theory that language determines the way people think, has not been supported by modern scholars. Labov, e.g., states that "... *the force of social evaluation ... is generally brought to bear upon ... the lexicon and phonetics*" (Labov 2001, p. 28). Indeed, the ways sociocultural factors affect the rigid grammar structures are intricate, if any at all. One can legitimately ask whether there is a connection between the Norman Conquest of England and the change to verb-non-final word order in ME. Or what is the correspondence between the Kurgan burial of Proto-Indo-European, along with the domestic horse and the chariot, ethnic markers of those, on the one hand, and the system of ablaut, a characteristic feature of Indo-European – vocalic alternations accompanied by morphological changes, on the other?

Still, studying the lexicon that reflects the cultural aspects of any given period could spell out the nature of language change and the complexities of interplay between intralinguistic and extralinguistic factors. From this standpoint, *Hamlet* by Shakespeare is a unique specimen of discourse, an encyclopedia of his time, with a bird-eye's view of the pertaining social aspects.

Hence, the research objective of the present study lies in finding out how the social environment of the late Tudor England is reflected in the language of *Hamlet* in semantics, structure, and figures of speech.

The method of discourse analysis, with a combination of macro and micro-analytical approaches (qualitative and quantitative approaches or mixed method research) has been used in the study.

Literature Review

A complete review of Shakespearean Literature would go far beyond the scope of this paper. Still, there are some relevant sources, which have been tapped into. Thus, the influences of foreign languages on and difference of English in the Bard's works are dealt with in the monograph *Interlinguicity, Internationality, and Shakespeare* (Saenger 2014). In particular, the author's elaboration on the Shakespeare's technique of coining new words and stylistic innovations – tautology, parallelism, repetition, and doubling of terms (Saenger 2014, pp. 97-98) contributes to an insight into the text of *Hamlet*.

The political background of the period is considered in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (Hadfield 2004). Especially, the book reveals how the Shakespeare's plays are informed by contemporary political ideas and events (Hadfield 2004, p. 12), the Bard's use of historical parallels, "... *given his own involvement in the events between 1599 and 1601*" (Hadfield 2004, p. 16), Shakespeare's criticism of court life and behavior (Hadfield 2004, p. 17), the indirect relation of *Hamlet* to contemporary events, as "*Elsinore represents dying Tudor England*" (Hadfield 2004, pp. 87-88).

The Shakespeare's language has been profoundly studied in *Shakespeare and the Arts of Language* (McDonald 2012). Among other things, the author dwells on the role of connotation in figurative language, together with that of figuration in coloring the text, and "... *the difference between the para-phrasable content of a*

statement and the effect of its figuration” (McDonald 2012, pp. 61-70). All that helps understand better the similes of the tragedy.

The book of Hope (Hope 1994) deals with a socio-linguistic study of Shakespeare’s plays. The author brings to light the hallmarks of Shakespeare’s style, as the use of the auxiliary ‘do’, relative markers, the pronouns ‘thou’ and ‘you’.

Numerous dictionaries on various aspects of Shakespeare’s language are also abundant: the informal language of the Bard is presented in the Dictionary of Blake (Blake 2004), the legal language – in the Dictionary of Sokol and Sokol (Sokol B, Sokol M 2004), a Glossary of the Bard’s Plays and Poems – in Shewmaker’s dictionary (Shewmaker 2008).

The playwright’s philosophical ideas are described in the work of Bevington (Bevington 2008). The most relevant to our research are the Shakespeare’s ideas on writing and acting (Bevington 2008, pp. 74-106) and those on religious controversy and issues of faith (Bevington 2008, pp. 106-143), which are reflected in the play (the apparition of the *Ghost*, *Hamlet*’s monolog on acting, etc.).

Shakespeare sources are studied in the Dictionary of Gillespie (Gillespie 2001). De Sousa considers cross-cultural encounters and environment in the Bard’s works (de Sousa 2002), Wells – sexuality in his plays (Wells 2010), Blake – the grammar of Shakespeare’s language (Blake 2002). The hidden language of Shakespeare encoded in symbols is revealed by Asquith (Asquith 2006), and Pearce (Pearce 2010).

The works of ‘old-timers’ – Drake in 1817 (Drake 1969), Johnson in 1765 (Johnson 1958), along with the commentary of Kean (Kean 1859) and Decker (Decker 1843) provide much valuable information on the Bard’s time, regarding customs, traditions, rites, together with peculiarities of the Shakespeare’s language.

Methodology

As it is known, there are three early editions of the text: First Quarto (Q1) in 1603, Second Quarto (Q2) in 1604-1605, and First Folio (F1 or F) in 1623 (Hattaway 1987). The problem of ‘authentic’ text is avoided in this study. It is established that Q2 and F1 texts are probably superior to Q1, which is shorter and designed for the stage performance. The text F1 with its original spelling has served as material for this research. The F1 text is used by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) for its quotations, as well (Simpson and Weiner 1994). In some rare cases, examples from Q2 were included in the study, they are marked as Q2. Though the original text F1 did not have ‘chapter and verse’ numeration (acts, scenes, lines), this paper follows the usual later practice (used also by the OED) of such numeration for the sake of transparency. Meanings of the lexical items are often taken from the OED and sometimes abridged.

The method procedure is as follows. Firstly, the text of *Hamlet* was thoroughly studied with special reference to the cultural hallmarks, wherefrom the corresponding language units were gleaned. Then all the items were thoroughly analyzed, tapping into various sources – commentaries and works on *Hamlet*. The language units in question were itemized and systematized into the following domains – medieval cosmology; scientific views; religious beliefs; superstitions, customs and traditions;

special areas of human activity (occupations, pastimes, diversions, etc.); prejudices, etc. In turn, these groups were scrutinized to undergo more detailed classification. Thus, special areas of human activities include hawking, hunting, sea, military, pastime (games), theater, law, arrow shooting, etc.; the group of contemporary realia contains those related to customs, traditions, burial and funeral rites, St. Valentine Day, flower symbolism, old songs, political references; superstitions are broken down into apparition of ghosts, the observance of spells and charms, queer customs and faith in omens, etc.

Secondly, the structure of the cultural mentions has been researched. The items were divided into three groups: lexical, communicative (sentences and sets of those), and idioms. Their specifics have been assessed.

Thirdly, figures of speech were considered in the items, which possess them. The most prolific types of metaphor and metonymy were commented on and classified.

Findings

In the tragedy, 126 direct mentions connected to the cultural (social) environment of the author's time and place are found. The first group to be discussed refers to medieval cosmology. It is known that the medieval views on the Universe were based on geocentric theory of the solar system by Ptolemy that tapped into Aristotle's physics. According to the geocentric theory, the Earth was fixed at the center, deferents were large circles centered on the Earth, and epicycles were small circles whose centers moved around the circumferences of the deferents, with the Sun, Moon, etc. moving around the circumferences of the deferents. The stars were fixed on their spheres and did not rotate on their own, contrary to planets (<http://abyss.uoregon.edu/~js/ast123/lectures/lec02.html>). This group contains 12 cases:

"When yond same Starre that's Westward from the Pole Had made his course t' illume that part of Heauen ..." [I.i.42-44].

"That as the Starre moues not but in his Sphere." [IV.vii.15].

"So many iournies may the Sunne and Moone Make vs againe count o're, ere loue be done." [III.ii.161-162].

"And thirtie dozen Moones with borrowed sheene, About the World haue times twelue thirties beene." [III.ii.157-158].

