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An Existential Interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in W.H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*

W.H. Auden is one of the most prominent figures in the 20th century English poetry, who during his prime years of creativity took interest in the existential school of thought. Therefore, in the author's later poems his existential views are presented. In my paper I aim at the analysis of the existential interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror*.

The Sea and the Mirror is considered Auden's one of the most famous poems, where he masterfully illustrates human existential issues and arising conflicts. Fear, anxiety, desperation, and depression have become mundane parts of life leading humans to suffering and alienation. Therefore, Auden is concerned with how one should live and survive in this chaotic and absurd state of being, what the ultimate meaning of life is and how to achieve harmony within oneself.

The Sea and the Mirror is not an effort to continue or explain *The Tempest*, Auden uses its narrative structure and characters to illustrate them through his existential lens. The poem is divided into three parts resembling a triptych painting, an art form unifying three pieces of art.

Auden employs the Sea as a purgatorial symbol for transformation of his characters, the so-called "Sea change" (reference to the song of Ariel). Therefore, Auden represents characters' reflections on past and future, and demonstrates their existential journey. Additionally, Auden introduces the idea of three stages of life and displays the metamorphosis of his characters from the perspective of inter-movement from the aesthetic through ethical, and to the religious stages. Auden's existential worldview was significantly shaped by Danish Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, whose influence is evident in Auden's later works. Like Kierkegaard, Auden was interested in thorough investigation of the affairs of human existence. Hence, in my paper I intend to discuss Auden's existential interpretation of Shakespeare's play as related to Kierkegaard's concept of Anxiety, faith and the three (aesthetic, ethical and religious) stages of life.