

Postmodern Shakespeare: Thinking Through Hamlet's Subversive Character

Yu-min Huang

National Changhua University of Education, Taiwan

Abstract

Over the centuries people have always faced the deaths of their beloved ones in their families 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 purgatory exists and ideas of which eschatology is correct in the English 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 Prince 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 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 *Hamlet* comes as freeplay.

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

If one should have a chance to be in power over a country, would he choose to be in or out? If one's father dies, will he choose to let go or to remain remorseful and does he believe that his father is still there in the purgatory? If his mother gets remarried, will he feel jealous or give her his blessings? These are what William Shakespeare intends to explore in his play *Hamlet*, and there are many criticisms on Shakespeare, on the play or on 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" (2001, p. 45). Besides, in Margreta de Grazia's praise for Prince Hamlet's soliloquies, *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most modern play and "breaks out of the medieval and into the modern" (qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 20). Thirdly, Prince Hamlet's soliloquies in the play functions as his state of mind and he is a modern hero (Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 20). Moreover, although Freud explains the play by way of his theory of the Oedipus complex, Marx gives us a "subversive reading of the Ghost of Hamlet's father" (Stallybrass qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 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" (1999, p. 67). 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 shown in Figure 1.

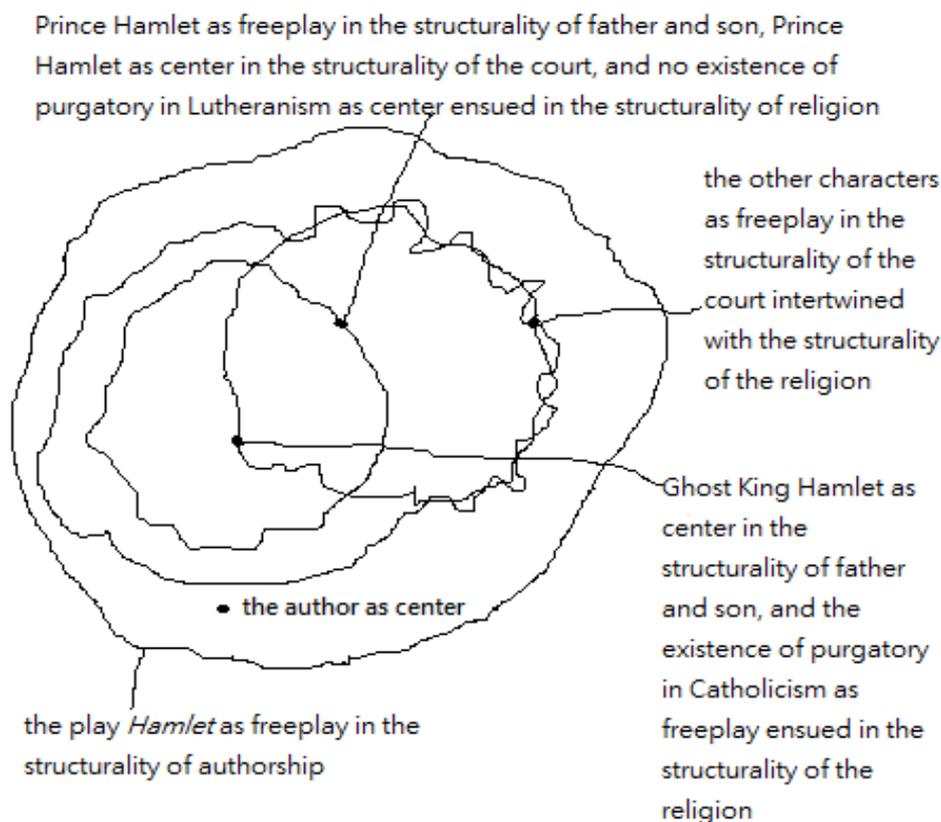


Figure 1

The essay consists of seven sections: Postmodernism and Derrida; Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the English Renaissance and the English Reformation; 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 *Hamlet* as Freeplay; and Conclusion.

Postmodernism and Derrida

Arnold Toynbee coined the term “postmodernism” in 1947 to mean “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, 2006, p. 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, 2006, p. 178). Postmodernist 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, 2006, pp. 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, 2006, p. 179). Derrida declares that there is only representation of truth to a reader’s mind: the mind encounters

the unfolding of the thing's Being ... truth is the projection of a thing's Being to an observer's mind. ... truth is but the mind's determination about the present state of an outside reality. Truth is [simply] one's interpretation or consciousness of a thing or reality. (Sagut, 2009, p. 1)

Eagleton defines postmodernism as subversive to the sole truth and reason and as the idea of instability and indeterminate:

[p]ostmodernity 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, 2006, p. 180), and he proposes the notions of what if, *différance*, supplementation and center-freeplay ground structurality.

Firstly, like postmodernist thinkers who seek alternative ways to interpret the world (Padley, 2006, p. 178), Derrida seeks alternative ways to interpret texts and asks the question “What if” (Bressler, 2007, p. 125)? It is the other philosophy of the same text: the task of deconstruction is to explore the possible other face of a philosophy (Derrida qtd. in Selden, 2005, p. 169), and its result “is a questioning... of notions of identity, origin, intention, and the production of meaning” (Selden, 2005, p. 169). Close textual analysis is emphasized by deconstruction in order that a text can expose the inherent contradictions or irreconcilable meanings or inconsistencies in itself, which becomes the reversal of the text: a text in itself contains elements that deconstruct its meant wholeness and unity, and its reader encounters all possible unlimited choices of interpretations, contributing to various divergent and possible interpretations of a text (Padley, 2006, p. 155, 154), which eventually forms a collage with always-changing meaning from postmodernism's perspective (Bressler, 2007, p. 99).