Another example from the text has to do with retrograde motion of planets, when each planet "... *seems to slow down at times, then move in reverse ... before resuming its course*" (<https://www.britannica.com/video/23882/Ptolemy-theory-solar-system>). As from above, the planets were moving on two sets of circle (deferents and epicycles), and this retrograde motion kept the planets in their circular orbits around the Earth (Ibid.). Thus, the *King* implores *Hamlet*:

"For your intent In going backe to Schoole in Wittenberg, It is most retrograde to our desire." [I.ii.113]. Here: *retrograde* is used in the obsolete sense introduced by

Shakespeare ‘contrary’, derived from astronomy (‘going contrary to motion of the sign: East to West’).

The fixed positions of the stars in the spheres and their structure are reflected in the following quotations:

“*Make thy two eyes like Starres, start from their Spheres.*” [I.v.22-23].

“*Doubt thou, the Starres are fire, Doubt, that the Sunne doth moue.*” [II.ii.115].

“*What is he, whose griefes ... conjure the wandring Starres, and makes them stand ...*” [V.i.258, 260].

The soul in medieval astrology, after Plato, was associated with the stars. Souls are made by Demiurge in numbers equal to the stars (Barton 2003, p. 109). Pythagorians and Platonists stressed the astral origin of the human soul (Barton 2003, p. 110). When *Polonius* says to his daughter: “*Lord Hamlet is a Prince out of thy Starre.*” [II.ii.140], he means that they both have different status, and he is out of her reach.

Next two cases refer to the ties between astrology and medicine, which were strong in the Middle Ages. The influence of the planets on the human body was contradictory and controversial (Barton 2003, pp. 185-192). Thus, *Horatio* seeing *the Ghost* exclaims:

“*But soft, behold: Loe, where it comes againe: Ile crosse it, though it blast me. Stay Illusion.*” [I.i.126-127]. Here: *to blast* ‘(of a malign planet) to exercise its bad influence’.

“*The nights are wholsome, then no Planets strike.*” [I.i.161]. Here: *to strike* ‘(of a malign planet) to kill (obs.)’

One more extract related to astrology is found in Q2:

“*As stars with trains of fire and dewes of blood, Disasters in the sun; and the moist star, Upon whose influence Neptune’s empire stands, Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.*” [I.i.129-132].

Here: *moist star* is the Moon, which was believed to be a source of dew and whose influence on the tides was known since 2nd c. BCE (Barton 2003). Cicero stated that from the Moon come moisture and dew, useful for nourishment of living being and plants (Barton 2003).

The second group under consideration relates to scientific views of that time. Evidently, in some cases it overlaps with that of astrology and erroneous beliefs, since the medieval science bore the birthmarks of both. This set counts 15 items. Firstly, the following should be encapsulated.

In ancient and medieval science, the nature consisted of four elements: earth, water, air, and fire, with each having the corresponding qualities: dry, moist (or humid), cold, and hot. They were thought to match corresponding *humors* (blood – air, black choler – earth, phlegm – water, and choler – fire). The earth was dry and cold, water – moist and cold, air – moist and hot, fire – dry and hot. The combination of those elements was thought to make up these four *humors* (fluids)

in human's body that determined his/her character. In the healthy organism, antagonizing humors were balanced, while an excess of one or more of those caused diseases (Barton 2003, pp. 911-916). Many cases in the group relate in some way to this ground principle, as:

"Awake the God of Day: and at his warning, Whether in Sea, or Fire, in Earth, or Ayre, Th' extrauagant, and erring Spirit, hyes." [I.i.153-155].

Another example: *"And since so Neighbour'd to his youth, and humour [=state of mind], That you vouchsafe your rest heere in our Court."* [II.ii.11-12].

Next quotation parachutes from the medieval sense of the word *temper*, along with *temperament* and *complexion*, as 'due combination of the above-mentioned qualities':

"He tels me my sweet Queene, that he hath found The head and sourse of all your Sonnes distemper [=malaise]." [II.ii.54-55].

Again: *"The King, sir ... Is in his retyrement, maruellous distemper'd."* [III.ii.307, 309-310].

And: *"Vpon the heate and flame of thy distemper [=state of madness] ..."* [II.iv.124].

Or: *"Mee thinks it is very soultry, and hot for my Complexion."* [V.ii.98-99].

Some vital body organs were considered in the Bard's time as seats of emotions and feelings: *liver* – the hub of love and violent passions, *heart* – the center of vital functions, the seat of life, the life itself; *mind* – the center of intellectual abilities, *bowels* used to stand for 'offspring, descendants'. In the following, *Hamlet* says:

"But I am Pigeon-Liuer'd, and lacke Gall." [II.ii.574], here: *pigeon* used in the old sense 'coward'.

The next case – *"And blest are those, Whose Blood and Iudgement are so well co-mingled."* [III.ii.78-79], after Johnson, shows that according to the doctrine of the four humors, *desire* and *confidence* were seated in the blood, judgment in the phlegm, and the due mixture of the humors made a perfect character (Johnson 1958).

Some obsolete senses nowadays bear the birthmarks of medieval views:

"This is the very extasie [=morbid state, as epilepsy, frenzy] of Loue." [II.i.102].

Again: *"... blasted with extasie ..."* [III.i.172].

Another example is: *"... the humourous [=peevis] man shall end his part in peace ..."* [II.ii.334-335].

The next small passage shows a wordplay based on old senses of *distempered* and *choler*: *"The King ... maruellous distemper'd [=troubled, vexed] ... rather with choller [=bile, purgation] ... for me to put him to his Purgation, would perhaps plundge him into farre more Choller [=anger, wrath]."* [III.ii.307, 309-310, 312, 314-315].

Another case in point is *spleen* with its obsolete derivative *splenative*. When *Hamlet* comes to fight with *Laertes* at the *Ophelia*'s funeral, he exclaims: "Sir though I am not *Spleenatiue* [=of hot and hasty temper], and rash, Yet haue I something in me dangerous, Which let thy wisenesse feare. Away thy hand." [V.i.265-267]. According to the OED, *spleen* at that time combined the opposite senses – 'the seat of melancholy or morose feelings' with that of 'the seat of laughter or mirth' (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 1858). Then the derivative (now all obsolete senses) emerged: 'merriment', 'caprice, whim', 'fit of temper, passion', 'courage, hot temper', wherefrom the meaning in question developed.

The biggest theme group under consideration can roughly be defined as 'special areas', 40 items (two of them in Q2), which includes such domains, as hawking, hunting, sea, military, pastime (games), theater, law, arrow shooting (single cases are not accounted for). As Drake puts it, hawking was "... during the reigns of Elizabeth and James, the most prevalent and fashionable of all amusements" (Drake 1969, p. 255). Being at the peak of its popularity and reputation at that time, it "... descended from the nobility to the gentry and wealthy yeomanry" (Drake 1969, p. 255). This diversion was very costly, and addicts often sacrificed their fortunes. The falconry jargon has left its traces in the tragedy. Thus, *Hamlet* after seeing the *Ghost* of his Father, answers his worried friends: "*Hillo, ho, ho, boy; come bird, come!*" [I.v.118], here: *hillo* was a command used by a falconer to his trained bird to return.

In another example "*But there is Sir an ayrie [=brood] of Children, little Yases, that crye out on the top of question ...*" [II.ii.339-340], *eyas* is 'a little hawk for training'.

One more instance of the same ilk: "*Masters, you are all welcome: wee'l e'ne to't like French Faulconers, flie at any thing we see.*" [II.ii.422-423]. Here, reference is made to the trained French falcons, which as actors like to play any script, are eager to attack any prey.

In the last citation related to hawking: "... if he be now return'd, As checking at his Voyage ..." [IV.vii.69-70], *checking* is 'stopping short the falcon's flight calling it back' (compared to *Hamlet*, who could break his voyage and return to Denmark).

