

Through Hamlet's Subversive Character

Yu-min Huang, National Changhua University of Education (NCUE), Taiwan

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Abstract

Over the centuries when people are faced with the deaths of their beloved ones in the family and suffer from grief over them, William Shakespeare in *Hamlet* offers his ideas of how a son faces his father's death and his mother's remarriage, ideas of whether the purgatory exists and ideas of which eschatology is correct in the Reformation, either Catholic or Protestant. In this essay, I examine two traces and one reversal in the play and ask many what-if questions through the perspective of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. In my argument, Shakespeare misspeaks to his readers in the atmosphere of Protestant Elizabethan England the meanings of death in Prince Hamlet's perspective in order to reverse his readers' way of seeing and to make them experience Hamlet's Catholicism as the form of the opposite, by which they can become theologians themselves and meet God behind His mask. In employment of Derrida's center-freeplay structurality, I believe that it is through Prince Hamlet's subversive character that Ghost King Hamlet is the first center into which Prince Hamlet comes as freeplay in the structurality of father and son, and Prince Hamlet as the second center into which the other characters come as freeplay in the structurality of the court, intertwined with the structurality of the religion where no existence of purgatory in Lutheranism comes as center into which the existence of purgatory in Catholicism comes as freeplay, by the structurality of authorship where author comes as center into which the play comes as freeplay.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, death, purgatory, revenge, Derrida, deconstruction

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Introduction

Had you a chance to be in power over a country, would you choose to be in or out? If your father dies, will you choose to let go or to remain remorse and do you believe that he is still there in the purgatory? If your mother got remarried, would you feel jealous or give her your blessings? There are many ideas in William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and many criticisms on Shakespeare, his play or the hero. Firstly, for Carol Zaleski, in the play "Shakespeare dramatized the fateful tensions between Protestant and Catholic interests with as much subtlety as he portrayed the battery of doubts, fears, guilt, piety, love, honor, and self-interest that tortured Hamlet's soul" (45). Besides, in Margreta de Grazia's praise for Hamlet's soliloquies, *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most modern play and "breaks out of the medieval and into the modern" (qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 20). Thirdly, Hamlet's soliloquies in the play functions as his state of mind and he is a modern hero (Thompson and Taylor 20). Moreover, although Freud explains the play in his theory of the Oedipus complex, Marx does "through a subversive reading of the Ghost of Hamlet's father" (Stallybrass qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 26). Furthermore, Marjorie Garber also proclaims that a decentering force with its center struggles with a centering force; it is "a self-centered de-centering that directs attention, as it should and must, to subject positions, object relations, abjects, race-class-and-gender" as well as "nostalgia for the certainties of truth and beauty" as centering in Shakespeare's plays and criticisms, namely Shakespeare as fetish and humanness; and there is poststructuralism for critics "in the wake of the explosion of new work on Shakespeare in the last two decades" (67). Finally, Terry Eagleton claims that Shakespeare "was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida" (ix-x qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 26). Poststructuralism then plays a significant role in postmodernism, which includes the subversive quality in the play. Thus, I would like to employ Jacques Derrida's center-freeplay structurality to examine the play and to argue that there are two traces which trigger Derrida's center-freeplay structurality, and it is through Prince Hamlet's subversive character that Ghost King Hamlet is the first center into which Prince Hamlet comes as freeplay in the structurality of father and son, and Prince Hamlet is the second center into which the other characters come as freeplay in the structurality of the court, intertwined with the structurality of the religion where no existence of purgatory in Lutheranism comes as center into which the existence of purgatory in Catholicism comes as freeplay, by the structurality of authorship where author comes as center into which the play comes as freeplay, as the illustration below shows:

The essay consists of six sections: Postmodernism and Derrida; Ghost King Hamlet as Center and Prince Hamlet as Freeplay; Lutheranism as Center and Catholicism as Freeplay; Prince Hamlet as Center and the Other Characters as Freeplay; Author as Center and His Play as Freeplay; and Conclusion.

