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**The Liminality of an East-Central European Hamlet –
Rose Tremain’s *The Road Home* as an Adaptation of William
Shakespeare’s *Hamlet***

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Abstract. Rose Tremain’s *The Road Home* explores the experiences of an Eastern European immigrant. The English literary discourse on this experience takes the form of a pastiche which reinterprets Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*. Hamlet’s liminality, experienced as a young and lonely rebel, and Lev’s hybridity, which he experiences in a cross-cultural position, is manifested in the same patterns. Tremain’s book follows *Hamlet* in showing liminality through madness, scenes of a theatre, and death as memory. These common features also share the important aspect of seeming instead of knowing which is a Kierkegaardian idea of non-existence. Following Edward S. Casey’s argumentation that Kierkegaard’s ideas are in accordance with Hamlet’s dilemma of whether to hesitate and think or to act and decide, this study investigates the scope of liminality in the character of Lev as an East-Central European Hamlet.

Key Words. Liminality, East-Central Europe novel, Rose Tremain, madness, memory.

Rose Tremain’s 2008 novel, *The Road Home*, portrays the East-Central European immigrant experience in Britain through a pastiche that pays homage to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Fit to the genre of British East-Central Europe novels, *The Road Home* portrays the encounter with the Other through the character of Lev, an economic migrant from an unspecified ex-Socialist Bloc country. Although the novel provoked a scholarly debate regarding whether its portrayal of East-Central Europe is heir to an orientalist, Cold War rhetoric exoticizing the ex-Second Bloc experience or rather an unbiased and refined image of the semi alterity of the European East (Harasztos 2015: 91), the overt Shakespearean subtext is rarely analysed in the context of the imagological aspects of Tremain’s novel.

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A literary discourse where the indigenous English drama *Hamlet* is used to illustrate the plight of an Eastern European immigrant offers an intriguing insight into how a Shakespearean reinterpretation can discover culturally new forms of liminality. A British literary rendering of the Eastern European immigrant experience in Britain is especially captivating, given that the political changes culminating in Brexit shed light upon the fact that postcolonial immigrants were on the large more welcome in Great Britain than those coming from ex-Second Bloc countries of the European continent (Sascha, Fetzer). Nevertheless, Tremain presents his main character, Lev, as an East-Central European Hamlet who struggles with his liminality in the manner of the true Shakespearean hero. As Emilie Walezak claims in her monograph entitled *Rose Tremain: A Critical Introduction*, by the Shakespearean intertextuality which binds Lev to a canonically central English cultural text, *The Road Home* positions Lev's intelligibility inside the English cultural field, that is, the novel strives to create an understandable, a knowable East-Central European (Walezak 2017: 167).

In interpreting the Eastern or East-Central European experience for a British audience, *The Road Home* does not only relate the narrative of an Easterner through the best way it can, that is, through Shakespeare. It also portrays a very British understanding of what the East-Central European Other might understand, gain, or appropriate from *Hamlet*. In Tremain's book, Shakespeare serves as a global English cultural reference for the East-Central European experience which is more readily shared with immigrant cultures than, say, British economic success. Lev sets upon his journey to London from the bleak socialist housing estates with an opportunist attitude wanting to become quickly and easily rich: "The English were lucky, thought Lev [...] I am going to make them share it with me: their infernal luck" (6). The book is a metatextual answer to such an Eastern European approach claiming that in order to reach this goal in British culture, one should first submerge in the liminality of Hamlet.

Hamlet is often analysed for its various instances of presenting liminal existence. In the Shakespearean motifs displaying certain forms of liminality utilized and paralleled in Tremain's novel, I wish to concentrate, at first, on the socio-psychological marginality of Hamlet's position which is akin to the immigrant's plight in many aspects. Secondly, I wish to highlight how the feeling of marginality is connected to an existential state of appearance or seeming which is coupled with the lack of understanding certain aspects of the dominant culture. This failure to understand pushes Hamlet and Lev into even more liminal spaces such as madness and acting as if in theatre. The liminality of madness and theatre can also be captured in many scenes from the novel. And, thirdly, I wish to investigate how all these liminal experiences result in the Kierkegaardian dilemma of the hesitant memory versus the active immersion in

the present, in other words, the immovability of death or the activity of life. Talking about a dynamic relationship between the memory and the present actions of a person as well as a social group, we arrive at specific questions of identity of the Eastern European Other which Tremain's text reads through *Hamlet*. Although Hamlet serves as an underlying model for the character of Lev, a conspicuous difference between their fates is that instead of fading into a memory or a ghost, Lev chooses action and life as if an East-Central European Hamlet who is given his happy ending the original is denied. My central concern is how Tremain's East-Central European Hamlet mirrors or rivals his Shakespearean counterpart.