The nature of the next diversion had drastically changed in the 16th c. "*All the sport now consists of speed ... the speed of the fleed blood-horse ... a racer*" (Drake 1969, p. 274). The hunting in the enclosures, as parks or forests, had been over. At that time, this pastime became training, preparation for the fatigue of a war, since the sport required much endurance, strength, and courage, as pursuing a stag or a wild boar. The sport exhibited a 'very imposing spectacle', with greyhounds, masters of the game, blasting horns, and other pompous and splendid rituals (Drake 1969, p. 274). In the tragedy, 5 examples related to hunting are found. Thus, *Polonius* comments on the *Hamlet*'s vows to *Ophelia*: "*Springes to catch Woodcocks. I doe know.*" [I.iii.115]. Woodcocks were believed to be an easy game to catch, witless birds. Again, being mortally wounded by *Hamlet*, *Laertes* cries out in agony: "*Why as a Woodcock To mine Sprindge, Osricke, I am iustly kill'd with mine owne Treacherie.*" [V.ii.302-303].

In another episode, *Polonius* suggests to the *King* that he knows the cause of *Hamlet's* distraction: “*And I do thinke, or else this braine of mine Hunts not the traile of Policie, so sure As I haue vs'd to do.*” [II.ii.46-48], where *trail* is ‘a course of a pursued animal by its scent’. *Rosencrantz*, in his turn, while assuring *Hamlet* that he managed to bring actors for entertainment, says: “... *wee coated them on the way, and hither are they comming to offer you Seruice.*” [II.ii.317-318], where *coat* is an old hunting term for dog to overtake a game in hare pursuing [=we manage to catch up with the actors and bring them here].

The last instance of hunting terms usage in the tragedy is the episode when the rioters headed by *Laertes* try to break into the *King's* palace, and *Gertrude* observes: “*How cheerefully on the false Traile they cry, Oh this is Counter you false Danish Dogges.*” [IV.v.83-84], with the idea that they are wrong, assuming that *Polonius* was killed by the *King*. Here: *counter* is ‘an opposite direction of the game pursuit’.

Theater is another special area, wherefrom some citations originate. Thus, in the Act II when *Hamlet* arranges a performance to help bring to light the *King's* guilt, he gives instructions to the actors, as follows: “*O it offends mee to the Soule, to see a robustious Pery-wig-pated Fellow, teare a Passion to tatters, to verie ragges, to split the eares of the Groundlings: who (for the most part) are capeable of nothing, but inexplicable dumbe shewes ...*” [II.ii.8-12]. *Groundlings* are ‘common people used to watch the play as standees’, *dumb show* is ‘a pantomime light performance that preceded the play’. In the same scene, *Hamlet* requests the ‘top’ player: “*And let those that play your Clownes, speake no more then is set downe for them.*” [II.ii.37-38], alluding to the practice of free exchange of actors’ quips on the stage.

There is another episode, when *Hamlet* rebukes the *Queen* that she married his uncle, comparing the latter to the *vice*: “*A vice of Kings, ... A King of shreds and patches.*” [III.iv.99, 103]. *Vice* was a fool of the old moralities, usually extravagantly dressed and was thought to be a predecessor of Punch.

There are some other references to amusements of that time. Thus, the ruinous practice of gambling (dicing) is shown in *Hamlet's* words to his mother: “*Makes marriage vows as false as Dicers Oathes.*” [III.iv.45-46]. Gambling took its hold in London in the end of the 16th c., the ‘vile houses’ were planted everywhere, and unfortunate dicers firmly believed that “... *dice were first made of the bones of a witch, and cards of her skin*”, but were unable to forsake that pernicious habit (Drake 1969, p. 158).

There is little known about the sports of bowling and tennis in that time, but next three citations relate to those. When *Polonius* gives instructions to *Laertes* on his leave, he observes: “*But doe not dull thy palme, with entertainment Of each vnhatc't, vnfledg'd Comrade.*” [I.iii.64-65]. *Polonius* probably means *palm-play* ‘a game like tennis of that time played with palms’.

In his famous monolog, *Hamlet* exclaims: “*To sleepe, perchance to Dreame; I, there's the rub.*” [III.i.65]. According to the OED, *rub* as ‘an obstacle or impediment by which a bowl is hindered in, or diverted from’ was frequently used in figurative senses in 16-17th cc.’ (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 1623).

In another episode, when *Polonius* wants his servant *Reynaldo* to check his son's behavior, he says: "*With windlesses, and with assaies of Bias, By indirections finde directions out.*" [II.i.62-63]. Here: *bias* is 'an oblique line in which a bowl runs' (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 132).

Arrow shooting took up a backseat at the time in question and was in decline: "... *the disuse of archery was so general, that the "Companies of Bowyers and Fletchers" made heavy complaints, and procured a work to be written, in order to place before "the nobility and gentlemen of England," their distress, and deprivation of subsistence, from the neglect of the bow*" (Drake 1969, p. 180). There are 3 quotations in the play, which refer to the practice. When the *King* assigns *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern* to spy on *Hamlet*, the latter assures him:

"*And here giue vp our selues, in the full bent.*" [II.ii.30], with the sense 'wholly, as an archer pulling back the arrow and the bowstring to the full bent of the bow'.

Equally: "*They foole me to the top of my bent.*" [III.ii.384].

The last example of the group is self-evident and needs no explanation: "*So that my Arrowes Too slightly timbred for so loud a Winde, Would haue reuerted to my Bow againe, And not where I had arm'd them.*" [IV.vii.23-26].

References to the military sphere comprise 4 citations. Two of them are found in the F1. Thus, when *Hamlet* urges his friends to keep silence about the apparition of *Ghost* of his Father, with the latter crying to them to swear, the *Prince* remarks: "*Well said old Mole, can'st worke i'th' ground so fast? A worthy Pioner, once more remoue good friends.*" [I.v.181-182], where *pioneer* has an old sense of 'a miner'.

In another instance, *Hamlet* accusing his mother of wrong-doing, tries to bring her to senses: "*If damned Custome haue not braz'd it so, That it is prooffe and bulwarke against Sense.*" [III.iv.37-38], where *proof* is archaic meaning for 'tested armory against shots'.

Another two citations referring to the military sphere are found in the Q2. Thus, sensing that *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern* set up a trap for him, *Hamlet* compares himself to a sapper, who would dig deeper tunnels (*mines*) to undermine enemy's constructions, making them blow with their own bomb: "*For 'tis the sport to have the enginer [=sapper] Hoist [=blown] with his own petard [=bomb]; and't shall go hard But I will delve one yard below their mines [=tunnels] And blow them at the moon. O, 'tis most sweet When in one line two crafts directly meet.*" [III.iv.206-210].

Last but not least to the topic, the *King* praises the sincerity of *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern* as: "... *whose whisper o'er the world's diameter As level [=aiming good] as the cannon to his blank [=gun's target].*" [IV.i.41-42].

Law terms, in general 13 items, are used in the extract when *Hamlet* sees a lawyer's skull and ponders on the transience of a human life: "... *where be his Quiddits [arch. 'nicety in arguments'] now? his Quillets [=verval nicety]? his Cases? his Tenures [English Law: 'possessions'], and his Tricks? This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of Land, with his Statutes [obs. 'a bond by which the creditor had the power of holding the debtor's lands in case of default'], his Recognizances [=a bond or obligation to pay a debt], his Fines [=the compromise of a fictitious or collusive suit for the possession of land], his double Vouchers*

[=when a vouchee vouches over], *his Recoueries* [=the fact or procedure of gaining possession of some property by a verdict of a court]: *Is this the fine of his Fines, and the recovery of his Recoueries, to haue his fine Pate full of fine Dirt? will his Vouchers vouch* [obs. 'to guarantee the title to or legal possession of'] *him no more of his Purchases, and double ones too, then the length and breadth of a paire of Indentures* [=a sealed agreement, contract between parties]? *the very Conueyances* [=a written document by which the transference of property is effected] *of his Lands will hardly lye in this Boxe; and must the Inheritor himselfe haue no more?"* [V.i.99-112] "*Is not Parchment* [=legal document] *made of Sheep-skinnes?"* [V.i.114].

