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PHILOSOPHICAL VALUE OF LITERATURE: MACHIAVELLI AND SHAKESPEARE

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to show the relationship between philosophy and literature by interpreting relevant plays by Shakespeare. It will be shown that philosophy and literature can talk about the same significant truths, e.g. about human nature, motivation and ambition. The debate between aesthetic cognitivists and aesthetic non-cognitivists that concerns the cognitive value of art, the question of whether art can truly teach us something is significant. While asking about the normativity of art, we should also examine whether its value depends on the social context. This will be the content of the first part of the paper which will deal with the more universal philosophical questions, most notably with the epistemological question of whether we learn through reading literature. And although literary approach to the same topics differs from the philosophical, literature can give us more vivid particular examples that can help us understand philosophical ideas and theories better. Thus, Shakespeare's work can guide us towards a greater understanding of philosophical concepts. For example, we can look into Shakespeare's tragedies for his understanding of virtue and compare it to the philosophical exploration of the same topic. The second part of the paper will explore specific ideas shared by Shakespeare and Machiavelli. Dealing with the relationship between the two authors, it will be inevitable to ask whether Shakespeare's texts can offer us a basis for normative claims about Machiavelli's ideas. Does Shakespeare provide us with a set of norms and rules for the (right) interpretation of Machiavelli's texts?

Keywords: philosophy, literature, Shakespeare's plays, Machiavelli, politics, fortune, *virtù*, irony, conspiracies.

1. Truth in philosophy and literature

We often hear comments on artworks. A play can be evaluated as profound, a science fiction novel celebrated for the depiction of a faraway world that is so similar to ours, and which we wouldn't have known with-

out that book. These propositions about the works of art have led to the appearance and development of the debate between aesthetic cognitivists and aesthetic non-cognitivists. Baumberger highlights the fact that aesthetic cognitivists accept and take seriously propositions about artworks (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1). Their position is best understood as a conjunction of an epistemic claim that “[a]rtworks have cognitive functions” (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1) and an aesthetic claim that the “[c]ognitive functions of artworks partly determine their artistic value” (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1). On the other hand, Baumberger highlights that the aesthetic non-cognitivists deny and reject one or both of these claims. Thus, there are different versions of this standpoint (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1).

According to Baumberger, the claims that form the basis of aesthetic cognitivism neither state that all artworks have cognitive functions (e.g. romantic comedies), nor that the cognitive functions of artworks necessarily increase their value. And indeed, like he believes is the case with biographies, we will be capable of learning something about history (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1) if we read or watch a play, e.g. *Richard II* and *Richard III*, but that does not (necessarily) make them better plays than *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. There are valuable artworks that serve purposes that are not cognitive. Examples for that would be propaganda films that have political functions, but do not really convey truth and have no cognitive functions. Apart from cognitive functions, Baumberger believes that an artwork can also have “practical, decorative, political, and economic” (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1) functions, as it can have, apart from cognitive (profoundness, shallowness etc.), other values (Baumberger, 2014, p. 1), e.g. moral, political etc.

Lamarque emphasises that no one denies that the truth has *some* kind of relationship with literature. According to him, fiction reports truth and we can get to truth through fiction (e.g. we can learn how it was to live at some time in some part of the world). However, it seems to him that it is not always the task of literature to report the truth, literature doesn’t have to have a didactic purpose. “To the extent that truth is better than falsehood and learning better than ignorance then conveying truth is valuable and works that convey truth have value in that regard.” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 367) He stands behind the idea that all of this is acceptable and indisputable, but the problems emerge once we ask ourselves whether truth contributes to the *literary* value of a work, which leads to even more problems. This then becomes a dispute about the value of literature, because the value of truth isn’t problematic, but we are concerned with whether there is some specific kind of truth for literature (Lamarque, 2010, p. 367).

Philosophical texts, such as Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*, but also historical texts such as Thomas Macaulay’s *History of England* fall

under literature, as Lamarque highlights, despite the fact that they aim at truth. If we try to restrict ourselves to “the relevant class of *fictional* works” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 368), we lose lyric poetry from sight, even if we do not try to make a distinction between fictional and non-fictional works and realize how hard of a task that is (Lamarque, 2010, p. 386). Because of that, Lamarque suggests that we focus on the question of *literary* value and to judge the artworks *from the literary perspective*. That’s when we come to an understanding that what has a *literary* value in the case of Hume’s work, is not its philosophical aspect, but the way in which the *Treatise* is written (Lamarque, 2010, p. 368). Another reason for the connection between the truth and literature is a long tradition that Johnson illustrates by saying: “Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth.” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 368, quoted from Samuel Johnson, *Milton (Lives of the Poets)*) Still, Lamarque indicates to us that the truth in poetry can be thought of here as a kind of seriousness of poetry: the seriousness of the reflection on the work, thoughts on the new possibilities and the development of imagination. But we have to be careful, because there is no proof of the connection of this seriousness with truth (Lamarque, 2010, p. 368).