I. Postmodernism and Derrida

Arnold Toynebee coined the term "postmodernism" in 1947, a term meaning "the extension and development of cultural modernism, the artistic and literary style that had enjoyed a period of massive influence between the wars, and experienced a revival of interest in the 1960s" (Padley 177). It is due to many disasters like two world wars, genocide and inhumanity that postmodernism challenges the intellectual attitudes since the 18th-century Enlightenment such as reason and rationalism, and that

it culminates in near-revolutionary events in Paris in 1968 and seeks new values and beliefs in replacement of those in Enlightenment thinking (Padley 178). Postmodernism thinkers undermine “‘grand narratives’... includ[ing] academic disciplines such as philosophy and history, and cultural products such as literature” but employ “poststructuralist [skepticism] about the reliability of linguistic meaning” (Padley 178-79). They argue that “all kinds of intellectual theories and processes of cultural enquiry, consisting of nothing more than discourse, could have no claim to reflect [the] reality or posit objective truths. The consequence of these claims was a crisis of representation in the modern world” (Padley 179). Eagleton defines postmodernism as subversive to the sole truth and reason and as the idea of instability and indeterminate:

Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities. (1997: vii)

Synonymous with poststructuralism to the extreme, deconstructionist practices are suggested by Derrida (Padley 180). Derrida proposes an idea of the center-freeplay structurality; it is that there is a center both within the structure and outside the structure in the center-freeplay structurality; the center “constitute[s] that very thing within a structure which[,] while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (279). He explains that “[t]he center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality ([it] is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. ...The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play” (279). For *différance* in Derrida’s deconstruction, it is impossible to determine textual interpretation as single one or a final determinate meaning, since “the relationship between language and the things it represents is arbitrary and subject to constant slippage of meaning” (Padley 181, 153-54). Like postmodernist thinkers who seeks alternative ways to interpret the world (Padley 178), Derrida seeks alternative ways to interpret texts and asks the question “What if” (Bressler 125)? Deconstruction emphasizes close textual analysis in order that the inherent contradictions or irreconcilable meanings or inconsistencies in a text can be brought out, which then becomes the reversal: “the text is shown to contain within its own structure[] elements that [destabilize] its purported wholeness and unity; [the reader is] faced with an almost limitless range of potential interpretations,” leading to a multiplicity of different and possible interpretations of the same text and textual analysis as “mere academic ‘playfulness’” or “hopeless nihilism” (Padley 155, 154), or leading to a collage with meaning always changing in postmodernist’s view or poststructuralist’s (Bressler 99).

There are two roles in text interpretation and production: the reader’s role and the author’s. Deconstruction critics view “the strategies of Derrida, J. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man and others, as tending to distance literature from its social, historical and political contexts,” but in fact, “deconstruction’s definition of ‘text’ embraces all

aspects of human discourse and communication,” inclusive of “[its] relationship to wider contextual issues” (Padley 154, 155). On one hand, a reader plays a role in the process of text interpretation. Each reader in his own different background and dominant social and cultural group interprets things in his own subjective and perspective; therefore, there are many realities and no absolute center (Bressler 99-102). For Derrida and other poststructuralist critics regardless of his personal experience, the reader is like a point, a perspective “at which the multiplicity of contending, often contradictory and provisional meanings offered by the text congregate” (Padley 183). A text, designates Roland Barthes, refers to “a collection of arbitrary signifiers whose potential meaning is subject to [a reader’s] continual revision and reassessment” (Padley 182). For Barthes, “[t]exts do not reflect or mimic reality, but are the product of formal and linguistic conventions that become established by the text’s relationships with other texts and with the larger text...of language itself” from which the reader interprets (Padley 182), and “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation,” but the reader is the place which makes multiplicity focused; and that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the [a]uthor” (Barthes 1325, 1326). On the other, author also plays a role not in his writing autonomy but in the class struggle: author is a producer, who “is working in the service of certain class interests. A progressive type of writer does acknowledge this choice. His decision is made upon the basis of the class struggle: he places himself on the side of the proletariat. And that’s the end of his autonomy. He directs his activity towards what will be useful to the proletariat in the class struggle. This is usually called pursuing a tendency, or ‘commitment’” (Benjamin 85-86). The author, all in all, sides with the proletariat and commits to his writing where he slips his language.