Two citations related to the seafaring are found in the play. They are self-explanatory. When *Polonius* urges his son to board a ship he says: "*The winde sits in the shoulder of your saile.*" [I.iii.56].

In another place, *Hamlet* asks *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern*: "*Let me see, to withdraw with you, why do you go about to recouer the winde of mee* [=take advantage], *as if you would driue me into a toyle?* [=trap]." [III.ii.313-314].

The next extensive group of cultural references relates to customs, traditions, realia of that time, historical events, etc. This is the umbrella term for very diverse citations, which have to do with an everyday life of the people in the England of Shakespeare, the way they perceive the world and their cognitive response. Altogether, the group contains 22 items.

The famous lines, when the *King* asks *Hamlet*: "*How is it that the Clouds still hang on you?"*, the latter replies: "*Not so my Lord, I am too much i'th' Sun.*" [I.ii.66-67] arouses controversy. The researchers differ between wordplay on *son* and *sun* (=you call me hypocritically *son* too often!) and an allusion to a proverbial saying *out of heaven's blessing into a warm sun*, as Johnson did: "... *applied to those who are turned out of house and home to the open weather. It was perhaps first used of men dismissed from an hospital, or house of charity, such as was erected formerly in many places for travellers*" (Johnson 1959), i.e., *Hamlet* is deprived of the throne and cut off with a shilling.

Equally, when a distracted *Ophelia* exclaims: "*Well, God dil'd you. They say the Owle was a Bakers daughter. Lord, wee know what we are, but know not what we may be.*" [IV.v.21-23], one cannot get the citation properly without knowing a common legend in Gloucestershire of that time, related by Drake: "*Our Saviour went into a baker's shop where they were baking, and asked for some bread to eat. The mistress of the shop immediately put a piece of dough into the oven to bake for him; but was reprimanded by her daughter, who insisting that the piece of dough was too large, reduced it to a very small size. The dough, however, immediately afterwards began to swell, and presently became of a most enormous size. Whereupon the baker's daughter cried out 'Heugh, heugh, heugh,' which owl-like noise, probably induced our Saviour for her wickedness to transform her into that bird*" (Drake 1969, p. 394).

A different case, referring to politics, is presented by the following two quotations. When *Rosencrantz* assures *Hamlet* that the *King* is disposed towards him, as: "*How can that be, when you haue the voyce of the King himselfe, for your Succession in Denmarke?"* [III.ii.369-370], one should bear in mind that the crown

used to be elective, with regard paid to the recommendation of the predecessor, and preference given to royal blood, which, by degrees, formed hereditary succession.

Another instance of the same kind is when *Hamlet* asked, where he had put the *Polonius*'s slain body, he answers enigmatically that the latter is at supper: "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten, a certaine conuocation of wormes are e'ne at him." [IV.iii.22-24]. A political reference here is mixed with a pun: worm 'insect' versus Worm (city), and diet versus 'assembly' (in German). "The Diet of Worms of 1521 (German: Reichstag zu Worms) was an imperial diet (a formal deliberative assembly) of the Holy Roman Empire called by Emperor Charles V and conducted in the Imperial Free City of Worms. Martin Luther was summoned to the Diet in order to renounce or reaffirm his views in response to a Papal bull of Pope Leo X" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diet_of_Worms).

One more citation of the same group is revealed in the last duel between *Hamlet* and *Laertes*, when the *King* pretends to drop in his drink a large pearl of good quality, *union* (in fact, some poison): "The King shal drinke to Hamlets better breath, And in the Cup an vnion shal he throw Richer then that, which foure successiue Kings In Denmarkes Crowne haue worne." [V.ii.290-293]. According to the OED, that sense was frequent in the 17th c., echoing the story about *Cleopatra* told by *Pliny* (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 2173). The custom of dropping and swallowing a pearl in a drink was common in the court as a compliment to a high guest, since pearls were believed to possess an exhilarating quality.

Next quotations are self-evident and need only brief comment. When *Hamlet* instructs the *actors* before the performance, he says: "Speake the Speech I pray you, as I pronounc'd it to you trippingly on the Tongue: But if you mouth it, as many of your Players do, I had as lieu the Town-Cryer had spoke my Lines." [III.ii.1-4]. Here is an allusion to town-criers, who used to be the chief means of communication between the ruling classes and common people with their stentorian voices.

When *Polonius* instructs *Ophelia* not to take *Hamlet*'s courting [=tenders] too seriously, he makes a pun: "Tender [=behave] your selfe more dearly; Or not to crack the winde of the poore Phrase [=to use the phrase too often], Roaming it thus, you'l tender [=make] me a foole." [I.iii.116-118]. Here, the idiom to crack a wind 'to overwork a horse so it became winded' refers to everyday life.

In another episode, when *Hamlet* pretends to be mad and *Ophelia* tries to appeal to his senses, he exclaims: "Get thee to a Nunnerie. Why would'st thou be a breeder of Sinners? I am my selfe indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things." [III.i.131-132]. In the end of the 16th c., *nunnery* acquired a bad sense 'a house of ill fame, a bawdy house'. In the same piece, *Hamlet* mocks *Ophelia* saying: "I haue heard of your painting too wel enough. God has giuen you one pace, and you make your selfe another: you gidge you amble and you lispe." [III.i.153-155]. Evidently, here is a satire on affected manners of that time (*paint* 'use much makeup', and *lisp*).

In the next passage, a mad *Ophelia* raves: "How should I your true loue know from another one? By his Cockle hat and staffe, and his Sandal shoone." [IV.v.23-26]. Here: *cockle hat* 'a hat with a scallop shell stuck in, worn by pilgrims as a

sign of their wandering to St. James shrine in Spain' (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 280). This is a historical realia of that time.

Two more customs are reflected in the tragedy: St. Valentine Day and burial. Thus, the distracted *Ophelia* sings: "*To morrow is Saint Valentines day, all in the morning betime, And I a Maid at your Window, to be your Valentine. Then vp he rose, & don'd his clothes, & dupt the chamber dore, Let in the Maid, that out a Maid, neuer departed more.*" [IV.v.47-54]. There were two ways of securing the proper Valentine in the next year at that time: "... either in drawing lots on Valentine-eve, or in considering the first person whom you met early on the following morning, as the destined object ... in the second there was usually some little contrivance adopted, in order that the favoured object, when such existed, might be the first seen" (Drake 1969, p. 326).

Funeral rites and burial were, as ever, very important at that superstitious time. Thus, the graves of deceased were decorated with garlands and greens, and strewn with flowers. It was the sign of soul's immortality and resurrection of the body. The herbs should be cut down (not plucked up), to revive again at the next season, like the body at the resurrection (Drake 1969, p. 240). Again, mad *Ophelia* while singing, refers to those rites: "*White his Shrow'd as the Mountaine Snow ... He is dead and gone Lady, he is dead and gone, At his head a grasse-greene Turfe, at his heeles a stone.*" [IV.v.29-32]; "... Larded [obs. 'strewn'] with sweet Flowers: Which bewept to the graue did not go, With true-loue showres." [IV.v.37-39]; "... They bore him bare fac'd on the Beer, Hey non nony, nony, hey nony: And on his graue raines many a teare, Fare you well my Doue" [IV.v.174-177]. Drake observes on the burial rites: "... virginity was held in great estimation; insomuch that those which died in that state were rewarded, at their deaths, with a garland or crown on their heads, denoting their triumphant victory over the lusts of the flesh" (Drake 1969, p. 240). At the *Ophelia's* burial, the Priest says: "*Shardes, Flints, and Peebles, should be throwne on her: Yet heere she is allowed her Virgin Rites [=crants, German word for 'garlands'], Her Maiden strewments, and the bringing home Of Bell and Buriall.*" [V.i.229-232]. *Stremments* here is 'scattering flowers over the graves'.