Still, Lamarque emphasizes that there are those who oppose the idea that fiction, unlike science and history, can communicate any *truth*, because it stands opposite to literature in some key respects. Literary value rests on “inventiveness, imagination, clever plots, or engaging characters.” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 369) However, “works of fiction are usually set in the real world, often referring to real places, events, or famous people” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 369), they get their ideas from the real world and so they can teach us geography or history. By using means similar to thought experiments in philosophy, literature can teach us truth through parables, “or moral tales told to children” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 369).

Yet, Lamarque points out that there are radical skeptics who completely deny that there is truth or they do not find it particularly important, so the truth would be a system “of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms.” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 369, quoted from Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Falsity in Their Extramoral Sense”). Statements like these, obviously describe the abovementioned concepts extremely pejoratively compared to the previously mentioned understandings of the topic.

Interesting for us are the stances of those who expressed their thoughts through the perspectives of both literature and philosophy. Because of that, Lamarque quotes Iris Murdoch, philosopher and writer, who found truth, perhaps even for her own fiction, in the great works of literature and understood it as clarity:

[W]hat we learn from contemplating the characters of Shakespeare or Tolstoy . . . is something about the real quality of human nature, when it is envisaged, in the artist's just and compassionate vision, with a clarity which does not belong to the self-centred rush of ordinary life. . . . [T]he greatest art . . . shows us the world . . . with a clarity which startles and delights us simply because we are not used to looking at the real world at all. (Lamarque, 2010, p. 371, quoted from Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 65)

Lamarque points us to another way in which we can interpret the truth in literature – if it corresponds to something, so if it's faithful to life, or, perhaps, human nature. That is achieved through believable and “recognizable characters and situations, [it] must avoid implausibility in plot structure . . . and must conform to norms of action and motivation.” (Lamarque, 2010, p. 372) Moreover, in literature, we can take everything that is expressed beautifully and clearly as true (Lamarque, 2010, p. 372).

Sometimes truth will not be conveyed explicitly, but, as Lamarque emphasizes, the reader's effort to fill the gaps so as to recognize the truth in the context will be necessary. The reader will be expected to recognize certain generalizations at the level of topic. For example, a literary work can contain general statements about the human nature that would lead the reader to the conclusion that (Lamarque, 2010, pp. 374–5), e.g. men are corrupt. Therefore, we can conclude that there is some kind of truth in literature, but it can be interpreted, as Lamarque states, as honesty, clarity, authenticity, probability of the structure of the plot, et al. As such, it can contribute to the literary value, but it is not the same as that necessary truth that would satisfy us in philosophy or history (Lamarque, 2010, pp. 372–3). It is some kind of “universal” truth that needs no proof, something that is not a true *factual* proposition (Lamarque, 2010, p. 376).

Another approach to thinking about the relationship between philosophy and literature comes from Dorothy Walsh and can be clarified with examples from Shakespeare's plays. In her opinion, in addition to *knowledge that* and *knowledge how*, we can also speak of *knowledge what it is like*. In that way we could understand what it means to lose a child or change our faith and that would be the knowledge characteristic of literature (Wilson, 1983, pp. 491–2, according to Dorothy Walsh, *Literature and Knowledge* (Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 96.). The examples from Shakespeare's works could then be useful to us precisely so we would learn, *know what something is like* from Lear's loss of Cordelia or Jessica's conversion from Judaism to Christianity. Walsh believes that this knowledge doesn't lack anything, it doesn't need proof, so it would be absolutely unnecessary to look for it and its lack wouldn't be problematic