II. Ghost King Hamlet as Center and Prince Hamlet as Freeplay

To deconstruct a text and oppose the single truth, I would like to employ Derrida’s deconstruction to examine the play and to expose that it is through Prince Hamlet’s subversive character to life that Ghost King Hamlet comes as center into which Prince Hamlet comes as freeplay in the structurality of father and son. I would also like to ask the question, what if, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the throne comes to not King Claudius but Prince Hamlet after late King Hamlet dies, or what if Ghost King Hamlet orders not Prince Hamlet but Queen Gertrude to avenge him, or what if Ghost King Hamlet does not die in a murder conceived by Claudius but dies for some other reason else, or what if Ghost King Hamlet in purgatory does not even exist since purgatory does not exist for Protestant theologians (Greenblatt 1997: 1662)? Sj Edward T. Oakes also asks the question of “what if [Prince] Hamlet had stumbled upon the love letters of Gertrude and Claudius, where he could read of their plot to kill the old king and marry soon after” (64)? Or in the play Tibor Fabiny discusses about a reversal, when Ghost King Hamlet reveals his truth to Prince Hamlet and asks for a revenge (52). If one of them is indeed so, the play would go into a wholly different direction. Besides, Shakespeare leaves the first trace in Ghost King Hamlet’s disclosure of a murderer to start the whole play:

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,

Unhouseled, dis-appointed, unaneled,
No reck'ning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.
O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest. (1.5.74-83)

Thompson and Taylor articulates that “if the Ghost is absence, invoking him and addressing him produces an effect of unbearable, petrifying presence” (31). In his address, Ghost King Hamlet accuses Claudius of murdering in detailed description and of Claudius’s illegitimacy to be a king, but Prince Hamlet is hesitant in revenge, resulting from “the nature of reality and the source of truth” (Dean 522). It is obviously not so simple as Zaleski’s declaration that if the Ghost is honest, “he is one of the holy souls on leave from [p]urgatory, come to warn the living and to beg for intercessory masses, prayers and good works as suffrages on his behalf” (45), but rather his claim of revenge should puzzle Prince Hamlet since being in purgatory is “to ease the debt of punishment” in Prosser’s designation (Dean 520), although obviously it does not. Meanwhile there come many questions, a question of whether Ghost King Hamlet is real, a question of whether purgatory does exist, and a question of whether the murder is true. Also, in Hamlet’s famous soliloquy lies the second trace:

Who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of? (3.1.78-84)

In fact, it can never be confirmed that purgatory does exist and what Ghost King Hamlet says is true since no dead people return to life from afterlife, an undiscovered country, whether good or bad; thus, to live seems merely to escape afterlife. Even so, Prince Hamlet takes the case seriously.

III. Lutheranism as Center and Catholicism as Freeplay

Through Prince Hamlet’s subversive to Christianity, in the center-play structurality of the religion in the play, it is no existence of purgatory in Lutheranism that comes as center into which the existence of purgatory in Catholicism comes as freeplay. The play is a misspeaking to “illuminate the issues set in motion by the Protestant Reformation and has even managed to adumbrate some key insights into Martin Luther’s dilemma that [arise] only in the twentieth century” (Edward T. Oakes 54). Theme of afterlife arouses the heated debate between Catholic Church and Reformation of the sixteenth century; and the existence of purgatory is the ground of all in medieval Catholicism and it is “a doctrine deliberately rejected by Lutheranism, the English Protestants and the Church of England (Edward T. Oakes 61, 62; Fabiny 51; Beauregard 50; Greenblatt 1997: 1662; Greenblatt 2001: 235). In the play, Ghost King Hamlet speaks of his serving a term of suffering purgatory, the conception and its practices, coming from Roman Catholicism and Prince Hamlet believes him

(Greenblatt 1997: 1662). In Stephen Greenblatt's idea, "Reformation theologians regard[s] ghosts and supernatural visitations as diabolical" (qtd. in Fabiny 51) and "Luther even avoided talking about hell, and he saw death (just as Tyndale did) as sleep until the day of doom" (Fabiny 51). As Raymond Waddington proposes, "Shakespeare used Martin Luther as a prototype in constructing the character of the prince." (qtd. in Fabiny 50). Hamlet is described as "young man Luther" at his education (Edward T. Oakes 54, 61, 69; Raymond Waddington in Fabiny 50), "a Christian of a peculiar type: one torn between two rival versions of Christian eschatology, Catholic [due to his upbringing] and Lutheran [due to his education]" (Edward T. Oakes 61, 63), and he "embodies lingering doubts about the 'lost world' of traditional Catholicism" (Brigden qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 38). It is not so much as Hamlet's loss of his own soul as his struggle between Catholic and Luther (Edward T. Oakes 61), and as that between Catholic and Protestant interests (Zaleski 45). In fact, it is Prince Hamlet, "a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament[who] is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost" (Greenblatt 2001: 240; Zaleski 45; Dean 522). The same is true in the case of Ophelia's funeral. It is a Christian issue over Ophelia's burial. Whether her drowning to death is suicide decides on whether she deserves a Christian burial since a Christian's suicide is a crime. Finally and ironically, she is buried in a Catholic funeral (Dean 522) not due to the cause of her death but due to her high social status in gravedigger's claim: "If this had not been/ a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian/ burial" (5.1.22-24), evident in her funeral rite with songs, flowers, and prayers as a pre-Reformation ritual (Beauregard 68), in contrast with Hamlet's refusal to sing, which is subversive to Christianity in Catholicism and which reveals its corruption. It is that Catholicism as freeplay offers a rational explanation for Lutheranism as center: there is "the hidden God, indirect revelation...revelation under the opposite" (Fabiny 44); namely, "For Luther, God conceals Godself in the form of opposites in order to reveal God's true self" just as Polonius's requirement to Reynaldo for investigating his son Laertes "By indirections find directions out" (Fabiny 52; 2.1.65).