Flower symbolism is reflected in the *Ophelia's* song: "*There's Rosemary, that's for Remembraunce. Pray loue remember: and there is Paconcies [pansies], that's for Thoughts ... There's Fennell for you, and Columbines: ther's Rew for you, and heere's some for me. Wee may call it Herbe-Grace a Sundaies: Oh you must weare your Rew with a difference. There's a Daysie, I would giue you some Violets, but they wither'd all when my Father dyed.*" [IV.v.184-185, 187-191]. Rosemary was believed to boost the memory and was carried both at weddings and funerals. "*It was also considered the emblem of fidelity in lovers; and at weddings it was usual to dip the rosemary in the cup, and drink to the health of the new married couple*" (Kean 1958, p. 211). *fennel* was a symbol of flattery, *columbine*, 'a thankless flower' stood for forsaken lovers, *a daisy* was a warning to maids not to trust their lovers, *violets* meant faithfulness, and *rew* is probably *ruth*, archaic for 'sorrow' (Kean 1958, p. 211). In another place, *Hamlet* quotes a piece of *Claudius's* letter, who conjures the English to put *Hamlet* to death, if those value the good relations with him: "*As loue betweene them, as the Palme should*

flourish, As Peace should still her wheaten Garland weare, And stand a Comma [=break, pause] 'twenee their amities." [V.ii.43-45]. Here: *Palm* is a symbol of understanding, and *Garland* is a symbol of prosperity and a mark of distinction.

This group also contains two old songs, apparently used by the Bard in his tragedy. When a mad *Ophelia* bewails her imaginary lover, she uses the part of old song, as Kean puts it (Kean 1958): "*And will he not come againe, And will he not come againe: No, no, he is dead, go to thy Death-bed, He neuer wil come againe. His Beard as white as Snow, All Flaxen was his Pole: He is gone, he is gone, and we cast away mone Gramercy on his Soule.*" [IV.v.210-219]. In another place, when two *Clowns* are digging a grave for *Ophelia*, one of them sings: "*In youth when I did loue, did loue, me thought it was very sweete: To contract O the time for a my behoue, O me thought there was nothing meete ... But Age with his stealing steps hath caught me in his clutch: And hath shipped me intill the Land, as if I had neuer beene such ... A Pickhaxe and a Spade, a Spade, for and a shrowding-Sheete: O a Pit of Clay for to be made, for such a Guest is meete.*" [V.i.62-65, 71-74, 93-96]. Kean states that "*The three stanzas sung here by the Grave-Digger, are extracted, with a slight variation, from a little poem called The Aged Lover renounceth Love, written by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who was beheaded in 1547. The song is to be found in Dr. Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*" (Kean 1958).

Religious issues take backseat in the tragedy, only 10 items have been found. Perhaps, it is due to sensitivity of the subject in the time when the English Reformation had been forcefully imposed on the country by Henry VIII and the Roman Catholic Church was outlawed. Asquith, for example, argues that Shakespeare was a secret Catholic and empathized with Catholicism (Asquith 2006). Pearce carries the idea to extremes, claiming that the whole *Hamlet* is a hidden protest against suppression of the good old religion (Pearce 2010). The first case is when *Hamlet* pretends to be mad and *Polonius* (trying to size him up) asks the *Prince*, who he is, and *Hamlet* replies: "*Excellent, excellent well: y'are a Fishmonger.*" [II.ii.189]. Kean explains here that this phrase was well understood in Shakespeare's time and enjoyed by the audience. It was "... applicable to the Papists, who in Queen Elizabeth's time were esteemed enemies to the Government. Hence the proverbial phrase of 'He's an honest man and eats no fish'; to signify he's a friend to the Government and a Protestant" (Kean 1958).

Another telling example is when *Rosencrantz* asks *Hamlet*: "*My Lord, you once did loue me.*" [III.ii.329], the latter replies: "*So I do still, by these pickers and stealers [=hands].*" [III.ii.330]. *Hamlet* here mocks the Church catechism: "*My duty towards my Neighbour, is ... To keep my hands from picking and stealing*" (<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Catechism.htm>).

Three more quotations indirectly related to religion include the words *libertine*, *liberal*, *liberty* of quite an opprobrious connotation. It is due to the fact that *libertine* was 'the name given to certain antinomian sects of the early sixteenth century', with the derivative idea 'unrestrained, abandoned to dissolute, licentious behavior' (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 967). Thus, *Ophelia* urges his brother *Laertes* to behave properly in France: "*Shew me the steepe and thorny way to Heauen; Whilst like a puft and recklesse Libertine Himselfe, the Primrose path of*

dalliance reads, And reaks [reck 'consider'] not his owne reade [rede 'counsel'].” [I.iii.50-53].

In another place, when *Polonius* orders his servant *Reynaldo* to spy on his son in France to assess his behavior, he says: “*But Sir, such wanton, wild, and vsuall slips, As are Companions noted and most knowne To youth and liberty.*” [II.i.23-25]. Lastly, the *Queen* announces *Ophelia*'s death by saying: “*There with fantasticke Garlands did she come, Of Crow-flowers, Nettles, Daysies, and long Purples, That liberall Shepheards giue a grosser name; But our cold Maids doe Dead Mens Fingers call them.*” [IV.vii.193-196].

The final direct citation of this group refers to the episode, when *Hamlet* mocks his *Mother* for forgetting his *Father* so quickly after his death: “*Nay then let the Diuel weare blacke, for Ile haue a suite of Sables. Oh Heauens! dye two moneths ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope, a great mans Memorie, may out-liue his life halfe a yeare: But byrlady he must builde Churches then:*” [III.ii.127-131]. Kane explains here: “*A suit trimmed with sables was in our author's own time the richest dress worn by men in England. By the Statute of Apparel, 24 Henry VIII. , it is ordained, that none under the degree of an Earl may use sables*” and later Kane mentions that benefactors of society, people who built churches should be “*recorded by means of the feast day on which the patron saints and founders of churches were commemorated in every parish*” (Kean 1958).

Some religious references on the discourse level are explained in the Bevington's work (Bevington 2008, pp. 106-143). Three of them relate to the first *Hamlet*'s encounter with the *Ghost* of his *Father*. The *Ghost* says: “*My hower is almost come, When I to sulphurous and tormenting Flames Must render vp my selfe.*” [I.v.4-6], and later: “*I am thy Fathers Spirit, Doom'd for a certaine terme to walke the night; And for the day confin'd to fast in Fiers, Till the foule crimes done in my dayes of Nature Are burnt and purg'd away?*” [I.v.13-17]. Bevington mentions here: “*... the Ghost appears to have spent the time since his untimely death in a place known in Roman Catholic belief as Purgatory ... a place of spiritual purging and purification*” (Bevington 2008, pp. 112-113). At the same encounter, the *Ghost* explains the reason of his suffering in the theologian language: “*Thus was I, sleeping, by a Brothers hand, Of Life, of Crowne, and Queene at once dispatcht [=bereaved, deprived]; Cut off euen in the Blossomes of my Sinne, Vnhouzzled, disappointed, vnnaneld, No reckoning made, but sent to my account With all my imperfections on my head;*” [I.v.73-78]. Bevington writes: “*'Unhousled' means 'without having received the holy sacrament; 'housel' is a name for the consecrated elements in the mass to be kept in a housel box ... , 'disappointed' is 'unprepared and unfurnished spiritually for the last journey', 'unaneled' is 'without having received the sacrament of extreme unction', while to 'anele' means to 'administer the last anointing extreme unction to the dying'*” (Bevington 2008, pp. 111-112). The words, “*... used by the Ghost have a distinctly Catholic flavor*” (Bevington 2008, p. 112).