Hybridity and liminality in the characters of Hamlet and Lev

The Road Home is a *Bildungsroman*, where the *bildung* is Lev's search to step out of the marginal, immigrant position, to find self-assertion and independence. It is similar to what Hamlet strives for. As a youth condemned, circumscribed, and advised by the adults around him, he aims at discarding his dependence and marginality. Independent action and self-assertion are the goals of both figures which, due to their marginal social and psychological states, they are incapable to achieve. Their initial endeavours are unanimously failing; however, their later success is differing. Lev and Hamlet also share social representativity in their struggles. As Walezak claims, Lev's

crisis is many-layered combining the identity crisis of the migrant, the gender crisis of the male individual and the economic crisis of his native country in the post-communist era so that the novel can be said to problematize the many facets of postimperialism: the joint collapse of ideological metanarratives and patriarchal dominance entail the fragmentation of identity (Walezak 2017: 163).

This collapse of ideological metanarratives is true for both characters. Hamlet also has inner struggles raging between old values and new ones. His archetypal modern crisis is the hesitation between residing in the past or going on which describes part of the post-socialist dilemma too. That is why the post-grand-narrative journey of Lev includes a very Hamletian rebellion against the authority of the fathers in general as well as his own father Stefan. Stefan is described as the immovable ancestral figure looming in Lev's mind he rebels against by changing his lifestyle. Stefan honours the dead and the past, which Lev discards as superstition. Britain also represents this modernity for him as the restaurant leader GK Ashe so describes his view on the topic: "fuck the parents" (167). Walezak also backs the Hamletian origin of Lev's marginality by claiming that the book unconventionally interprets Shakespeare's hero as a self-exile: "he casts himself out, so that he can make things right in the place he's left behind" (168).

Overt allusions to Hamlet in Tremain's novel thus create a *mise-en-abyme* for the migrant's plight. And, although Walezak claims that it is not a successful *mise-en-abyme* (168), I think the parallel is apt. No matter that Hamlet was not a hybrid identity in being a foreigner, moreover, he was culturally central to Denmark, he still failed to understand and reluctant to accept many aspects of its culture. Consequently, he was in a liminal position, as a teenager among adults whose liminality allows for criticism of the system. Lev, too, remains an outsider in British society. Those who accept him derive from marginal groups such as the elderly, the Irish, or postcolonial immigrants. Thus, both characters stand on the verge of two psychological states (youth and dependency versus adulthood and self-assertion) as well as that of two cultures (medieval and modern versus state socialist and capitalist respectively).

These circumstances create liminal spaces for the two characters and, also, it makes them hybrid identities. The notions of 'liminality' and 'hybridity' stand close to each other; however, they are not interchangeable. Liminality is a notion Cultural Studies borrowed from anthropology. The original concept, coined by Victor Turner, refers to the state of those individuals who, in a rite of passage, belong to an "interstructural position" (Turner 1967: 93). Later, the expression came to denote several various borderline conditions in the personality development of individuals in post-industrial societies as well. Thus, liminality predominantly emphasizes the chronological state of in-betweenness. As opposed to this, the concept of 'hybridity,' which became popularized by Homi Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture* (1994), concentrates on the spatial or, rather, the symbolically spatial aspects of an intermediate position between cultures. As Sayyed Rahim Moosavinia and Sayyede Maryam Hosseini claim in their study "Liminality, hybridity, and 'Third Space,'" Bhabha designates a deliberately counter-hegemonic subject position for hybrid identities (2018: 335), which means hybrid identities tend to pose an ongoing subversion of dominant cultures, not a passing one. Consequently, I will use these two notions accordingly: 'liminality' for chronologically passing states of in-betweenness, and 'hybridity' for the limbo status of standing on the verge of two, or more, cultures.