IV. Prince Hamlet as Center and the Other Characters as Freeplay

Through Prince Hamlet's subversive to Claudius's kingship, it is Prince Hamlet, who comes as center into which the other characters in the play come as freeplay in the structurality of the court, such as Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and *The Mousetrap* performers. With politics, religion and moral laws intertwined, to revenge or not to revenge, it is a dilemma for Prince Hamlet; and the act of revenge has double meanings for Marjorie Garber (495 qtd. in O'Neill 124) and it decides his act of faith (Dean 521). If he does not avenge late King Hamlet, he shows no filial obligation and no respect; however, if he does, his act of revenge, performed in a play as a start, not only undermines church doctrine (Greenblatt 2001: 253) but shakes political court (O'Neill 124-25). For church doctrine, on one hand, in Protestant doctrine, ghosts are evil spirits or illusions and a ghost's vengeance is regarded as immoral although some Protestant authorities such as John Calvin, Peter Martyr and Thomas Wilson agree on just vengeance not for hatred but for charity (Beauregard 53,56). On the other, although Bacon argues that the most tolerable kind of revenge for wrongs is no law to remedy nor to punish (17 qtd. in Kumamoto 59); although the debt should be left in God's hand to pay off; although Catholicism agree on vengeance merely on tyrannicide from a body political as God's minister with the good intention, in Aquinas's designation, which is not

“directed by hatred for the offender but rather by charity intending some good, such as the offender’s amendment or the common good” (Beauregard 53, 54); and although Claudius employs a tyrannical rule for certain (Beauregard 48), Hamlet cannot ensure his intention to be good but hesitates to revenge. He is “a reckless and incompetent avenger” despite whether vengeance justified (Beauregard 57). In fact, Hamlet is ambivalent, self-conflicted and hesitant toward vengeance in his soliloquies, especially in the scene of Claudius’s prayer in his address “to be, or not to be,” which ends up as “let be” as religious; temporarily Hamlet chooses not to kill King Claudius on his praying just to prevent Claudius from heaven (3.1.58); but gradually, he chooses the side of believing in Ghost King Hamlet in the existence of purgatory in Catholicism (Dean 521; Beauregard 50) and taking revenge on Claudius, “an endorsement of its Catholic world” (Dean 526) as freeplay, and subverts to Claudius’s regime (Greenblatt 1997: 1660) and the Lutheranism as center, although in Cam’s idea vengeance is common but not supportable (60 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 34) and although for Robert N. Watson, Michael Neill and Stephen Greenblatt, vengeance is a “problematic substitute” (Thompson and Taylor 42) and its tragedy is “a displacement of prayers for the dead forbidden by the Reformation” (Watson 75 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 42).

“[M]oral chameleon” (O’Neill 129) as Queen Gertrude is, her body is the body political, where Claudius and Prince Hamlet war to win the throne. In Karin S. Coddon’s idea of Hamlet’s madness, “the representation of madness in the play as relating to the ‘faltering of ideological prescriptions to define, order, and constrain subjectivity,’ and “madness as ‘an instrument of social and political disorder (61, 62 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 41), and madness as “refusal to take the world of Polonius seriously,” the world of Machiavelli (O’Neill 124, 123). In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s idea, Hamlet suffers from his ambition to the throne and jealous of Claudius’s marriage with Gertrude (Greenblatt 1997: 1660). It is Hamlet’s madness, or melancholia, or paranoid jealousy of Claudius and Gertrude’s marriage that destroys all values into female sexuality as women’s nothing in the play (Eagleton 1986: 70-71):