The last indirect reference to religion is made in the tragedy when *Hamlet* resists the temptation to kill *Claudius* while he was praying. Bevington explains that he does not want to kill the perpetrator at his prayer to inflict on the murderer “*... a worse fate than if he were to die on his knees imploring God for help*”

(Bevington 2008, p. 115): “Now might I do it pat, now he is praying, And now Ile doo't, and so he goes to Heauen, And so am I reueng'd: that would be scann'd [=pass judgment] A Villaine killes my Father, and for that I his foule Sonne, do this same Villaine send To heauen. Oh this is hyre and Sallery [=reward], not Reuenge.

He tooke my Father grossely, full of bread [=alive and healthy], With all his Crimes broad blowne, as fresh as May, And how his Audit stands, who knowes, saue Heauen: But in our circumstance and course of thought 'Tis heauie with him: and am I then reueng'd, To take him in the purging of his Soule, When he is fit and season'd for his passage?” [III.iii.78-90].

The next cultural group to be examined refers to superstitions, as a general term, and contains 14 items. As Drake puts it “*The popular creed, during the age of Shakspeare, was perhaps more extended and systematised than in any preceding or subsequent period of our history. For this effect we are indebted, in a great measure, to the credulity and superstition of James the First, the publication of whose Demonology rendered a profession in the belief of sorcery and witchcraft a matter of fashion and even of interest*” (Drake 1969, p. 314). Many various credulities of the time wrapped in the name of the ‘science’ reigned over every aspect of everyday life. Superstitious rites; traditions, and beliefs; apparition of ghosts, goblins, fairies, etc.; the observance of spells and charms; queer customs, ceremonies, creeds, and faith in omens; the false doctrine of sympathetic indications and cures are but an incomplete inventory of the popular delusions in that time (Drake 1969, pp. 314-400).

Examples of those kinds are abundant in the play. Ghosts and other fancied evil creatures were supposed to walk at night and at dawn to leave the mortal world, as the *Ghost of the Hamlet's father*: “*It lifted vp it head, and did addresse It selfe to motion, like as it would speake: But euen then, the Morning Cocke crew lowd; And at the sound it shrunke in hast away, And vanisht from our sight.*” [I.ii.228-232].

Among other similar cases are: “*It was about to speake, when the Cocke crew.*” [I.i.162]. “*The Cocke that is the Trumpet to the day, ... Awake the God of Day: and at his warning, Whether in Sea, or Fire, in Earth, or Ayre, Th' extrauagant, and erring Spirit, hyes To his Confine.*” [I.i.165, 167-170].

“*The Bird of Dawning singeth all night long: And then (they say) no Spirit can walke abroad, ... No Faiery talkes, nor Witch hath power to Charme.*” [I.i.175-176, 178].

Another common Elizabethan belief was that only a scholar with the knowledge of Latin could exorcise a spirit, as in the following, when *Marcellus* urges *Horatio*: “*Thou art a Scholler; speake to it Horatio.*” [I.i.53]. The following example also needs clarification: “*Or, if thou hast vp-hoarded in thy life Extorted Treasure in the wombe of Earth, (For which, they say, you Spirits oft walke in death).*” [I.i.148-150]. Decker explains in *Knight's Conjuring*: “... if any of them [=rich people, knights] had (in th' daies of his abomination and idolatry to money) bound the spirit of gold by any charmes in caues [=caves], or in iron fetters vnder the ground, they should for their soules quiet, (which questionlesse would whine vp and down) if not for the good of their children, release it to set vp their decay'd estates” (Decker 1843, p. 33).

Some examples within this group refer to medieval beliefs about animals. The following quotations clearly reveal those false associations:

“*And each particular haire to stand an end Like Quilles vpon the fretfull Porpentine.*” [I.v.25-26]. Porcupines were formerly believed to dart or shoot their spines at enemy (a symbol of irascibility). In another place, answering to the King’s “*How fares our Cosin Hamlet?*”, Hamlet says: “*Excellent I faith, of the Camelions dish: I eate the Ayre promise-cramm'd, you cannot feed Capons so.*” [III.ii.93-95]. Chameleons at that time were thought to eat on air.

When *Osrice* hurries to the King to tell him that *Hamlet* will take the wager, *Horatio* observes: “*This Lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.*” [V.ii.185-186], after the belief that a newly-hatched lapwing runs with a shell on his head.

Laertes opening his arms for the King exclaims: “*And like the kinde Life-rend'ring Politician [=pelican], Repast them with my blood.*” [IV.v.147-148], after the false belief that the pelican should feed its young with its heart’s blood.

The next example shows another superstition that the tears of the wounded stag are so precious that they should be used for medical purposes. When the King abruptly left the play, *Hamlet* staging to check his guilt observes: “*Why let the strucken Deere go weepe.*” [III.ii.280]. In another work *As You Like It*, Shakespeare speaks of “*... big round tears cours'd one another down his innocent nose in piteous chase.*” [II.i.38]. The similar image is found in the 13th Song of Drayton’s *Polyolbion* (Kean 1958).

Sorcery and witchcraft takes a back seat in *Hamlet* comparing with *Macbeth* where its hallmarks are abundant. Still, when *Hamlet* sets up a play to trap the King, one of the *Actors* says: “*Thou mixture ranke, of Midnight Weeds collected, With Hecats Ban, thrice blasted, thrice infected.*” [III.ii.266-267], here: *Hecate*, Greek goddess of underworld, and the weeds collected at midnight are believed to have her strongest curse [=ban]. The next lines show the opposite: “*... no Cataplasme so rare, Collected from all Simples that haue Vnder the Moone, can saue the thing from death.*” [IV.vii.142-144]. Here: *simples* [=medical herbs] have the best curing effect when collected at night under the Moon.

One more important group of items is underrepresented in *Hamlet*, compared to other Shakespeare’s work. It deals with prejudices of every kind, especially those of gender and race, 13 items. In the middle-age Christian male-dominated world, language reflected bias against women. Thus, when *Rosencrantz* and *Guildenstern* are trying to find out *Hamlet*’s intentions, the following talks ensues: “*Guild. Happy, in that we are not ouer-happy: on Fortunes Cap, we are not the very Button Ham. Nor the Soales of her Shoo? Rosin. Neither my Lord. Ham. Then you liue about her waste, or in the middle of her fauour? Guil. Faith, her priuates, we private Ham. In the secret parts of Fortune? Oh, most true: she is a Strumpet.*” [II.ii.243-251]. Apart from that Fortune is *She* and *Strumpet*, this passage abounds in double entendres: not to live high [=on Fortunes Cap], but somewhere in the middle, around her waist, in the secret parts of Fortune; *privates* as ‘parts’ and *private* as ‘favorite’ [nonce usage of the Bard, now obsolete]. Again, further: “*Out, out, thou strumpet, Fortune!*” [II.ii.502], and: “*That they are not a Pipe for Fortunes finger. To sound what stop she please.*” [III.ii.71-72].