at all (Wilson, 1983, p. 492). If we understand knowledge that we find in literature in this way, Shakespeare's works would give us an almost inexhaustible source of knowledge. However, Wilson emphasizes that we have to take into account that even this understanding is not complete and that there are many challenges for it to face. It is not hard to *know what it is like* on a superficial level, let us use examples from *King Lear*, to divide the property between ungrateful daughters and consequently lose a home, money and mind, but Wilson appeals to us that we can truly know this in the 'strong sense' only if we make big changes to our thoughts and conduct in the light of such circumstances. That is to say that, if we were to know this in the strong sense, we would have to modify our understanding of homelessness, poverty and mental stability, and with them our thoughts and conduct because only then can we broaden and apply our knowledge on new cases. We would, thus, have to think of ways to find housing, gain money and seek professional help, and act accordingly: to get a job, rent a place and visit a therapist. Only then does this knowledge become a tool for reacting to situations, problems and questions (Wilson, 1983, pp. 492–5).

Baumberger believes that the knowledge gained from literature doesn't need to be interpreted in the same way we usually interpret knowledge, namely, as a propositional knowledge composed of justified (or reliable) true claims. It is absolutely enough to say that reading literature leads us to understanding and that already suggests that we have made some cognitive progress (Baumberger, 2014, p. 2). For cognitive progress it is enough to ask questions or pose problems for which we don't need to give conclusive answers or solutions, but to give some clarifications – this is especially important for philosophy (Baumberger, 2014, p. 5).

And, since artworks can teach us something (Baumberger, 2014, p. 9), e.g. how England looked during the rule of Richard II, they particularly help the development of our cognitive faculties when they deepen our understanding of things. Baumberger, thus, emphasizes that Don Quixote refers to a hopeless, although noble, man who acts absurdly, and Don Juan refers to a great lover. We will sometimes meet such people in real life and we will be able to give them names of these heroes as predicates (Baumberger, 2014, p. 10). So a noble scholar who constantly delays his goals might remind us of Hamlet, maybe we will even begin to use that name to refer to him.

Baumberger highlights the fact that literature has more means that can lead us to a better understanding of something. It can use specific accentuation, deliberate subtraction and addition, deforming and alienation of different characteristics of objects so as to grip our attention (Baum-

berger, 2014, p. 10). E.g. we can find specific accentuation and deforming in the descriptions of Richard III that are used to focus our attention to his foulness (*Richard III*, I. i. 1–31; IV. iv. 166–173). Addition may be found in *Macbeth*, if the witches were there to grip the king's attention. And Hamlet finds himself an alien in the world from which quite a lot has been subtracted, his father most notably. So, “[b]y carefully selecting and describing fictional incidents, actions and characters, [literary works] provide perspectives on real people and their relationships and interactions.” (Baumberger, 2014, p. 11)

Art, and with it literature, could serve as a thought experiment (Baumberger, 2014, p. 16). Its relationship to philosophy is clear to that extent because, as Baumberger says, philosophy and science can “contain and use thought experiments” (Baumberger 2014: 16). And insofar as thought experiments in these disciplines can lead us to cognitive progress, Baumberger doesn't see why that wouldn't be the case with literature. Literary works will prompt us to explore different possibilities, see the consequences of assumptions, illustrate and support ideas and hypotheses (Baumberger, 2014, p. 15). That can lead us to ask more questions, change our opinions on a topic, give us a new perspective, show us what it means to find ourselves in a situation etc. (Baumberger, 2014, p. 16) Baumberger believes that literature can help the development of different cognitive faculties by encouraging our imagination, but we will also be able to reflect about that of which an artwork speaks, we will learn from examples that we read, and maybe we will ponder some problems that we usually wouldn't, e.g. some moral dilemmas. All of this can lead to an adoption of new knowledge, and the enhancement of our memory (Baumberger, 2014, p. 17) as we later on think back on the work or reproduce it.

Of course, Baumberger states that the aesthetic non-cognitivists do not agree with this understanding of literature, and they will claim that the truths and beliefs acquired through reading literature are trivial. For instance, *Crime and Punishment* would not teach us that murder is bad, we ought to know that beforehand so as to recognize and accurately interpret these ethical ideas (Baumberger, 2014, p. 18). Hence, according to aesthetic non-cognitivists, a parallel would be to take *The Merchant of Venice* and claim that we came to an insight that greed is bad through it. On the other hand, Baumberger highlights that some non-cognitivists even claim that we cannot base our beliefs on literary works, because they could never be justified, especially not by simply referring to the work. We can change Baumberger's example and say, according to some aesthetic non-cognitivists, to read *Richard III* isn't sufficient to permit us to say that

we know how England of his time looked. For that we need history books (Baumberger, 2014, p. 18).