However, the closeness of these two notions also plays an important part in my study, one key aspect of which is the mere condition of existing outside clear-cut categories. This condition that involves being devoid of categories is highly subversive of the world of normality, law and order or, simply, everyday practice. When something is not categorizable, one fails to understand it and has to be content with a superficial impression of how the given object seems in his or her perception. Edward Casey in his study "Hamlet on the Edge, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty" argues that it is the condition of seeming that provides the edge

in boundary for liminality (Casey 2014: 140). Seeming is a key idea in my investigation into Lev's Hamletian aspects. After all, his whole *Bildungsroman* can be conceived as a journey from understanding Britain only superficially, accepting his first, stereotypical impressions created by what seemed to be true towards a deeper understanding of this other culture. Seeming can be an explanation for the liminal and hybrid positions Lev and Hamlet display and many of the problems such positions entail.

According to Casey, seeming can appear in two ways: either it is on the surface of the thing, or it is a densified essence, a form of the whole, namely, its appearance. This is a paradox: the appearance either scratches only the surface of the essence, or it captures its whole meaning (Casey 2014: 140). It has a potential to subvert both the surface and the essence by existing, yet again, on the boundary of categories, a little in both territories. *Hamlet* shows three fundamental types of seeming, that is, states of liminality which all incorporate these two features of seeming: capturing the whole or scratching only the surface. In the following, let us examine the Hamletian liminalities of madness, theatre, and that of death or memory as they feature in *The Road Home*.

The Liminality of Madness and Theatre

Madness

Regarding an attempt to understand a culture, madness seems to be a display of failure rather than a liminal position aiding constructive subversion. Indeed, from early medieval times, madness was referred to as the opposite of reason. However, in the Renaissance, and later on in the Baroque, the meaning of madness became more blurred. Since the Cartesian elevation of conscious thinking and reason up into the centre of the modern subject, madness became the signifier of marginalization and the subversion hidden in anything deviating from the central and normal. Hamlet's madness is also such an act of transgressing the boundary of reason and madness (Casey 2014: 139). Polonius's words also demonstrate that this madness is rather a liminal state: "though this be madness, yet there's method in't" (Shakespeare 2003: 70). Shakespearean madness always carries the doubt and criticism of the so-called wise normality. His plays famously positioned madness within reason, and projected it onto the court jester figures who expressed the subversive reason of madness. Thus, this early Modern madness is only thought to be madness inside the realm of the real madness of powerful madmen like Richard III or Claudius. Hamlet's is a madness that only seems so. It is only madness from the outside and wisdom on the inside. Moreover, it is ever ready to play this game of turning itself

inside out with a postmodern and Baroque fold only to find itself on the very opposite side of the surface again.

In his *History of Madness*, Foucault refers to the symbol of the early Modern “ship of fools” laden with its cargo of mad souls searching for reason as a heterotopia *par excellence* of liminality (qtd. in Wilson 2014: 198). He claims that madness is simply a derogatory category used for the Other. Derrida refines this idea further by claiming that Cartesian subject is a mere repression of the fear of madness, as the anguish from being mad lies at the closest proximity to madness (Wilson 2014: 199). In Foucault’s thinking, the construction of the Ego is itself a fool’s errand, as it consists of a mockery of the madmen in us who can only be “a fool of a logos that is father, master, and a king” (Foucault 1978: xvii). Therefore, the ego resides in-between two powers, the seemingly reasonable logos and the suppressed madness.

What the construction of the ego is on an abstract level, the personality development of the characters is on a narrative level. What Foucault calls “the power that drives out, excludes, banishes, marginalizes, and represses” (qtd in Wilson 2014: 199) is traditional reason or logos that Foucault called the father and king. It is the ever changing power in many forms. For Hamlet, it is Claudius and the normalizing Danish court, for Lev, it is his father as well as the exploitative and neo-colonialist Great Britain. It is the all-time powerful madman whose repressive power marginalizes Hamlet and Lev, against whom they fight with the liminal power of madness. Notably, Lev, the East-Central European Hamlet, is taught this duality of modern existence by Britain and British characters. GK Ashe is a controversial figure in this sense: he represents the suppression and aggressive Othering of a typically reasonable modern power as well as the subversive second generation person who dares to disregard authority. No wonder, he later becomes Lev’s role model. This is a Deleuzian folding of madness which is placed both on the outside and in a power position and on the inside in a subversive and liminal space.