In another place, *Hamlet* deliberately mocks *Ophelia* by saying: “*I could interpret betweene you and your loue: if I could see the Puppets dallying.*” [III.ii.246-247]. This complex metaphor needs explanation. First, *Hamlet* refers to the puppet show, where the master [=interpreter] speaks the dialog *dallying* [=flirting, making fun], implicating that she is a doll [another sense of the word *puppet*] in other hands. Then, he insinuates that *Ophelia* has a lover with whom she is having an affair. Last but not least, as Kean puts it “*The puppets dallying are here made to signify to the agitations of Ophelia's bosom*” (Kean 1958).

Moreover, there is an episode, when *Hamlet* accuses *Queen Gertrude*, his Mother, of betraying the memory of his Father by hastily marrying his uncle: “*Such an Act That blurres the grace and blush of Modestie, Cals Vertue Hypocrite, takes off the Rose From the faire forehead of an innocent loue, And makes a blister there.*” [III.iv.47-51]. The allusion here is made to prostitutes, who at that time were branded with hot iron.

One more female gender denigration is as follows: “*If thou canst mutine [=to rebel] in a Matrons bones, To flaming youth, let Vertue be as waxe. And melt in her owne fire.*” [III.iv.91-93]. Here: *Vertue* is a female, and as soft as wax.

There is an instance of race prejudices in the tragedy. *Hamlet* considers joining the actors' troupe: “*... if the rest of my Fortunes turne Turke with me ...*” [III.ii.272-273]. The denigrating association of Turkish people as savage, barbarian, and cruel is found here. Another prejudice in the language of that time, which still hold good nowadays, as well, is against people of the countryside. When *Hamlet* says: “*Now I am alone. Oh what a Rogue and Pesant slaue am I?*” [II.ii.558-559], he reproaches himself for being undecided.

It may be considered as one of the language universals, since there is an analogical semantic development in a series of words from the sense of ‘rustic, country dweller’ to that of ‘term of abuse, low fellow, rascal’: *chuff* ‘rustic’ & ‘rude, coarse, churlish fellow’; *boor* ‘farmer, countryman’ & ‘rude, ill-bred fellow’; *villain* ‘villager, a peasant’ & ‘criminal, trouble-shooter, term of opprobrium’; *clown* ‘countryman, rustic, peasant’ & ‘ill-bred man, fool’; *churl* ‘tenant in pure villeinage, serf’ & ‘rude, low-bred fellow’; *carl* ‘husbandman, countryman’ & ‘term of opprobrium’; *rustic* ‘countryman, peasant’ & ‘boorish person’. *Farmer* as well has derivative meaning ‘an ignorant rustic; a stupid or gauche person’ (Simpson and Weiner 1994, p. 569).

The quantitative results of the semantic groups are summarized in the Table 1.

Table 1. *Quantitative Results of the Semantic Groups*

№	Semantic group	Number of items	Percentage %
1	The total sum	126	100
2	Special areas of activity, including hawking, hunting, sea-faring, military, pastime (games), theater, law, arrow shooting	40	31.75
3	Customs, traditions, realia of the time, historical events	22	17.46
4	Scientific views of the time	15	11.9
5	Superstitions	14	11.11
6	Prejudices	13	10.32
7	Medieval cosmology	12	9.52
8	Religion	10	7.94

Apart from the semantic grouping, the structure of language units under consideration has been assessed in the research. All items were divided into three classes by their structure: lexical units (words and word combinations), phraseological units (idioms), and communicative units (sentences and beyond, i.e., sets of sentences). It is known that idioms belong to a border-line case between lexical and communicative units; their status is controversial and not considered in this paper.

The analysis revealed that the first lexical class contains 45 items (13 of them are the law terms used in one *Hamlet's* monolog) – 35.71%. The examples of the first group are: *extasie* ‘morbid state, epilepsy, frenzy’ [II.i.102]; *distemper'd* ‘troubled, vexed’ [III.ii.307]; *groundlings* ‘common people used to watch the play as standees’ [II.ii.8-12]; *libertine* ‘unrestrained, abandoned to dissolute, licentious behavior’ [I.iii.51]; the law terms, explained above [V.i.99-112, 114], etc.

The second class of idioms related to the cultural hallmarks is the least numerous – 7 items (5.56%). The examples of those are as follows: *in the full bent* ‘wholly, as an archer pulling back the arrow and the bowstring to the full bent of the bow’ [II.ii.30]; *to the top of my bent* [III.ii.384]; *as level as the cannon to his blank* ‘be sincere, as aiming at gun's target’ [IV.i.42]; *pickers and stealers* ‘hands (the Church catechism)’ [III.ii.330], etc.

The cultural references in the tragedy, which are expressed as sentences and sets of those (communicative units), constitute the bulk of the material – 74 items (58.73%). Mostly, they have the structure of a composite sentence, as the example explained above: “*The King shal drinke to Hamlets better breath, And in the Cup an vnion shal he throw Richer then that, which foure successiue Kings In Denmarkes Crowne haue worne.*” [V.ii.290-293].

The quantitative results of the structure are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Quantitative Results of the Structure*

№	Type of structure	Number of items	Percentage %
1	The total sum	126	100
2	Communicative units: sentences and sets of sentences	74	58.73
3	Lexical units: words and word combinations	45	35.71
4	Phraseological units (idioms)	7	5.56

The third aspect of the present study deals with figurative language of the units. Figures of speech were revealed in 54 items of 126 – 42.26%, among them 16 cases of metonymy and 38 cases of metaphor.

The most current case of metonymy is contingency, based on the flower symbolism in the *Ophelia*'s monolog (8 items), as stated above [IV.v.184-185, 187-191]. The transfer or association can be expressed here as 'flower' into 'emotion', that is 'concrete' into 'abstract'. E.g. *Rosemary* into 'remembrance', *Fennell* [=fennel] into 'flattery', *Rew* [=rue] into 'sorrow', *Violet* – 'faithfulness', *palme* [=palm] – 'understanding', etc. In four more cases, the contingency in metonymy is grounded on the relation 'place of the referent' into 'referent itself', though it goes about erroneous beliefs. Thus, *spleen* was believed to be 'the seat of melancholy or morose feeling' is used in the sense 'morose, melancholic' [V.i.265], as above. In *Pigeon-Liuer'd* [=pigeon-livered] [II.ii.574] as 'coward', metonymy is combined with metaphor: liver was thought to be the hub of passions and emotion (metonymy: place into emotion), along with 'having passion or force like a pigeon' (animal metaphor). In the words *libertine* [I.iii.51], *liberal* [IV.ii.195], and *liberty* [II.i.25] (see above), it is synecdoche, part of the whole that makes the change: from 'names of certain sects of the early sixteenth century, with the derivative idea 'unrestrained, abandoned' to 'dissolute, licentious behavior or a person'.

The quantitative results on the types of metonymy are presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. *Quantitative Results on the Types of Metonymy*

№	Types of metonymy	Number of items	Percentage %
1	The total sum	16	100
2	Flower symbolism	8	50
3	Place for referent	4	25
4	Synecdoche	3	18.75
5	Other	1	6.25

As for metaphorical transfer, the most current type is an animal metaphor – 15 cases, as *woodcock* [I.iii.115] and [V.ii.302] from 'animal' into 'stupid person'; *eyas* 'a little hawk for training' into 'young actors' [II.ii.339]; *porpentine* [I.v.25] from 'porcupine' into 'an irascible person'; *Camelions* [III.ii.93] from 'chameleon' to 'a person who eats on air', as *Hamlet* says he is fed-up with empty promises; *lapwing* [V.ii.185] from 'animal' to 'a running person', when *Hamlet* calls so *Osric*, who hurries to the *King* to tell him that *Hamlet* will take the wager, etc.