Secondly, for *différance* in Derrida's deconstruction, “meaning is always *deferred*, perhaps to the point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification. *Diff[é]rance* not only designates this theme but offers in its own unstable meaning a graphic example of the process at work” (Norris, 1982, p. 32; emphases in original). Derrida further explains that

[s]ubjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*. This is why the *a* of *différance* also recalls that spacing is temporization, the detour and postponement by means of which intuition, perception, consummation—in a word, the relationship to the present, the reference to a present reality, to a *being*—are always *deferred*. [This present reality or this being is] [d]eferred by virtue of the very principle of difference which holds that an element functions and signifies, takes on or conveys meaning, only by referring to another past or future element in an economy of traces. (1982, p. 28–29; emphases in original)

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, 2006, pp. 181, 153–54), and since Derrida's

deconstruction is “an activity of reading which remains closely tied to the texts it interrogates, and which can never set up independently as a self-enclosed system of operative concepts” (Norris, 1982, p. 31).

Thirdly, Derrida proposes the idea of supplementation, referring to addition and substitution simultaneously, featuring that writing supplements and replaces speech in all human activity and he claims nature-culture opposition that nature is a full presence and it comes before culture, but in the violent hierarchy, nature is not pure but is already in culture’s contagion (Selden, 2005, p. 166). In supplementation, for Derrida, every binary opposition plays roles of center and freeplay; for example, deception plays a supplementary role as freeplay to truth as center (Bressler, 2007, pp. 124–125), and other does to self in Bakhtin’s dialogism, and culture does to nature, by my analogy. Writing and the presence of the other are highlighted in the discussion of morality and its vital elements: “[t]here is no ethics without the presence of *the other* but also, and consequently, without absence, dissimulation, detour, difference, writing” (Derrida, 1997, pp. 139–40; emphases in original). Writing, physically secondary in its system, differs from speech in speech’s immediate and full presence, leaves a trace and requires reinterpretation in the hierarchy of speech as presence and writing as secondary (Selden 164–65); however, Bacon claims that the hierarchy can be reversed and that both writing and speech are signifying processes and they both lack presence (Selden, 2005, p. 165): in fact, “speech is a species of writing” (Selden, 2005, p. 166). Derrida believes that

writing...brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new “concept”... [It is] a new concept of writing, that *simultaneously* provokes the overturning of the hierarchy speech/writing, and the entire system attached to it, *and* releases the dissonance of a writing within speech, thereby disorganizing the entire inherited order and invading the entire field. (1982, p. 42; emphases in original)

Hence, for Derrida, “writing overrides speech and absence overrides presence” (Huang, 2015, p. 21). Derrida even describes the characteristics of writing in its smallest unit: “a written sign is a mark” (qtd. in Selden, 2005, p. 167), which, involving irresponsibility (Selden, 2005, p. 167) and lacking a subject and a particular addressee in a particular context, repeats itself and which violates its real context and is deciphered in divergent contexts (qtd. in Selden, 2005, p. 167), not even taking authorial intent into account. In brief, a word, under erasure, has no ultimate, absolute meaning but has its meaning, always being deferred, added and supplemented, and always changing in the oscillation of the interpretation, one signifier signifying after another to seek a final end but to no avail; a word achieves its meaning on a journey of self-construction in his relation with other in their difference in this freeplay language; and in this process, what-if questions arise and the author misspeaks in his slips of language and exposes what he dreads to say (Bressler, 2007, pp. 125–128, 132; Norris, 1982, p. 32; Selden, 2005, p. 166; Sagut, 2009, p. 2) in a metaphor:

[m]etaphor[s] must therefore be understood as the process of the idea or meaning (of the signified, if one wishes) before being understood as the play of signifiers. ... this representation of the object, signifying the object and signified by the word or by the linguistic signifier in general, may also indirectly signify an affect or a passion. ... metaphor is the relation between signifier and signified within the order of ideas and things.... The literal or proper meaning will be the relationship of the idea to the affect that it *expresses*. And it is the *inadequation of the designation* (metaphor) which properly *expresses* the passion. (Derrida, 1997, p. 275; emphases and parentheses in original)

The meaning of a metaphor to its passion becomes the final end to achieve.

Lastly, 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; and the center constitutes itself in a structure and escapes the structurality of the structure in its own governance: it “constitute[s] that very thing within a structure which[,] while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (1978, p. 279). He discusses the belongingness of a center and 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” (1978, p. 279; parenthesis and emphases in original). Derrida further applies the center-freeplay structurality to the nature-culture opposition in the example of incest prohibition for Levi-Strauss. For Derrida, the idea of something cooked comes before that of something raw in their existence even though in nature raw precedes cooked; likewise, the idea of culture comes before that of nature in their existence even though in life “nature precedes culture” (Fry, 2009). Derrida defines nature and culture in Levi-Strauss’s idea:

that which is *universal* and spontaneous, and not dependent on any particular culture or on any determinate norm, belongs to nature. Inversely, that which depends upon a system of *norms* regulating society and therefore is capable of *varying* from one social structure to another, belongs to culture. (1978, p. 283; emphases in original)

The relationship between nature and culture is believed “a declaration of absolute interdependency” (Fry, 2009) and “causative” of each other (Fry, 2009). Levi-Strauss’s nature-culture opposition transforms into Derrida’s idea of center-freeplay structurality; that is, nature is the center into which culture comes as freeplay (1978, pp. 278–83).