In Tremain’s novel, Lev is indeed subjected to what Foucault named repressive and marginalizing power by some of the English characters. G K Ashe suppresses him, Sophie exploits and, in turn, is exploited by Lev, whereas, Ruby helps him. These acts of power all push Lev into the feeble and liminal position of the immigrant worker. As a mad reaction to the madness of power, he also throws his own mad scene when he kicks dustbins on dark London streets in a rage after the theatre visit. His liminality is manifested after he watches a postmodern drama with Sophie’s friends. In what is probably an in-yer-face theatre performance, Lev is unable to understand the duality of figuration: true and not true at once. The postmodern interpretation where incest is portrayed probably as an all-embracing symbol for modern existence, Lev remains an outsider thinking about his actual daughter and an actual incest, being

outraged that reality is mixed up with fiction with regard such a crucial topic. He falls into the trap of the liminality of seeming: he couldn't distinguish between portrayed scene and reality not only when watching the drama. He also falls into the trap of seeming when witnessing his girlfriend, Sophie's, gradual warming up towards one of her young and fancy friends, Howie. He becomes raging and mad when he realizes that he could not distinguish reality from appearance here, because his own East-Central European categories fail to serve him anymore. By this, he definitely feels to be suppressed, his reality mocked and desacralized by the trap of seeming. As a result, this thought of 'neither true, nor entirely not true' drives Lev into his Hamlet rage.

After their respective madness scenes, both Hamlet and Lev have to experience a painful break up moment with their lovers. One might even suspect that a foreboding threat of a disappointment in the beloved girl triggers their raging madness scenes. Indeed, both in Hamlet's reproaches and in Lev's wishful thoughts about Ophelia and Sophie respectively, the treachery of appearance definitely features. Hamlet and Ophelia deliberately misunderstand each other in their dialogue in Act 3 Scene 1. Ophelia claims she does not love Hamlet anymore, "rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind", which is a dubious statement, since in the previous moment she just agreed with the queen's suggestion that their love might do both her and Hamlet good. Hamlet also seems to lie about the gifts and about what they actually signify, his true affection: "I never gave you aught" (Shakespeare 2003: 99). They appear to each other in a different light now: their previous liminal state, that love is, became clear now: it was only seeming to be true. Hamlet and Lev look more broken because of their previous ignorance of the true nature of the girl than the actual betrayal. Hamlet rages about the futility of believing in anybody: "we are arrant knaves, all: believe none of us" (100). Lev is also angry with himself, being blind before: "nothing was the right way up for long. There was something, some silently approaching event, such as the opening of a play, which you knew ... you *knew* was going to turn everything on its head" (211-212). They are outraged that they failed to know it right. They are hurt because they again fell into the trap of appearances. They are the unsuspecting heroes in front of whose appalled eyes, a treacherous world is unveiled. They create the raging and mad scenes in order to gain a little break away from this constant facing with their own naivety and the fact that the world is not the nice place it previously seemed. Adulthood is not the rosy vista it seemed as a loving youth. Britain is not the "infernally lucky" place it seemed from East-Central Europe.

Theatre

Both Hamlet and Lev experience madness in normality and react to it with Foucauldian subversively reasonable or, rather, mad scenes. With these fabricated, seemingly mad moments, these characters deliberately step out of normality into the liminal zones of irrationality. Given Casey's paradox about seeming, namely, that it could either touch upon the surface of its object or capture the essence of it, Hamlet and Lev's raging scenes might be in connection with their attempts to understand the world around them. These performed scenes either remain very far from reality or, just the opposite, capture its real meaning. In fact, *The Road Home* follows the pattern of *Hamlet* by positioning the disillusioned raging scene of Lev in the proximity of the theatre scene as it also happened for the Danish prince. The liminality of madness is intertwined with the liminality of theatre, which is the space where the liminal experience of epiphany about the world takes place for both Hamlet and Lev.

Merleau-Ponty argues that mirrors, namely, places of seeming, create a boundary between two orders of being. Mirrors are the limes between things and spectacles and they turn things into spectacles and vice versa. The play and the King's conscience is in this mirroring relationship with each other. The play seems like the actual events that the King is aware of; consequently, it functions as a mirror. Plays as well as any rituals happen in a liminal space between two realms (qtd in Casey 2014: 139). This liminality of the theatre is what disgusts Lev in the play they watch with Sophie. The play is about a married couple whose names are vulgarly allusive: the man's name, Dicer, and the woman's name, Deluda, directly reveal the meaning of their relationship. Moreover, at a certain point, Dicer reveals his desires for his daughter called Bunny and fucks a Bunny-faced inflatable doll on stage. In the theatrical setting, as Lev comprehended it, fathers seemed incestuous and abusive, mothers alcoholic and selfish, and both a little childish in their desires. After watching such scenes, Lev enters into his dustbin-throwing tantrum thinking: "I've made my life obscene" (215). Because if the theatre mirrors reality, his own life is only a seemingly honest and loving place, in fact, an obscene pretence. The disillusionment in traditional values, marriage and love is also a Hamletian emotion here.