Transfer of different human qualities (personal, occupational, behavioral, etc.) forms ground for comparative association in 10 cases. Here conventionally, it is called 'human to human'. When *Hamlet*, e.g. says that the Fortune "turne Turke with me ..." [III.ii.273], he compares a Turkish man to a barbarian, savage person. Equally, rebuking himself as "... Rogue and Pesant ..." [II.ii.559], he compares a country dweller to an unworthy person. Calling the *Ghost* of Father a *Pioner* [=pioneer] in the old sense of a 'miner' [I.v.182], the *Prince* stresses the idea how quickly the *Ghost* can move under the ground. Or calling *Polonius* a *Fishmonger* 'a fish-seller' [II.ii.189], *Hamlet* means a 'Catholic, esteemed enemy to the Government'. Comparing his *Father* to *Claudius*, *Hamlet* calls the latter "A King of shreds and patches." [III.iv.103], here the transfer is from the sense 'fool, clown' to that of an 'unworthy person'.

In 7 cases metaphor is based upon the changes from concrete to abstract notions, as in *rub* – "... there's the rub." [III.i.65]: from the notion 'bump in the bowl course' to that of 'obstacle, impediment'. Other examples of that kind are *bias* from 'an oblique line in which a bowl runs' [II.i.63] to 'immoral behavior'; and "... prooffe and bulwarke against Sense." [III.iv.37-38], with *proof* as a 'tested armory against shots' into 'something that protects a person from hardship'.

Four cases are personification, as when *Polonius* urges his son to board a ship (see above) he says: "The winde sits in the shoulder of your saile." [I.iii.56]. There are some borderline cases. When *Fortune* is *she* and compared to *Strumpet* [II.ii.243-251, 502], this simile may be regarded as both personification and change from abstract to concrete notions.

The quantitative results on the types of metaphor are presented in the Table 4.

Table 4. *Quantitative Results on the Types of Metaphor*

№	Types of metaphor	Number of items	Percentage %
1	The total sum	38	100
2	Animal metaphor	15	39.47
3	Transfer of different human qualities (human to human)	10	26.32
4	Transfer from concrete to abstract notions	7	18.42
5	Personification	4	10.53
6	Others	2	5.26

The quantitative results on the figures of speech in general are summarized up in the Table 5.

Table 5. *Quantitative Results on the Figures of Speech in General*

№	Figures of speech	Number of items possessing figures of speech	Percentage %
1	The total sum	54	100
2	Animal metaphor	15	27.78
3	Transfer of different human qualities, as human to human (metaphor)	10	18.52
4	Flower symbolism (metonymy)	8	14.81
5	Transfer from concrete to abstract notions (metaphor)	7	12.96
6	Place for referent (metonymy)	4	7.41
7	Personification (metaphor)	4	7.41
8	Synecdoche (metonymy)	3	5.56
9	Others	3 (metaphor – 2, metonymy – 1)	5.56

As it is evident from the findings, in the items with figures of speech metaphor prevails over metonymy – 38 (70.37%) and 16 (29.63%) correspondingly.

Discussion and Conclusion

Thus, summing up the study results, the most prolific sociocultural semantic group in *Hamlet* relates to various human activities (31.75%); followed by those referred to customs, traditions, realia, historical references (17.46%); scientific views of that time (11.9%); superstitions (11.11%); prejudices (10.32%); medieval cosmology (9.52%); and religion (7.94%).

The research shows that the lexis related to everyday life of the people (their activities, traditions, customs, superstitions, and prejudices) dominates that of abstract notions (religion, cosmology, science). The findings should be taken with caution and not be carried too far. Language units, which reflect cultural hallmarks, depend on many actors in the play. First, findings are valid for one tragedy *Hamlet* taken in isolation. To get complete statistical data on the issue, the whole corpus of Shakespeare's works must be studied.

Secondly, the expression of cultural realia varies in the course of time, for one thing, and from play to play, for another. Thus, the tumultuous period of the late 16th early 17th cc. was marked by such momentous events, as destroying the Spanish Armada, the death of Queen Elisabeth, the accession of James to the English throne, Gunpowder Plot, complicated relations between monarchy and church, along with those between England and Scotland, the King James Bible project from 1604 through 1611 (with its enormous influence on the English culture), turbulent political changes, to name but a few factors, which shaped the shifting cultural landscape of the period with corresponding expression in language and literature.

Cultural references also depend on the ideas and content of plays. Thus, issues of sex and gender are mostly addressed in the romantic comedies Shakespeare wrote

in the 1590s, as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, etc., along with *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest*. The practice of witchcraft provides a powerful material for *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's ideas on politics and political theory are manifested in his English history plays (*Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Richard II*, *King John*, etc.). Religious issues, as Bevington put it, are grappled with in *King John* and *Henry VIII* (Bevington 2008, p. 119). Such plays, as *Julius Caesar*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Titus Andronicus* contain many historical mentions of the corresponding times. Whereabouts other than English are shown in the Bard's *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice*, etc.

Characters' description and particular situations add more weight to the choice of cultural mentions. Thus, instructing the actors before the play, *Hamlet* uses a lot of theater lexicon. On the other hand, military terms are often used by warriors and kings, as by *Claudius*, *Macbeth*, etc. Royal court and hereditary issues are vivid in the historical plays, as in *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus*, etc.

Religious references are quite modest in the material and worth some consideration. There is no arguing over the enormous role of religion in all life spheres at that time, since the science era had not been ushered yet. In our study, only direct mentions related to cultural realia have been accounted for, and in this case they are only the tip of the iceberg. There are a lot of instances in the tragedy, for example, when characters pray, as *Claudius* (see above) [III.iii.78-90], and *Hamlet* does not want to kill him during the prayer. Moreover, the tragedy abounds with interjections, which relate to God in particular or/and religion in general, e.g.: *By Heauven [=Heaven]! Before my God! By Saint Patricke! Faith! By my fey [=faith]! Prithee [=pray thee]! Perdie [=by God, French par dieu]! By the Rood [=by cross]! By Cocke [=by God]! By gis [= Jesus]! Marry [= Virgin Mary]! Byrlady [=by our Lady]! Ifaith [=in faith]! By Saint Charity! Gramercy on his Soule [=may God reward you greatly]!*, etc. Studying such material goes beyond the objectives of the research.

Last but not least, the use of the cultural mentions serves as stylistic means of describing a character and is conditioned by a particular situation. Thus, *Hamlet*, seeing a lawyer's skull, uses 13 law terms in his monolog (see above) [V.i.99-112], the only instance in the play. Or another single case when distracted *Ophelia* speaks on flower symbols (see above) [IV.v.184-185, 187-191].

Findings on the structure of the material apparently fit the logic. In most of the cases, cultural mentions are realized in communicative units. It holds true for abstracts from the old songs, proverbs and sayings, some superstitions, which cannot be expressed explicitly by lexical units or idioms. Such items are often accompanied by similes and comparisons and extended over lexis to sentences and sets of those.

Results of figurative language in cultural references mainly support the general tendency of a creative use of language to generate a desired effect. The most prolific types of figures of speech are animal metaphor (comparison animal to human), metaphor as association based on transfer of different human qualities (personal, occupational, behavioral, etc.), metaphor as transfer from concrete to abstract notions, personification; along with two types of metonymy based on contingency 'place for referent' and synecdoche (pars pro toto). The only exception

is flower symbolism, which again serves as stylistic means mentioned above and should not be attached much significance in general.

Further research prospects lie in studying a larger or the entire corpus of Shakespeare's works and probably, along with those of his contemporaries to get a much more detailed picture of the relations between the culture and the language of that time. That requires very extensive interdisciplinary study (culturology, linguistics, sociology, statistics, etc.), with more voluminous material, which is not restricted by rather a narrow scope of this paper.

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