Overall, 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, 2006, p. 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, 2007, 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, 2006, p. 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, 2006, p. 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, 2006, p. 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, 2010, pp. 1325, 1326). On the other hand, an author’s social role is emphasized and he also plays a role not in his writing autonomy but in the present social situation (Benjamin, 1998, pp. 85–86): an 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, 1998, pp. 85–86)

The author, all in all, sides with the proletariat and commits to his writing not due to autonomy but from a class interest (Benjamin, 1998, pp. 85–86), where he slips his language (Bressler, 2007, p. 128).

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the English Renaissance and the English Reformation

The date when Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was written remains unclear (Thompson & Taylor, 2006, pp. 49–53) but it was approximately in 1599 (Platter in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 50) or in 1601 (Jenkins in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 52). For John Lawson, the English Renaissance came together with the English Reformation and was influential in the later fifteenth century and the sixteenth century. It sparked a revival of classical antiquity for art, literature and learning. It argued for humanism, which referred to "a new interest in man and human perfectibility, the rejection of scholasticism, [and] a passion for pure Latinity and the study of Greek" with Erasmus as a powerful representative and his version of the New Testament in Latin as seeds of the English Reformation (2007, p. 66) since "Erasmus'[s] work influenced heresiarchs like Luther and Tyndale" (Elton, 1991, p. 112). This "new learning no more than Lutheran doctrine could work upon the English Reformation until the crown had led the way in the political and jurisdictional break of the 1530s" (Elton, 1991, p. 113).

For the English Reformation, one factor of the theology from Catholicism to Protestantism (Elton, 1991, pp. 114, 134) is that after "marr[ying] his brother's widow," Catherine of Aragon, King Henry VIII, based on readings of Deuteronomy xxv. 5¹ (Ibid., p. 98), feeling afraid of committing a sin as outlined in Leviticus xx. 21² and in his conscience (Ibid., pp. 98, 101) and thus having no descendants nor heirs except Mary (Ibid., p. 98), for the benefits of his nation (Ibid., p. 100), played a political, religious and jurisdictional game (Ibid., pp. 98–107). He did this for "the validity of his marriage" (Ibid., p. 101) and to pursue "a legitimate heir to the throne" (Ibid., p. 101) in the atmosphere of anti-clericalism (Ibid., pp. 102, 104, 110) due to the jurisdiction by the government and due to corruption of the Church (Ibid., pp. 110, 103–05). He declared that "Kings of England" with superior power were second to God solely (Ibid., pp. 107, 120). In his political, diplomatic, religious and jurisdictional game (Ibid., pp. 110, 122–123) and with the assistances of Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer, Henry VIII pushed himself onto the royal supremacy over the Church and over the Parliament. He gradually walked toward the break with Rome since his sovereignty preceded any foreign authority, and he gradually achieved his purpose of gaining the divorce with Catherine of Aragon and the remarriage with Anne Boleyn in 1533 (Ibid., pp. 101, 114–120, 129–134). Boleyn was from a family who supported anti-clericalism, "Luther's attack on the Church" and "the seculari[z]ation of Church property" (Ibid., p. 116) despite some aftereffects (Ibid., pp. 137–40). To Henry VIII's belief, his kingly power overrode the Church's power (Ibid., pp. 133–36; Haigh, 1993, p. 118) and thus he became the "Supreme Head of the Church of

¹ Deuteronomy xxv. 5 regulates that one man should "marry his brother's widow if she is childless." (Elton, 1991, p. 98. Note.)

² Leviticus xx. 21 regulates that "a man who marries his brother's widow shall be childless." (Ibid. p. 98.)

England” (Elton, 1991, p. 135, 136; Haigh, 1993, p. 119). During the English Reformation, the time of the 1530s is a watershed for Christendom and Christianity. People’s faith at that time changed from Catholicism to Protestantism in the critical period of approximately thirty years, from their familiar “daily scene[s]” of “the mass, prayers for the dead, the invocation of saints. . . monks, nuns and friars” in Catholicism to non-Catholicism (Lawson, 2007, p. 65). The Church, wealthy and powerful as it was, and having its courts, canon law and the Pope as its spiritual leader, was attacked as an institution and was faced with its reform in many places around Europe in the early sixteenth century “among [both] laymen and churchmen alike” since it hampered the sovereign nation states (Ibid.) and since it was deemed corrupt (Elton, 1991, p. 105). Bishops and those clergies at the higher positions, inherited from their fathers, could be ill-educated and were not morally better but they owned high power since they “were lawyers and administrators appointed for loyal service to the king’s government, [ironically] not for their piety and sanctity” (Lawson, 2007, p. 66). They took the lead for monks and friars. Therefore, Catholicism became impure theology since both superstitions and scholastic theology arose in Catholicism (Ibid.): with these

simple, uneducated people[,] Catholicism had accumulated superstitious and materialist accretions—miracles, shrines, prophecies and relics, which the Church was almost powerless to control; whilst to the learned[,] the primitive faith of the gospels had become obscured by the elaborate superstructure of scholastic theology no less than by these ignorant peasant cults. (Lawson, 2007, p. 66)

In the religious situation of falling Catholicism and rising Protestantism, Henry VIII’s political manipulation for his marriage with Anne Boleyn triggered the twist and turn of the English Reformation and he, as a start, gradually turned his people toward the Protestantism in his reign since he played a double-faced game: Henry VIII must have been deemed to be partial to Protestantism for his marriage with Anne Boleyn although, for Greenblatt et al., he still maintained Catholic practices in his church (I A 45). Surprisingly enough, after Henry VIII, as different political reigns of Henry VIII’s descendants in the royal family, the religious situation swayed between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; as Greenblatt et al. claim, King Edward was a partial Protestant, Queen Mary a Roman Catholic, and Queen Elizabeth a Protestant, embracing both sides (I A 45). Then, it is reasonable that their people must have felt puzzled about what religious direction they should have faith in and that they must have sought an answer.