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world! (1.2.129-34)

Prince Hamlet feels living to be meaningless, which lies a seed to be subversive to the traditional throne, King Claudius’s. In politics, Prince Hamlet has no justification to the throne of Denmark and has no proper personal traits for it. Firstly, as “the crackup of a romantic idealist” (O’Neill 123), he is not ambitious enough but too straightforward in his course of rightful and lawful action on the throne of Denmark so Claudius has his chance to take the throne in the elective monarchy of Denmark in place of Hamlet, the scene absent from the readers; however, it is affirmed that Gertrude’s body is “an illegitimate source of political authority” (Greenblatt 1997: 1665, 1660; Edward T. Oakes 64; Tennenhouse qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 39). It is “two separate acts of treason, the seizing of the Queen’s body and the seizing of political power” (Tennenhouse 96 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 39), which is

unbearable for Hamlet and which contributes to his paranoid jealousy and his unwillingness to occupy his own position either as a prince or as an heir, or as Ophelia's lover (Eagleton 1986: 71). Merely in this way of paranoid jealousy can Hamlet "protect his inner privacy of being against the power and knowledge of the court" and "[t]his inner being...evades the mark of the signifier" in his own claim (Eagleton 1986: 71):

These indeed 'seem',
For they are actions that a man might play;
But I have that within which passeth show—
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.83-86)

Hamlet is thus "pure deferral and diffusion, a hollow void which offers nothing determinate to be known" (Eagleton 1986: 72).

Prince Hamlet is so jealous of Claudius's throne and marriage with Gertrude that he cannot be objective to uncover the truth. Further, although Hamlet subverts to King Claudius's power manipulation, it is a pity that he dare not face the answers of the matters over whether late King Hamlet is murdered by Claudius, and hence, whether late King Hamlet comes from purgatory; and whether Prince Hamlet has justification to overthrow Claudius; and furthermore, "which eschatology is correct, Catholic or Protestant" (Edward T. Oakes 63, 65), but all remain mysteries. For Greenblatt, confused about Lutheranism as center and Catholicism as freeplay, Prince Hamlet does not accept that "[p]urgatory is a fiction" but he endeavors to "establish the veracity of the Ghost's tale" (2001: 253). In his thinking about his and his play's focus on "'What if' activity of theatrical behavior and performance" (Dean 525) and in his effort to confirm Claudius's crime of murder, he resorts not to a rational method of investigation but to a literary artwork (Dean 524) to stage not *The Mousetrap*, the plot that the player-brother murders his own brother and marries his sister-in-law but *The murder of Gonzago*, the plot that the player-nephew Lucianus murders the player-uncle Gonzago (Greenblatt 1997: 1662-63; Edward T. Oakes 63; Dean 525; Thompson and Taylor 39). By dodging in testing the truth of murder, Hamlet loses the golden opportunity to prove Claudius as a murderer in his reaction to the performance in front of the entire court; that is, he loses "a much stronger case for his action" (O'Neill 125) and justification to the throne (Edward T. Oakes 64) and has long lost it before the crowning in the elective monarchy. It tests not Claudius's reaction to the murder but reveals Prince Hamlet's intention to kill Claudius. Thus, Prince Hamlet seems to know he cannot be a legitimate heir. In fact, he stirs up Claudius's act of killing him on one hand and on the other he intends to escape death. In the later part of the play, to escape from his own death and invert his disadvantage, Prince Hamlet commits forgery and homicide by forging the letter to kill King Claudius's two messengers in England in his exposition:

I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model of that Danish seal;
Folded the writ up in the form of th'other,
Subscribed it, gave't th'impression, placed it safely,
The changeling never known. (5.2.50-54)

In his public virtue, Hamlet does not act like a king heir and neither does he have the

proper character as the foundation for the political order (Eagleton 1986: 73). On impulses Prince Hamlet avenges late King Hamlet and fences with Laertes, one losing his father too, which seems unnecessary if he can prove his justification to the throne in what he calls *The Mousetrap* in his claim to Horatio: “But I am very sorry, good Horatio,/ That to Laertes I forgot myself;/ For by the image of my cause I see/ The portraiture of his./ (5.2.76-79), but it leads to many deaths without Hamlet’s sincere remorse, his own death included, ironically leaving the regime of Denmark in Fortinbras’s hand and in a far worse situation, a Norwegian family in long feud with Denmark in late King Hamlet’s reign (Edward 58 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 34-35; Edward T. Oakes 66-67). In Hamlet’s oral will, he utters