But by using this example we can illuminate Baumberger's position, and say that *Richard III* undoubtedly is some kind of biography. Shakespeare's historical play, or tragedy as it was previously classified (Greenblatt, 2016, p. 296), refers to the real political figures and is set in a real place, so it can provide us with a basis for beliefs about them, and with that it will offer us some points of view that the historical texts do not offer us (Baumberger, 2014, p. 19). *Richard III* will, thus be a thought experiment that will use historical figures, places and events in its setup. Furthermore, the accuracy of the certain historical information found in the tragedy can provide us with a reason for the better evaluation of this play (Baumberger 2014: 20). "Hence, we can learn about aspects of the world through imagination, and ordinary or literary thought experiments can aid these imaginings." (Baumberger, 2014, p. 20)

Novitz believes that there can ultimately be no knowledge without imagination, and imagination is precisely that which lies in the foundations of fiction (Carroll, 1990, p. 167). Fiction, thus, can help us form hypotheses.

Furthermore, if the fanciful imagination operates this way with respect to knowledge acquisition across the board, the fact that some of our hypotheses are concocted in fictions should serve as no impediment epistemically so long as those hypotheses turn out to be successful – successful, that is, with respect to illuminating the world. (Carroll, 1990, p. 167)

In Novitz's understanding, propositional knowledge is not the only form of knowledge (Carroll, 1990, p. 168), and

literature may impart beliefs about values, practical skills – knowledge of *how* to do *x* (strategic skills) or new ways to think about *x* (conceptual skills) – and empathetic skills (the ability to experience what it feels like to be caught up in certain situations), as well as deepening, and perhaps complicating, our understanding of our own values by exploring them in relation to challenging situations. In all these different ways, we can learn from fiction[.] (Carroll, 1990, p. 168)

As opposed to Novitz, Carroll sees the knowledge acquired in this way as a sort of induction (Carroll, 1990, p. 169). It does seem to me that the works of fiction can inspire us to form hypotheses, and if Carroll is correct in his view of this knowledge as a product of induction, we could rely on it just as much as we can rely on astronomy or, in general, sciences that rest on induction. And since we usually don't doubt science, maybe it is time to put a bit more trust in literature.

1.1. Universal/particular

According to an ancient idea, literature presents “the universal through the particular.” (Shiner, 2010, p. 25) Most notably, Aristotle understands this relation as follows:

[A] historian and a poet . . . differ in that one speaks of what truly happened, and the other of what could have happened.

That is why poetry is a more philosophical and a more serious thing than historiography, because poetry shows more that which is general, and historiography that which is particular. General is when we say that the person with these or those traits has to speak or act in this or that way by probability or by necessity; and poetry pays attention to that, when it gives persons names. (Aristotel, 2015, pp. 71–2)

Shiner differentiates three understandings of the relationship between the universal and the particular. Actual particulars could, thus, be characters that are not fictional, but are real historical figures or might have been real: Julius Caesar, Anthony and Cleopatra; Hamlet and Macbeth. In dealing with this problem like Shiner, we come to an understanding that, since Prospero from *The Tempest* never existed, he is not a particular, despite the fact that such owls and frogs showed in *Macbeth* do exist (Shiner, 2010, p. 25). Abstraction from these particulars leads us to “any ambitious man or woman, anyone who is torn between passion and duty,” (Shiner, 2010, p. 25) or just any owl. Yet, there is still one more mode of presentation, so to say, of the relationship between universal and particular through which the “ontological function” is reflected. Through it, we can find, not only characteristics of a certain type of person or a certain danger to man, but persons in general and general dangers to them. This is “ontological” precisely because it deals with how things are in the ultimate principle, human nature in general (Shiner, 2010, p. 25). Once we allow such an understanding, we can say that even science fiction can intelligibly provide us with a viewpoint of our world by indicating something else entirely, thus illuminating parts of our own world (Shiner, 2010, p. 28).

The general claims an artwork makes are typically made implicitly by the work's treatment of particulars. They are displayed in the fine-grained descriptions or representation of particular characters and events. Hence, the cognitive contribution of artworks does usually not primarily consist [of] conveying general beliefs considered in abstraction from the particulars of the narrative and its characters. It rather lies in the detailed descriptions or representations of particular (and often imaginary) cases that suggest the general beliefs. (Baumberger, 2014, p. 20)

Hunt explains that approaching a work of fiction from a philosophical standpoint offers us a plethora of examples, particulars to which we can apply our ideas or beliefs (Hunt, 2006, p. 400). He showcases his ideas on an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, but they can be slightly modified so as to serve the purpose of our examination of literature. So, when we come in contact with a play, we encounter particulars that may have an impact on our cognition.