Hamlet discusses late King Hamlet’s existence in purgatory (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1662). In fact, the history of the idea of purgatory dates back to the twelfth century, and there are three systems: Hell, Purgatory and Paradise (Goff, 1986, p. 165). For Peter the Chanter, the places for the good and those for the evil must be clearly differentiated: those people considered good go to Paradise immediately if there is nothing for them to burn, or they go to Purgatory first to burn something sinful with them and go to Paradise afterwards if they carry venial sins; and the evil go to Hell directly (Ibid.). He further designates that merely the predestined or the elect go to Purgatory although opinions vary from people to people (Ibid.). In fact, in the Church’s battle against “heresy” in its view, numerous ecclesiastical writers in the period around the turn of the thirteenth century shared their ideas, and it was the start of Purgatory (Goff, 1986, p. 168). They employed the new doctrine of Purgatory as their weapon; thus, the existence of Purgatory boosted both “progress in philosophy and pressure from the masses” and “the need to do battle against those who would not accommodate themselves to the new belief” (Ibid., p. 169) in Catholicism, as in the case that purgatorial suffering was considered to be “performing the full penance due for sin in this world” (Rex, 1993, p. 75). To the large scale, the Roman

Catholic Church polished the doctrine of Purgatory to battle against “the heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Greeks of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and the Protestants of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (Goff, 1986, p. 169). However, its enemies argued that “a man’s fate in the other world depended only on his merit and God’s will” (Ibid.), and that, in fact, purgatory, together with the cult of the saints and the sacrifice of the mass, was what the Protestant Reformers aimed to attack (Rex, 1993, p. 75). Then, death became the crucial issue, and purgatory became the weapon for the power battle between the Roman Catholic Church and its enemies. Those enemies, or “heretics,” believed that

the soul goes directly either to Heaven or to Hell; there is no redemption between death and resurrection. Hence, there is no Purgatory and it is futile to pray for the dead. No admirers of the Church, heretics denied that the institution has any role in determining the fate of the soul after death and opposed its attempts to extend its power over men by claiming such a role. (Goff, 1986, p. 169)

Interestingly enough, Lutheranism is one among those enemies in Protestantism against Catholicism. In *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses*, Martin Luther proposes that Christians, who are for Lutheranism, “militate against the whole idea of purgatory because they do not establish an intermediary state between the dead who have been condemned and those who are saved” (qtd. in Evener, 2015, p. 536) and that purgatory is not people’s common fate (qtd. in ibid, p. 541) even though he leaves whether purgatory exists in God’s power to decide on (Ibid., p. 546). Vincent Evener describes those faithful for Lutheranism as blind and deaf to the wandering ghosts and to their stories of purgatory but they rely on scripture, the Word and Christ:

the faithful who in their lives had plugged their ears before and turned their eyes from the wandering spirits and their tales of purgatory, and who had sought Christ alone in the spoken word (auditory) and printed scripture (visual), were admonished to shut their inward eyes before terrifying images at the moment of death, and to turn their (metaphorical) heads and eyes instead to the image of Christ, made immediately present to physical, outward hearing and seeing in the sacrament.

...

Christians were to cling in faith to scripture, the Word, and Christ alone, plugging their ears to the clamor of the poltergeists and closing their eyes to apparitions of lost loved ones. (p. 543, parentheses in original; p. 547)

Thus, the existence of purgatory remains a struggle and controversial issue between Catholicism and Lutheranism and it is open to the play for the discussion.

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 acts as center into which Prince Hamlet acts 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 not to King Claudius but to 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. What if Ghost King Hamlet in purgatory does not even exist since purgatory does not exist for Protestant theologians (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1662)? Sj

Edward T. Oakes also asks the question of “what if [Prince] Hamlet had stumbled upon the love letters of [Queen] Gertrude and Claudius, where he could read of their plot to kill the old king and marry soon after” (2010, p. 64)? Or in the play Tibor Fabiny discusses about a reversal of when Ghost King Hamlet reveals his truth to Prince Hamlet and asks for a revenge (2006, p. 52). If one of these events were 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. (Shakespeare 1.5.74–83)

Selden proposes the same view that late King Hamlet as center is there and not there (170) in Prince Hamlet’s reaction to seeing late King Hamlet: “The time is out of joint. O cursed spite/ That ever I was born to set it right” (Shakespeare 1.5.189-90)! Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor articulate 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, 2002, p. 522); the example is in Ghost King Hamlet’s accusation:

sleeping in mine orchard,
 A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
 Is by a forged process of my death
 Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
 The serpent that did sting thy father’s life
 Now wears his crown. (Shakespeare 1.5.35-40)

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, 2002, p. 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 Prince 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? (Shakespeare 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; however, Prince Hamlet chooses to believe in Ghost King Hamlet and takes the case seriously. Then, the play begins.