However, there is a considerable difference from *Hamlet* in the theatre scene. In the play, it is Hamlet who actively constructs what the mirror of the play should show. By contrast, Lev only witnesses the mirror of his life set up by the interpretation of others, possibly that of a contemporary British playwright. As Wilson argues, "theatre is not set up against power, but is one of power's essential modes": the lesson Greenblatt and New Historicism learned from Foucault was the old one that power uses circuses" (2014: 203). Interpretation is power and Lev is subjected to this power in the theatre. However, he later surpasses passive knowing and

also takes part in theatrical scenes of his own. His actions after this epiphanic moment can be interpreted as performing acts of his own, in his own theatre. He is torn between performative actions of his own self-improvement and mirroring what others expect from him. Trying to find his own path after being sacked from the restaurant falls into the first, ruthlessly raping Sophie falls into the second category. His raging madness scene can also be interpreted in the paradigm of active subversion: Lev attempts to subvert the seeming, and performs its delusion as the obscene reality the play suggested.

Lev, as well as Hamlet, has to struggle with the perceptions of others about him. He even performs them in his liminal theatrical experiences. As Hamlet's is the tragedy of never to become anything in fact, the tragedy of the half-finished existence of youth, Lev's is very much that of the hybrid existence of the migrant who, although leaves Eastern Europe behind, is still unable not to think along those lines. His mad rage is a subversion of understanding "this unreal world he'd just entered" (210). In his performative actions, he attempts to fight the interpretative power of the theatre Britain makes of him. All these liminal struggles lead to the Hamletian dilemma of seeming or knowing. Seeming means being circumscribed, whereas knowing stands for actively participating in the reality that mirrors me. In Tremain's novel, the East-Central European immigrant's situation is portrayed through this dilemma, which is also the question of life or memory, the question of taking action or remembering, and finally, the question of to be or not to be.

Death and memory

Just as ominously Hamlet is, Lev is haunted by his past, by the spectres of his dead and motionless father as well as his deceased wife. As Casey argues, memory is at the boundary space and time between the actual event and its death (2014: 143). Ghosts play an important part in Renaissance English dramas as they are archetypal liminal creatures, being the ones who did come back from a place where it is impossible to come back from. This means they are the non-existent beings. Casey claims that ghosts and dreams belong to the main topic of the drama of the seeming: they seem to be here, but they are not in fact (2014: 140). Remembering the dead, which is in fact evoking their ghosts, as well as dreaming or day-dreaming lure one back from life towards the liminal zone of the threshold between life and death. It is densely portrayed by a kitchen scene in Tremain's novel when Lev is immersed in his thoughts, spills water on the floor, and the chef wakes him up by throwing a bucket at him shouting: "Stop dreaming. I have been watching you. Concentrate!" (79). Thus, remembering deliberately stops Lev from action, which is the Eastern European immigrant version of the

greatest inner conflict of Hamlet: an inability to decide for or against action in the actual place and time he exists in, for or against existence, that is, “to be or not to be.”

Memory and, since memory refers to dead moments, death too creates liminality between action and hesitation. For investigating how this liminality appears in Tremain’s book, Kierkegaard’s philosophy is worth examining. In her study “Hamlet and Kierkegaard on Outwitting Recollection”, Jennifer Ann Bates argues that Kierkegaard raises very similar issues to those of Hamlet. Hamlet’s wavering between two states of existence is similar to Kierkegaard’s philosophical ruminations discussed in his book *Postscript*, written under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus. Both for Hamlet and for Kierkegaard, “to merely recollect is to forget to be” (Bates 2014: 40).