Since these particulars may differ widely from those in which the viewer [or reader] first acquired these beliefs and values, this process might produce surprising results. These results can affect beliefs they hold when they are no longer viewing the motion picture [, reading or watching a play] and actively contemplating this fictional world, because that world might well be logically relevant to what their beliefs ought to be. (Hunt, 2006, p. 400)

What happens here is that particulars might influence our real life beliefs. In that way king Lear's particular circumstances are able to modify our beliefs in regards to the division of property or make us acquire new beliefs about it. And not only that, but "the narrative itself, or part of it, is the example that drives the argument." (Hunt, 2006, p. 400) That would mean that we could even formulate an argument against the division of property as long as we are alive based on the particular case of king Lear.

What the narrative contributes to the viewer's [or reader's] cognition is not so much the abstract and universal as the concrete and particular. To the extent that it works on the viewer's [or reader's] mind in an argument-like way, it works as an argument-by-example. (Hunt, 2006, p. 401)

Because of that, we are allowed to explain further or base our philosophical arguments on the particular examples from literature.

2. Machiavelli and Shakespeare

In this part of the paper I attempt to show that philosophical understanding can be improved by taking literary works into account. By using excerpts from selected Shakespeare's plays I endeavor to clarify some of Machiavelli's more universal ideas.

Similar topics, affinities and interests that can be found in the works of both authors can undoubtedly, at least partially, be explained by their seemingly similar lives. They highlighted both past and present events and compared them, and they both studied history so as to understand current political events better. "Shakespeare's plays were always decisively . . . and are, in the world and of the world . . . [H]e also wrote scripts that were

intensely alert to the social and political realities of their times.” (Greenblatt, 2016, p. 12) Shakespeare and Machiavelli knew very well both the highest and the lowest social classes. And, besides writing about the rulers and for the rulers (and wore (literally or figuratively) their clothes (see Makijaveli, 2018, p. 8)), they wrote about the citizens and directly spoke to the ordinary (or more ordinary) people, one of them at the theatre, and the other primarily in *Discourses on Livy*. Because of these similarities, not only Machiavelli’s works, but also Shakespeare’s plays can be read as real-political (Čavoški, 2019, p. 374).

Despite the fact that Shakespeare referred directly, but very rarely, to other thinkers, it is obvious that he was very well read and informed. Given that he mentioned the names Socrates and Aristotle at least once in his works, (Rowe, 2010, p. 174, p. 178) and a play on the name Machiavelli – Machevil (Grady, 2000, p. 124, according to William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 3.2.193), we can be sure that he knew of them and some of their ideas. Obviously this use of Machiavelli’s name wasn’t kindhearted and it might have led to further misconceptions about the theory relayed in *The Prince*. Chavoshki says as follows: “Shakespeare knew well who Machiavelli is and what kind of diabolical political teaching he expounded.” (Čavoški, 2019, p. 375) In contrast to Chavoshki, I would say that Shakespeare did not know who Machiavelli truly was, because were Shakespeare actually aware of Machiavelli’s words, I doubt that he would ever use Machiavelli’s name like that and yet write in such a similar vein.

2.1. Fortune

One of the key notions of Machiavelli’s political philosophy is fortune and it is one of the “two important independent notions that stand in the beginning of every political action.” (Uzelac, in Makijaveli, 2020, pp. 164–5) Fortune is an external force, independent of man; fortune is a necessity that is impossible to control and escape (Uzelac, in Makijaveli, 2020, p. 165). Apart from fortune as a notion of political philosophy, Machiavelli speaks of personified Fortune, which is the remnant of olden times:

[F]ortune being changeful and mankind steadfast in their ways, so long as the two are in agreement men are successful, but unsuccessful when they fall out. For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because Fortune is a woman . . . and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always, womanlike, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her. (Machiavelli, 2014, pp. 121–2)

We find a very similar conception of Fortune in Shakespeare's plays. On one hand, Fortune determines greatly the destiny of political figures and is capable of changing the course of history. Thus, she is understood as an unpredictable force. On the other hand, she can also be a "personified superhuman force with the matching will, [a force] that *chooses* on a whim, that is, caprice, what and when she will grant or deny someone, make happy or harm, give good or inflict evil." (Čavoški, 2019, p. 68)