O, I die, Horatio!
The potent poison quite o’ercrows my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England,
But I do prophesy th’election lights
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th’occurrences, more and less,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence. (5.2.294-300)

Prince Hamlet loses Denmark to Fortinbras not because of a war with Norway but because of domestic conflicts in Denmark herself. In Philip Edward’s declaration, “he has brought the country into an even worse state, in the hands of a foreigner” (58 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 34-35). And “[t]he act of revenge itself happens in a flash of rage, without planning, without any self-vindicating declaration by Hamlet to Claudius, and without any public confession of guilt by the usurper. At the end, revenge leaves the Prince [Hamlet] not with inner satisfaction but with intense anxiety over his ‘wounded name’” (Greenblatt 1997: 1664). Strangely enough, Prince Hamlet himself worries less about the possibility that after killing Polonius and causing many deaths like those of Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Laertes and Claudius, either directly or indirectly, all in his responsibility, he may serve the same prison term in Purgatory as his father late King Hamlet, but cares more about whether the coming generations would remember him (Edward 58 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 35; Greenblatt 2001: 4):

O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story. (5.2.286-91)

Ironically enough, Hamlet’s story must be “highly embarrassing” or a laughing stock in Fortinbras’s impending reign (Eagleton 1986: 74).

Taking his honor self but dropping moral self (O’Neill 125-26), Hamlet subverts to filial piety and moral law in the case of Gertrude and Ophelia, since they two are politically complicit for Claudius’s kingship, Gertrude as directly complicit and Ophelia as indirectly complicit, obeying her father Polonius, Claudius’s minister in Hamlet’s misapprehension (O’Neill 122-23). As to the private virtue, even though “Gertrude’s sexual behaviour and remarriage do not seem out of the ordinary” (Cam

60 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 34), Hamlet subverts to matriarchal filial obligation with all his intention in his cynical talk with Gertrude, since for him Gertrude makes at least two errors, revealing her sexual desire *per se* and revealing it not for him but for Claudius, another man (Eagleton 1986: 71):

O heart, lose not thy nature! Let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
I will speak daggers to her, but use none.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites—
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never my soul consent (3.2.363-369).

Hamlet intends to make Gertrude “repent and behave[] as a priest in the biblical and Protestant sense of the word” (Fabiny 51). His love for Queen Gertrude is as unbearable as Ophelia’s for him. Besides, Prince Hamlet shows no love for Ophelia: “You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so/ inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you/ not” (3.1.118-20) and he feels no guilt of the death of Polonius, Ophelia’s father, and no guilt of the sudden death of Ophelia, his lover since the play “situates the need for revenge in a context that goes beyond any crime” (Greenblatt 1997: 1664). Hamlet even blames Gertrude’s remarriage on all women, Ophelia in particular: his command to Ophelia “Get thee to a nunnery” referring to going to a brothel in Elizabethan slang (Greenblatt 1997: 1665; 3.1.122). To my belief, she commits suicide in her madness, not because of her bodies and her erotic desires in Elaine Showalter’s perspective but because of her feeling her love for Prince Hamlet unbearable and meanwhile her acknowledge of her father’s death in the Prince Hamlet’s hand, which Prince Hamlet again subverts the filial obligation in the family of his father-in-law-to-be (Edward T. Oakes 66).

V. Author as Center and His Play as Freeplay

In the center-freeplay structurality of authorship, I believe, it is Shakespeare the author who comes as center into which his play *Hamlet* comes as freeplay. The Protestant Reformation was dated back to 1517, the year when Martin Luther posted “the ninety-five thesis to the door of Castle Church of Wittenberg” and along the year, when William Shakespeare wrote his plays for approximately seventy years (O’Neill 121). To probe into more about Shakespeare’s life for interpreting the play, Thompson and Taylor designates in the atmosphere of Protestant England “Shakespeare’s only son Hamnet or Hamlet died in August 1596, and his father John was to die [a Catholic] in September 1601” and that is relevant with the play with the death of a father as the beginning and a death of a son as an ending (36; Dean 521): “Hamlet’s guilt-ridden compulsion to help his tormented father may draw on Shakespeare’s own guilt toward his recently deceased and reputedly Catholic father” (Watson 75 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 37). Also, in the scene of the gravedigger in his answer “a tanner will last you nine year” (5.1.154-55) to Hamlet’s question “How long will a man lie i’th’ earth ere he rot?” (5.1.151), Shakespeare assists John Shakespeare in having a coat of arms in October 1596; as a glover and whittawer, John had the job to tan the skins of animals (Honan 8, 21, 38, 228-29 qtd. in Thompson and Taylor 37). Edward T. Oakes indicates that Shakespeare is “a committed and orthodox Catholic” with ambiguous evidence in interpreting the play