Lutheranism as Center and Catholicism as Freeplay

Through Prince Hamlet's subversive to Christianity, in the center-freeplay 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" (Oakes, 2010, p. 54). Theme of afterlife arouses the heated debate between Roman Catholic Church and Reformation of the sixteenth century; and the existence of purgatory is the ground of all in medieval Catholicism (Ibid., pp. 61, 62) and it is "a doctrine deliberately rejected by Luther[anism]...the English Protestants" (Fabiny, 2006, p. 51; Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1662) and the Church of England (Beauregard, 2007, p. 50; Greenblatt, 2001, p. 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, p. 1662):

I am thy father's spirit,
 Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
 And for the day confined to fast in fires
 Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
 Are burnt and purged away.
 ...
 But this eternal blazon must not be
 To ears of flesh and blood. List, Hamlet, list, O list!
 If thou didst ever thy dear father love—
 ...
 Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. (Shakespeare 1.5.9–13, 21–23, 25)

However, in Stephen Greenblatt's idea, "Reformation theologians regard[s] ghosts and supernatural visitations as diabolical" (qtd. in Fabiny, 2006, p. 51) and "Luther even avoided talking about hell, and he saw death (just as Tyndale did) as sleep until the day of doom" (Fabiny, 2006, p. 51; parenthesis in original). As Raymond Waddington proposes, "Shakespeare used Martin Luther as a prototype in constructing the character of the prince." (qtd. in Fabiny, 2006, p. 50). Prince Hamlet is described as "young man Luther" at his education (Oakes, 2010, pp. 54, 61, 69; Raymond Waddington in Fabiny, 2006, p. 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]" (Oakes, 2010, pp. 61, 63), and he "embodies lingering doubts about the 'lost world' of traditional Catholicism" (Brigden qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 38). It is not so much as Prince Hamlet's loss of his own soul as his struggle between Catholic and Luther (Oakes, 2010, p. 61), and as that between Catholic and Protestant interests (Zaleski, 2001, p. 45). In fact, interestingly enough, it is Prince Hamlet, "a young man from Wittenberg, with a distinctly Protestant temperament [who] is haunted by a distinctly Catholic ghost" (Greenblatt, 2001, p. 240; Zaleski, 2001, p.

45; Dean, 2002, p. 522). The same is true in the case of Ophelia's funeral that the interests are most taken into consideration. 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 (Ibid., p. 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" (Shakespeare 5.1.22–24), evident in her funeral rite with songs, flowers, and prayers as a pre-Reformation ritual (Beauregard, 2007, p. 68), in contrast with Prince 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, 2006, p. 44); namely, "[f]or Luther, God conceals Godself in the form of opposites in order to reveal God's true self" (Ibid., p. 52) just as Polonius's requirement to Reynaldo for investigating his son Laertes: "[b]y indirections find directions out" (Shakespeare 2.1.65).

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, Queen Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and *The Mousetrap* performers. Firstly, Claudius is a freeplay character to Prince Hamlet as center in the structurality of the court. 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 Garber (1999, p. 495 qtd. in O'Neill, 2012, p. 124) and it decides his act of faith (Dean, 2002, p. 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, p. 253) but shakes the political court (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 124–25). Namely, for church doctrine, on the 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, 2007, pp. 53, 56). In Prince Hamlet's unwillingness to avenge Ghost King Hamlet he utters:

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
 And shall I couple hell? O fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
 And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
 But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?
 Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
 Yea, from the table of my memory
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records.... (Shakespeare 1.5.92-99)

On the other hand, the play's claim to the existence of purgatory "adds an extra twist to the motif of [Prince Hamlet's] hesitation" (Dean, 2002, p. 521). Although Bacon argues that the most tolerable kind of revenge for wrongs is no law to remedy nor to punish (p. 17 qtd. In Kumamoto, 2006, p. 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, 2007, pp. 53, 54); and although Claudius employs a tyrannical

rule for certain (Ibid. p. 48), Prince Hamlet cannot ensure his intention to be good but he hesitates to revenge. He is “a reckless and incompetent avenger” despite whether vengeance justified (Ibid., p. 57). In fact, Prince Hamlet, feeling ambivalent and troubled, hesitates toward vengeance in his soliloquies, especially in the scene of Claudius’s prayer as Greenblatt claims where his address “to be, or not to be” (Shakespeare 3.1.58) ends up as “let be” (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1659); temporarily Prince Hamlet chooses not to kill Claudius while Claudius is praying:

To be, or not to be; that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 And, by opposing, end them. (Shakespeare 3.1.58-62)

However, gradually, he chooses the side of believing in Ghost King Hamlet in the existence of purgatory in Catholicism (Beauregard, 2007, p. 50) and the side of taking revenge on Claudius. He justifies his revenge on Claudius in his address to Horatio:

Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon—
 He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
 Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
 Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
 And with such coz'nage—is't not perfect conscience
 To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damned
 To let this canker of our nature come
 In further evil? (Shakespeare 5.2.64-71)

Prince Hamlet subverts to Claudius’s regime (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1660) and this act of revenge is in fact “an endorsement of its Catholic world” (Dean, 2002, p. 526) as freeplay into which the Lutheranism comes as center, although in Cam’s idea vengeance is common but not supportable (p. 60 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 34) and although, for Robert N. Watson, Michael Neill and Stephen Greenblatt, vengeance is a “problematic substitute” (Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 42) and its tragedy is “a displacement of prayers for the dead forbidden by the Reformation” (Watson, p. 75 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 42).