All unavoided is the doom of destiny. (*Richard III*, IV. iv. 218)

Hamlet testifies to the idea that there is no escape from fortune when he starts following the ghost, despite Horatio's plea (Čavoški, 2019, p. 72):

My fate cries out[.] (*Hamlet*, I. iv. 83)

And despite the fact that he is so rational, Hamlet, who is on a mission to "bring the world to the law and justice", he sees fortune as inescapable. Of course, Hamlet was very hesitant by nature (Čavoški, 2019, p. 56) which is easily noticeable in his delay of bringing the world to the law and justice, and so it seems that he is ruled, maybe contradictory, by both reason and destiny. "Because, when he couldn't live according to his ideal of rational stoicism, he let himself be destiny's hostage just in the way he predicted her:" (Čavoški, 2019, p. 56)

[B]lest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. (*Hamlet*, III. ii. 73–76)

Machiavelli tells us that "everything changes according to the circumstances" (Makijaveli, 2018, p. 93) and Shakespeare testifies to that. Fortune constantly turns the wheel,

so she raises some, and others she throws down, and in the order that only she knows and determines. . . . In other words, those who are engaged in politics and aspire to high positions ought to closely follow the wheel of fortune, so as to find out where their allies and adversaries are. When the wheel goes downhill, those who fall and perish should be abandoned immediately. If, on the other hand, it rises uphill, one should join the lucky ones so as to quickly prosper. (Čavoški, 2019, p. 76)

2.2. *Virtù*

Still, there is a way to fight Fortune. The other key notion that lies in the foundations of every political action is *virtù*. This notion is usually translated as *virtue* (Uzelac, in Makijaveli, 2020, pp. 164–5), which is not

adequate for it differs from the ancient, and ethical in general, notion of virtue. *Virtù* is Machiavelli's technical term that signifies "a part of man's character, his boldness to react or not to react to the elements that fortune brings into events . . . i.e. the ability to adapt to fortune and her game of chance, even to impose our law on fortune." (Uzelac, in Makijaveli, 2020, p. 165) And while fortune is a necessity, *virtù* is a condition of our free will, that is, it provides space for our decisions despite and against fortune. "[V]irtù is an answer to her, and it depends on our *virtù* whether we will be able to respond effectively or if the response will ultimately be a prelude to our defeat." (Uzelac, in Makijaveli, 2020, p. 165) Still, Machiavelli speaks of virtue in the same sense as we do so today, as of positive characteristics of men (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 56), but he also speaks of *virtù*, roughly, as of courage and morale (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 60).

Shakespeare also speaks of virtue as of "fundamental moral and political value" (Čavoški, 2019, p. 164). It is exactly because both of these authors use the term 'virtue' to describe positive characteristics of a person, and use it in political contexts and some actions evaluate highly, that we can say that both of them speak of *virtù*. "[*Virtù*] [does] not manifest and prove itself in everyday, but only in unusual circumstances, when [a man] is put to great trials." (Čavoški, 2019, p. 164) When it comes to Shakespeare's plays, like in the work of Machiavelli, we can find the use of the notion of virtue that was characteristic for the Romans, in order to signify mainly courage (Čavoški, 2019, p. 164; *Coriolanus*, II. ii. 85–86). Because of that, *virtù* "stands out and proves itself [best] in the war that Othello exalts and glorifies." (Čavoški, 2019, p. 165) Such an understanding of *virtù* is illustrated, for example, by Hamlet's words:

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. (*Hamlet*, IV. iv. 53–56)

Virtù is especially important for the new rulers. And since Macbeth proved himself as full of *virtù* in the battles, he later gained the ability to establish himself as the usurper.

[B]ut all's too weak;
For brave Macbeth, –well he deserves that
name, –
Disdaining fortune, with his brandisht steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valour's minion,

Carved out his passage till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th'chops,
And he fixt his head upon our battlements. (*Macbeth*, I. ii. 15–23)

Yet, Machiavelli believes that this leonine characteristic, this courageousness and the ability to scare away the enemies and wolves (gentry), isn't sufficient. He believes that a ruler ought to think ahead, to anticipate traps and act cunningly and twofacedly like a fox (Machiavelli, 2014, pp. 83–4). And there is no bigger fox in Shakespeare's plays than Richard III who was always and everywhere a fraud (*Richard III*, I. i. 90–95, I. i. 147–150; I. iii. 325–340). On the other hand, Macbeth was no fox, which was best seen in act II, scene iii when no one believes him (although they do not openly tell him so) that he wasn't involved in the murder of king Duncan.