Lev also struggles with this inner conflict. For his identity, it is crucial to stick to remembering his homeland and his living and dead family members left behind in East-Central Europe (Ina, Stefan, the father, Rudi etc). However, he is aware that they are not successful in living and do not necessarily support his new life here. In addition, he meets people in England who do not seem to recollect much of their roots. Sophie does not even talk to her family, and Ruby spends a classic Western European old age abandoned by her children in a caring home. Still, Britain is the space of living, activity, and change for Lev. Lev is stuck in-between as a hybrid identity, resenting both. On the one hand, he reproaches his family and Eastern Europeans for standing still, for a depressive refusal to change. His mother’s inactivity nearly broke his enthusiasm when organizing his own restaurant: “what’s the point of it [caring about anything – Á.H.] when life takes everything away?” (7). On the other hand, he is discontented with the active and light-hearted ways of the Brits, heavily resenting Sophie for moving on to the next lover, or the play for experimenting with alternative modes of expression which do not hold traditional family links in esteem. He feels such easy-going ways as shallow and content with only an appearance as he reproaches her: “I understand you now. You don’t see anything. You see what is ‘fashion’ and what is ‘smart’. That’s all that matters to you” (210). Lev is an Eastern European Hamlet once again: reproaching those who move on, unhappy with those who can only see the old values.

Peculiarly, his inert hesitation between the two cultures is central to his hybrid reality, namely, the fact that both contain elements he is not ready to part with. He discards Ina’s pessimism and keeps going on with his plan, because he values hard work and the success he experienced in Britain. However, in his discontent with Britain, shallowness and the lack of ‘knowledge’ appears. He doesn’t wish to give thinking and ‘knowing’ up. Still, remembering, that is thinking, somehow excludes active existence, life, or the Hamletian “to be”. Kierkegaard thus

worded it: “the absurdity of the eternal being finite transforms theoretical knowing into subjective decision: in choosing, one becomes. All other forms of thought are non-actual; they are recollections without the movement of becoming” (Bates 2014: 43). Consequently, Kierkegaard goes so far as to claim that knowledge that gives rise to decision is a prerequisite to becoming, that is, existence. Bates adds to this that the other kinds of ‘knowing’ Kierkegaard names “all other forms” might be subsumed under the heading of ‘seeming’. This other type of knowing, or seeming is Hamlet’s hesitancy which is the furthest from existence. Hamlet’s task is from the beginning to restore time’s flow. This means becoming or, in Kierkegaardian terms, changing. However, recollection is a hindrance to that (Bates 2014: 44). In the middle of the novel, Lev also falls into this seeming existence when he is drawn back by his memories and discontented with what Britain has to offer.

Lev, similarly to Hamlet, still wants people around him not to proceed with time so quickly. Stand still and remember. As Bates argues, what Hamlet grieves the most is that Gertrude and the court forgot old Hamlet. Remembering is the ghost’s final exhortation and it became the gravest task of Hamlet to remember old Hamlet, that is, himself in the creation, as our father is our genesis (Bates 2014: 45). For Gertrude to forget her previous husband with whom she begot Hamlet means for him that he became a spiritual bastard. For Lev, the incestuous scene in the theatre had a similar meaning: filial and paternal feelings can be discarded and are not to be respected anymore as a spiritual source and genesis. In such a rootless situation, Hamlet’s famous dilemma “to be or not to be” refers to a threefold state that defy becoming: the self-annihilation in suicide, the either-or status of a ghost or memory, and the contrast of knowing, which gives rise to deciding and becoming, and seeming, which is only a semi-existence (Bates 2014: 46). Lev also has to face all three aspects of this existential dilemma. At first, he struggles with suicidal melancholy after the death of his wife. Secondly, he is haunted by memories of his past when in England. He had to discard memories in order to move on: “it was important not to start thinking about her now. It was essential to Lev’s survival not to lose himself in dreams of her” (40). Thirdly, he finds himself in the predicament of seeming as an immigrant when “they thought him a criminal of the kind” (41).

All these, suicide, remembering, and seeming, are various liminal forms of “not to be” both Hamlet and Lev ponder over. By the end, however, there is a fundamental deviation in their fates. The tragedy of Hamlet is that he couldn’t step out of this seeming non-existence. Horatio’s oath to tell everyone about him is “an entrenchment in recollection”, because, as Bates states, Hamlet will then be turned from action into memory (Bates 2014: 51). By contrast, in the Kierkegaardian sense, Lev, by forgetting about his history and rather moving on with his

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new restaurant equals to choosing action instead of memory. *The Road Home* gives its East-Central European Hamlet a positive ending where the rest is not silence, but “something wild and beautiful, and full of woe” (Tremain 365). This is more remindful of “to be” than Shakespeare’s ending, where Hamlet ends up “not to be”.

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