Also, Queen Gertrude and the other characters serve as freeplay to Prince Hamlet as center in the structurality of the court. “[M]oral chameleon” (O’Neill, 2012, p. 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 Prince Hamlet’s madness, “the representation of madness in the play [is] relating to the ‘faltering of ideological prescriptions to define, order, and constrain subjectivity’”; and “madness [is] ‘an instrument of social and political disorder (pp. 61, 62 in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 41); and for William O’Neill, madness is for “his refusal to take the world of Polonius seriously,” the world of Machiavelli (pp. 124, 123). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent (Shakespeare 2.2.284) to offer Prince Hamlet the idea that “the very substance of the ambition is merely the shadow of a dream” (Shakespeare 2.2.251-52). In Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s idea, Hamlet suffers from his ambition to the throne and is jealous of Claudius’s marriage with Queen Gertrude (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1660). It is Prince Hamlet’s madness, or melancholia, or paranoid jealousy of Claudius and Queen Gertrude’s marriage that destroys all values in regard to female sexuality and women become nothing in the play (Eagleton, 1986, pp. 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! (Shakespeare 1.2.129-34)

In his madness, Prince Hamlet feels living to be meaningless, in 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, 2012, p. 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, even though it is affirmed that Queen Gertrude's body is “an illegitimate source of political authority” (Greenblatt, 1997, pp. 1665, 1660; Oakes, 2010, p. 64; Tennenhouse qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 39). In fact, for Prince Hamlet, it is two times of treacheries, “two separate acts of treason, the seizing of the Queen's body and the seizing of political power” (Tennenhouse p. 96 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 39), which is unbearable for Prince 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, p. 71). Merely in this way of paranoid jealousy can Prince 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, p. 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. (Shakespeare 1.2.83-86)

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

To the core, Prince Hamlet is so jealous of Claudius's throne and marriage with Queen Gertrude that he cannot be objective to uncover the truth and that his behavior and performance worsens the political situation and his relationship with King Claudius. For example, although Prince 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 he has justification to overthrow Claudius; and furthermore, “which eschatology is correct, Catholic or Protestant” (Oakes, 2010, pp. 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, p. 253). In his thinking about his and his play's focus on “[w]hat if” activity of theatrical behavior and performance” (Dean, 2002, p. 525) and in his effort to confirm Claudius's crime of murder, Prince Hamlet resorts not to a rational method to investigate it but to a literary artwork (Dean, 2002, p. 524) and thus, he stages not *The Mousetrap*, the plot in which the player-brother murders his own brother and marries his sister-in-law but *The Murder of Gonzago*, the plot in which the player-nephew Lucianus murders the player-uncle Gonzago (Greenblatt, 1997, pp. 1662–63; Oakes, 2010, p. 63; Dean, 2002, p. 525; Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 39). Prince Hamlet plays a

doubling role. On the one hand, he plans to stage *The Murder of Gonzago* with players in his inquiry to them: “Can you play the murder of Gonzago” (Shakespeare 2.2.514-15)? On the other hand, he tells a lie to Ophelia that he will stage *The Mousetrap*, and he and the players even rehearse it in the following plot:

Hautboys play. The dumb show enters. Enter a KING and a QUEEN very lovingly, the QUEEN embracing him. She kneels and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck. He lays him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exits. The QUEEN returns, finds the KING dead, and makes passionate action. The poisoner, with some two or three mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the QUEEN with gifts. She seems loath and unwilling a while, but in the end accepts his love. Exeunt [the PLAYERS] (Shakespeare 3.2.122-23; emphases and capitalizations in original)

Then, in the real performance, Prince Hamlet stages *The Murder of Gonzago* in the public party, especially in front of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude:

Enter [Player] Lucianus
 This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.
 ...
Player Lucianus Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
 Confederate season, else no creature seeing;
 Thou mixture rank of midnight weeds collected,
 With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
 Thy natural magic and dire property
 On wholesome life usurp immediately.
[He] pours the poison in [the Player King's] ears
Hamlet A poisons him i'th' garden for 's estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant, and writ in choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife. (Shakespeare 3.2.223, 233-42; parentheses and emphases in original)

By dodging the testing of the truth of murder, Prince 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, 2012, p. 125) and justification to the throne (Oakes, 2010, p. 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 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. (Shakespeare 5.2.50-54)

On the one hand, Prince Hamlet is not a proper king even though he seeks to avenge late King Hamlet. In his public virtue, Hamlet does not act like a king's heir and neither does he have the proper character as the foundation for the political order (Eagleton, 1986, p. 73). For example, on impulse 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" (Shakespeare 5.2.76-79), but it leads to many deaths without Prince 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 a long feud with Denmark in late King Hamlet's reign (Edward, p. 58 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, pp. 34–35; Oakes, 2010, pp. 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'occurents, more and less,
 Which have solicited. The rest is silence. (Shakespeare 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" (p. 58 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, pp. 34–35). And "[t]he act of revenge itself happens in a flash of rage, without planning, without any self-vindicating declaration by Prince 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, p. 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, p. 58 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 35; Greenblatt, 2001, p. 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. (Shakespeare 5.2.286-91)

Ironically enough, Prince Hamlet's story must be "highly embarrassing" or a laughing stock in Fortinbras's impending reign (Eagleton, 1986, p. 74), not in his own expectation.

On the other hand, in his private virtue, Prince Hamlet, taking his honor self but dropping moral self (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 125–26), subverts to filial piety and moral law in the case of Queen Gertrude and Ophelia, since they two are politically complicit for Claudius's kingship, Queen Gertrude as directly complicit and Ophelia as indirectly complicit, obeying her father Polonius, Claudius's minister in Prince Hamlet's misapprehension (O'Neill, 2012, pp. 122–23). Interestingly enough, even though Queen "Gertrude's sexual behaviour and remarriage do not seem out of the ordinary" (Cam, p. 60 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 34), Prince Hamlet subverts to matriarchal filial obligation with all his intention in his cynical talk with Queen Gertrude, since for him Queen 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, p. 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. (Shakespeare 3.2.363-369)