As a political realist, Machiavelli realized that virtuous rulers sometimes fail, while the vicious persevere. Sometimes evil is necessary (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 73), and Shakespeare comes to the same conclusion and has Iago tell Cassio: “[Y]ou are but now cast in his mood, a punishment more in policy than in malice” (*Othello*, II. iii. pp. 269–270). But we ought not to be seduced by the notion of *virtù* and think that Machiavelli knew of no more virtues than of that bravery/morale/resolve/readiness for battle. Still, it is more important to act like a fox and pretend that one has them, than to actually possess them. Next to *virtù*, there are still some crucial virtues (Machiavelli, 2014, pp. 85–6). “[A] prince ought to . . . appear to him who sees and hears him altogether *merciful, faithful, humane, upright, and religious*. There is nothing more necessary to appear to have than this last quality” (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 85, our cursive). No one demonstrates that better than Richard III, who is presented as disciplined in war, wise in peace, bountiful, virtuous, fair and humble (*Richard III*, III. vii. 16–17), when he says:

But then I sigh; and, with a piece of Scripture,
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With old odd ends stoln out of holy writ;
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil. (*Richard III*, I. iii. 335–339)

2.3. Conspiracies

A hasty ruler, the one who is not careful enough, can become hated, and general hatred of the people is the cause number 1 of conspiracies (Makijaveli, 2020, p. 10). And “[i]f fortune leads the conspiracy, *virtù* is an

answer to her, and it depends on our *virtù* whether we will be able to respond effectively or if the response will ultimately be a prelude to our defeat.” (Uzelac, in Makijaveli, 2020, p. 165) A ruler puts himself at risk with the onslaughts “on a man’s life, his property, or his honour.” (Makijaveli, 2020, p. 11) For instance, Richard II stole the land of Bolingbroke’s father which ultimately led to his demise. If a ruler is to attack someone, Machiavelli states, he then ought to extinguish the liniage of the former ruler (Machiavelli, 2014, p. 10). Not doing that was the mistake of Macbeth’s and Claudius’. Furthermore, Claudius offends Hamlet by marrying his mother, his father’s widow, and by calling himself Hamlet’s father (Šekspir, 2016, pp. 15–9). So Claudius’ demise was only natural.

“Conspiracies are figured out either by uncovering or by guessing.” (Makijaveli, 2020, p. 27) That’s why no one believed Macbeth that he had no involvement in the murder of Duncan, despite the lack of evidence for or against him – that conspiracy was figured out by guessing. “[I]n order to ensure that the ruler is not under threat, people should either be treated kindly or [he has to] get rid of them” (Makijaveli, 2020, p. 27). To ensure that their fathers will not be avenged, Richard III orders the murder of his nephews (*Richard III*, IV. iii. 24–44) and decapitates his subjects left and right when he doesn’t like what they’re saying, which should serve as a reminder for anyone who would try to conspire against him (*Richard III*, III. v. 46–48).

DUKE OF GLOSTER: Then be your eyes the witness of their evil:

Look how I am bewicht; behold mine arm

Is, like a blasted sapling, wither’d up:

And this is Edward’s wife, that monstrous witch,

Consorted with that harlot-strumpet Shore,

That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.

LORD HASTINGS: If they have done this thing, my gracious lord, –

DUKE OF GLOSTER: If! thou protector of this damned strumpet,

Talk’st thou to me of ‘ifs’? Thou art a traitor: –

Off with his head! (*Richard III*, III. iv. 68–77)

2.4. Irony

When we call someone ironic or sarcastic in our everyday life, we usually mean that he says, more or less humorously, and expressed by means like intonation or gesticulation (e.g. by rolling his eyes), something opposite from what he actually thinks. Yet another kind of irony is also present in the works of Machiavelli and Shakespeare. Namely, Machiavel-

li's irony usually boils down to the question of his actual political stance. Was he a monarchist or a republican? He undoubtedly gives great advice for both sides. But it is this overemphasis that can guide us toward the answer to the question. Something similar can be found in Shakespeare's plays as well, but there will also be some differences.