(69); nonetheless, indicates Greenblatt, despite still uncertain for Edward T. Oakes, it is likely that Shakespeare is not “a secret Catholic sympathizer” (2001: 254) but “the [Protestant] playwright was probably brought up in a Roman Catholic household in a time of official suspicion and persecution of recusancy” and he “was haunted by the spirit of his Catholic father pleading for suffrages to relieve his soul from the pains of Purgatory” (2001: 249). Or, as John Keats designates Shakespeare’s “negative capability,” it is the ability “to submerge his own personality into his characters so that *they* speak on their own terms rather than being mouthpieces for some ideological hobbyhorse of” the author (qtd. in Edward T. Oakes 71 emphasis in original). In the play, “Shakespeare fuses Senecan fatalism with Christian hope, and Protestant iconoclasm with the persistence of Catholic devotions” (Zaleski 46). The play as freeplay describes not Shakespeare’s religious tendency, but his awareness of “the implications of the dangers” in “a highly charged religious setting” (Edward T. Oakes 72), the same as Christopher Marlowe’s awareness (Huang 2011: 122-23). The play, declares Marius, is “a mirror held up to [reflect] religious confusion” (qtd. in Fabiny 51) and echoes “the themes of Luther’s theology of the cross” (Fabiny 52), which is what Shakespeare fears to say. The play “takes [the audiences] toward the cross by twisting [them] out of [their] wrong orientations, by challenging the direction of [their] gaze, by reversing [their] seeing” (Fabiny 52). For Luther, merely by experiencing life like living, dying or being damned can one become a theologian. Hamlet dies and in his death, he does meet God, God behind a mask and becomes a theologian himself (Fabiny 53).

VI. Conclusion

As a reader losing Father and having long felt remorse along with Prince Hamlet and with the audience in the atmosphere of Protestant Elizabethan England, disapproving of Catholicism (Dean 519), I interpret Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with two traces, Ghost King Hamlet’s disclosure of a murderer and the existence of purgatory, and thus the significant reversal of whether Ghost King Hamlet in purgatory does exist and I examine the play in Derrida’s center-freeplay structurality. In a structurality of father and son, there is Ghost King Hamlet who comes as center into which Prince Hamlet comes as freeplay; in a structurality of the religion where no existence of purgatory in Lutheranism comes as center into which the existence of purgatory in Catholicism comes as freeplay despite a “larger theological position unclear” (Dean 522); in the structurality of the court where Prince Hamlet comes as center into which the other characters such as Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and *The Mousetrap* performers come as freeplay; and in the structurality of authorship where the author Shakespeare, who sides with the proletariat to grieve over the deaths of the two beloved ones, his father John Shakespeare and his son Hamlet Shakespeare, comes as center into which the play comes as freeplay. In his commitment to writing for the proletariat where he slips the language, Shakespeare misspeaks that there should be the turnaround from Catholicism to Lutheranism, like the turnaround from Calvinism to Lutheranism in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (Huang 2011: 132) and that it is a much better life for Prince Hamlet to believe in Lutheranism, where death is in fact life (Fletcher 198 qtd. in Huang 2011: 108), to “let go of his father and accept the loss of him” like the speaker in Linda Pastan’s poem *Go Gentle* (Huang 2015: 29), to bless Queen Gertrude’s remarriage, to cherish Ophelia’s love and to help Claudius reign over the Denmark. The play does not become “a text-book demonstration of the theological irresolution and liturgical

failure of the Elizabethan settlement” (Dean 522), but rather, merely by reversing my seeing and experiencing Hamlet’s Catholicism as the contrary in Shakespeare’s misspeaking can I become a theologian and meet God behind His masks (Fabiny 46, 53), “a loving father, yet with various faces” (Huang 2011: 133) and can I reach communication with Shakespeare since “[t]he most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t [being] said” (Drucker qtd. in Archer 1).

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Contact email: huangelisha@gmail.com