Prince Hamlet intends to make Queen Gertrude "repent and behave[] as a priest in the biblical and Protestant sense of the word"³ (Fabiny qtd. in Fabiny, 2006, p. 51) in order to dare her. His love for Queen Gertrude is as unbearable as Ophelia's for him. Besides, Prince Hamlet shows no love for Ophelia in his confession: "You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so/ inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you/ not" (Shakespeare 3.1.118-20). He also feels no guilt at the sudden death of Ophelia, his lover, and no guilt at the death of Polonius, Ophelia's father since the play "situates the need for revenge in a context that goes beyond any crime" (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1664). Prince Hamlet even blames Queen Gertrude's remarriage on all women, Ophelia in particular. He accuses Ophelia and rejects the marriage with her:

I have heard of your paintings, too, well enough. God
hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You
jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures,
and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no
more on't. It hath made me mad. I say we will have no more
marriages. Those that are married already—all but one—shall
live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go. (Shakespeare 3.1.142-48)

Prince Hamlet even commands Ophelia in his scolding, "Get thee to a nunnery" referring to going to a brothel in Elizabethan slang (Greenblatt, 1997, p. 1665; Shakespeare 3.1.122). To my belief, Ophelia 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 unbearable for her acknowledge of her father's death in Prince Hamlet's hand (Oakes, 2010, p. 66), which Prince Hamlet again subverts the filial obligation in the family of his father-in-law-to-be-yet. In seeing the other characters as freeplay to Prince Hamlet as center, therefore, we see the march of the tragedy of many deaths.

³ See Tibor Fabiny's article in Kürtösi, K., and Pál, J., Eds. (1994). 'The Eye' as a Metaphor in Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Cordelia and Edgar: Blinded Parents' Seeing Children. *Celebrating Comparativism Essays in Honour of György Mihály Vajda*. Szeged: Attila József University, 461–78.

Author as Center and *Hamlet* 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”. To probe more into Shakespeare’s life for interpreting the play, Thompson and Taylor describe the atmosphere of Protestant England where “Shakespeare’s only son Hamnet or Hamlet died in August 1596, and his father John was to die [a Catholic] in September 1601” (2006, p. 36; Dean, 2002, p. 521) and that this is relevant to the play with the death of a father as the beginning and a death of a son as an ending (Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 36): “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, p. 75 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 37). Also, in the scene of the gravedigger in his answer “a tanner will/ last you nine year” (Shakespeare 5.1.154-55) to Hamlet’s question “How long will a man lie i’th’ earth ere he rot?” (Shakespeare 5.1.151), Shakespeare assists his father 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, pp. 8, 21, 38, 228–29 qtd. in Thompson & Taylor, 2006, p. 37). Edward T. Oakes indicates that Shakespeare is “a committed and orthodox Catholic” with evidence too ambiguous to interpret the play (2010, p. 69); nonetheless, indicates Greenblatt, despite still uncertain for Edward T. Oakes, it is likely that Shakespeare is not “a secret Catholic sympathizer” (2001, p. 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, p. 249). Or, as John Keats claims on 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 Oakes, 2010, p. 71; emphasis in original). In the play, “Shakespeare fuses Senecan fatalism with Christian hope, and Protestant iconoclasm with the persistence of Catholic devotions” (Zaleski, 2001, p. 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” (Oakes, 2010, p. 72), the same as Christopher Marlowe’s awareness in *Doctor Faustus* (Huang, 2011, pp. 122–23). The play, declares Marius, is “a mirror held up to [reflect] religious confusion” (qtd. in Fabiny, 2006, p. 51) and echoes “the themes of Luther’s theology of the cross” (Fabiny, 2006, p. 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” (Ibid.). For Luther, merely by experiencing life like living, dying or being damned one can become a theologian. Prince Hamlet dies and in his death, he does meet God, but God behind a mask and he becomes a theologian himself (Fabiny, 2006, p. 53).

Conclusion

As a reader losing my father and having long felt remorse along with Prince Hamlet and with the audience living during the atmosphere of Protestant Elizabethan England that was disapproving of Catholicism (Dean, 2002, p. 519), I interpret Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* with two traces: first, 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, secondly, I examine the play in light of Derrida’s center-freeplay structurality. In the structurality of father and son, there is Ghost King Hamlet, who comes as the first center into

which Prince Hamlet comes as freeplay; and Prince Hamlet comes as the second center into which the other characters such as Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and *The Mousetrap* performers come as freeplay in the structurality of the court, intertwined with the structurality of 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, 2002, p. 522). This also relates to 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, Shakespeare misspeaks that in terms of the religion, there should be a turnaround to Lutheranism from Catholicism in the play, like the turnaround to Lutheranism from Calvinism in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (Huang, 2011, p. 132). Prince Hamlet, if he is a faithful Christian for Lutheranism, should close his ears and eyes to Ghost King Hamlet’s story of purgatory and leave the issue of purgatory for God to decide on, since for Luther death is in fact life (Fletcher, 2005, p. 198) and since those “Christians who were troubled by ghosts or poltergeists...were instructed by Luther not to hear the supposed wandering dead” (Evenson, 2015, p. 534). In terms of the political benefits of England, it is a much better life for Prince Hamlet to “let go of his father and accept the loss of him” like the speaker in Linda Pastan’s poem *Go Gentle* (Huang, 2015, p. 29), to bless Queen Gertrude’s remarriage, to cherish Ophelia’s love and to help Claudius reign over Denmark. Thus, interestingly enough, in terms of the reign and marriage, King Henry VIII is analogized as Claudius in the play and Catherine of Aragon is, as Queen Gertrude, and his throne and their marriage are both valid and not sins, despite the Leviticus curse that “a man who marries his brother’s widow shall be childless” (Elton, 1991, p. 98). And all this is despite there being no male heirs from them (Ibid.), despite his conscience in his marriage with Catherine of Aragon as a sin (Elton, 1991, p. 101), and despite his intention for the divorce with Catherine of Aragon and for his remarriage with Anne Boleyn (Ibid. pp. 99–101, 116–17, 120, 133; Haigh, 1993, pp. 113, 115, 116). Thus, Shakespeare fears to say that King Henry VIII may be right in his marriage with Catherine of Aragon and his succession to the throne and reign over England and he may be right to be a factor in the English Reformation and to make a turn from Roman Catholicism. However, in the meantime, Shakespeare fears to say that King Henry VIII may be wrong in his divorce with Catherine of Aragon for there were no heirs except “Mary, born in 1516” (Elton, 1991, p. 98). King Henry VIII may also be wrong in his remarriage with Anne Boleyn, delivering Elizabeth (Ibid. p. 132), since the selection of a legitimate heir can come from a wider family relation and be of either gender. It need not only be a king’s son but also his daughters and brothers in referring to Greenblatt et al.’s illustration of the House of Tudor (I A 42). The play does not become “a text-book demonstration of the theological irresolution and liturgical failure of the Elizabethan settlement” (Dean, 2002, p. 522), but rather, merely by reversing my seeing and experiencing of Prince Hamlet’s Catholicism as the contrary in Shakespeare’s misspeaking can I become a theologian and meet God behind His masks (Fabiny, 2006, pp. 46, 53), “a loving father, yet with various faces” (Huang, 2011, p. 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, 2009).