Machiavelli wants, first and foremost, the common good. And even when the ruler or tyrant himself is virtuous, this common good is unobtainable in a monarchy. Because of that, Skinner points out that the only way to freedom lies in the republic, a community of free people (Skinner, 1990, p. 141). Viroli states that, according to Machiavelli, someone's status and class should in no way keep him from participating in politics. On the contrary, politics should be something available to the best of the citizens, and not only to the high ranking, gentry and nobles. All those who have proven themselves and gained their reputation in public office are worthy of political life, and not those who gained it simply by being wealthy and born in a certain family. One can, thus, prove himself by offering wise counsel and by doing acts that benefit the citizens (Viroli, 1990, pp. 155–6).

But Shakespeare didn't think highly of the common people. *Coriolanus* shows us people terrified before the battle, but vulturous after it (Čavoški, 2019, pp. 297–8), incapable “of doing anything good without the right lead” (Čavoški, 2019, p. 298). The people are imprudent, irresponsible and disunited because of their great individual differences. All of that makes them unskilled in politics, fickle and unreliable (Čavoški, 2019, pp. 298–300). Coriolanus is especially harsh toward plebs:

I muse my mother
Does not approve me further, who was wont
To call them woollen vassals, things created
To buy and sell with groats; to show bare heads
In congregations, to yawn, be still, and wonder,
When one but of my ordinance stood up
To speak of peace or war. (*Coriolanus*, III. ii. 7–14; Čavoški, 2019, p. 301,
quoted from
Šekspir, *Sabrana dela* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ i Dosije),
Korolan, III čin, 2. Scena, 8–14.)

But even in his dislike of the common people, Shakespeare still manages to be humorous. As Čavoshki highlights, Shakespeare shows the people as morally corrupt and lacking guilt for their own mistakes, such as the murder of Cinna the poet, who didn't conspire against Caesar (Čavoški, 2019, pp. 302–3).

CINNA: Truly, my name is Cinna.

FIRST CITIZEN: Tear him to pieces; he's a conspirator.

CINNA: I am Cinna the poet, I am Cinna the poet.

FOURTH CITIZEN: Tear him for his bad verses, tear him for his bad verses.
(*Julius Caesar*, III. iii. 27–30)

All of this leads us to the conclusion that, while Machiavelli was a republican, Shakespeare was most probably a monarchist.

3. Conclusion

Although they differ in method, philosophy and literature share some common topics, so we can conclude that their goal – understanding – is the same. Literature is a thought experiment, and thus has a cognitive function. Truth finds its place in literature, at least in the sense that fiction takes some elements from the real world, so it can teach us, say, history and geography. And if we were to see imagination as the basis for the formulation of hypotheses, we could conclude that literature can inspire us to create arguments based on induction, much like sciences do. We can also learn the truth from metaphors, which are not only stylistic devices, but are also characteristic of philosophy. One of the tasks of literature is illumination of our universal principles and concepts through particular examples of situations and characters.

Philosophical interest in art was born around the same time as philosophy itself. Aristotle's definition of tragedy dates from the ancient era, but tragedy moved farther away from it later on. This move from Aristotle's suggestions for a good tragedy can be found in Shakespeare's plays. Despite that, we will find a plethora of philosophical ideas in his works. A special attention was given to the comparison of Shakespeare's ideas with the ideas from the political philosophy of Machiavelli.

Hence, the chosen plays also have a political value. That was primarily shown in the comparative analysis of them and Machiavelli's ideas from *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*. These ideas were sorted by topic so as to follow the notions and problems of fortune, *virtù*, conspiracies, and irony. Thus, both authors speak of virtue as positive characteristics of a man, but also, in a more technical sense, they speak of *virtù*, i. e. conquering and militant bravery and morale. Both of them, however, believe that fortune also has a giant impact on one's rule. Fortune is an unpredictable force capable of turning the political situation over. The influence of fortune and *virtù* together is best seen in the examples of conspiracies, which both

Machiavelli and Shakespeare especially scrutinize as the greatest threat to the ruler. And aside from all of that, both writers are very humorous and sharp, although not at all radical, which is indicated by their use of irony. Irony in their works can also be interpreted in a strictly political sense when we try to discover their own personal stances. The interpretation of the nature of men lies in the centre of their political stances and here they finally diverge. All of these topics provide us with a framework in which we can interpret the words of one more easily through the words of the other, primarily Machiavelli's through Shakespeare's examples.

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