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank her beloved family, particularly Chiu-er Lin and Yu-chien Huang, and her respectable professors, particularly Dr Shui-mu Chang and Dr Hui-zung Perng in the Department of English, National Changhua University of Education, Changhua, Taiwan, R. O. C.

References

- Archer, C. A. (2009). The Invisible Elephant. In *A Different Path, A Different Result*. 1-6. PDF file.
- Barthes, R. (2010). The Death of the Author. In *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton and Company.. Print.
- Beaugard, D. (2007). ‘Great Command O’Ersways the Order’: Purgatory, Revenge, and Maimed Rites in *Hamlet*. *Religion and the Arts* 11, 45–73.
- Benjamin, W. (1998). The Author as Producer. *Understanding Brecht*. Trans. Anna Bostock. London: Verso. PDF file.
- Bressler, C. E. (2007). *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. 4th ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education. Print.
- Dean, P. (2002). The Afterlife of Hamlet. *English Studies* 83.6, 519–526.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Print.
- . (1982). *Positions*. Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Print.
- . (1997). *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: University of Johns Hopkins Press. Print.
- Eagleton, T. (1986). *William Shakespeare*. Oxford: Blackwell. Print.
- . (1997). *Illusions of Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell. Print.
- Elton, G. R. (1991). *England Under the Tudors*. London: Routledge. Print.
- Evener, V. (2015). Wittenberg's Wandering Spirits: Discipline and the Dead in the Reformation *Church History* 84.3, 531–55.
- Fabiny, T. (2006). The ‘Strange Acts of God:’ The Hermeneutics of Concealment and Revelation in Luther and Shakespeare. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45.1, 44–54.
- Fletcher, A. (2005). “Doctor Faustus and the Lutheran Aesthetic.” *English Literary Renaissance* 35, 187–209.
- Fry, P. H. (2009). *Introduction to Theory of Literature*. TS. Yale University, Yale.
- Garber, M. (1999). Shakespeare as Fetish. In *Postmodern Shakespeare*. Ed. Orgel, Stephen and Sean Keilen. London: Garlands. Print.
- Greenblatt, S. (1997). Hamlet. In *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. London: W.W. Norton and Company. Print.
- . (2001). *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press. Print.
- Greenblatt, S., et al., Ed. (2012). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature I*. 9th ed. London: W. W. Norton and Company. Print.
- Goff, J. Le. (1986). *The Birth of Purgatory*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Print.
- Haigh, C. (1993). *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society Under the Tudors*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Print.
- Huang, Y. (2011). Self-Realization as Challenge to the Old and the New Convention: Dialogism and Heteroglossia in Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. MA thesis. National Changhua University of Education. Print.
- . (2015). Life in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. *Proceedings of The Asian Conference on Ethics, Religion and Philosophy, March 26–29, 2015: The International Academic Forum*. Nagoya, 17–31. PDF file.
- Kumamoto, C. D. (2006). Gertrude, Ophelia, Ghost: Hamlet's Revenge and the Abject. *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 6, 48–64.
- Lawson, J. (2007). *Mediaeval Education and the Reformation*. London: Routledge. Print.
- Norris, C. (1982). *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*. London: Methuen. Print.

- Oakes, E. T., S.J. (2010). Hamlet and the Reformation: The Prince of Denmark as ‘Young Man Luther’ *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought & Culture* 13.1, 53–78.
- O’Neill, W. (2012). Doing and Performing in *Hamlet*. *Midwest Quarterly* 53.2, 121–31.
- Padley, S. (2006). *Key Concepts in Contemporary Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Print.
- Rex, R. (1993). *Henry VIII and the English Reformation*. New York: St. Martin's Press. Print.
- Sagut, J. (2009). Derrida’s Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences. *Scribd*. PDF file.
- Selden, R., et al. (2005). *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. 5th ed. London: Pearson. Print.
- Shakespeare, W. Hamlet. In *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (1997). London: W.W. Norton and Company. Print.
- Thompson, A. & Taylor, N., Eds. (2006) Introduction. In *Hamlet*. London: The Arden Shakespeare. Print.
- Zaleski, C. (2001). The Rebirth of Purgatory. Rev. of *Hamlet in Purgatory*, by Stephen Greenblatt. *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life* 118, 43–46.

Author contact email: huangelisha@gmail.com