

Hamlet's Fourth Soliloquy

"To be, or not to be"

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Introduction

Hamlet's celebrated soliloquy "To be, or not to be," which has most frequently been discussed in all his soliloquies, has so far invited most various interpretations. They can broadly be classified into two theoretical schools; the school of suicide theory and the mixture of both this school and other schools.

The representative critics of the suicide theory school are A.C. Bradley and Dover Wilson. A.C. Bradley writes: "In this soliloquy Hamlet is not thinking the duty laid upon him at all. He is debating the question of suicide" (Bradley 100). Dover Wilson also writes: "Sleep, death, annihilation, his whole mind is concentrated upon these; and the only thing that holds his arm from striking home with 'the bare bodkin' is the thought of 'what dreams may come,' 'the dread of something after death'" (Wilson 127). However, contextually it is difficult to understand that Hamlet thinks of suicide. When Hamlet soliloquizes, "To be, or not to be," he is planning a play within the play to ascertain the reliability of what the Ghost says. Furthermore, in "O what a rogue..." (Edwards *Ham.* 2.2.502-58) soliloquy which is very close to "To be, or not to be," Hamlet blames himself for the delay of revenge and doubts about the identity of the Ghost. Does he really want to commit suicide under such a situation? He seems to be eager for the vengeance rather than to commit suicide at that point. Moreover, the only speech about suicide is "O that this too too solid flesh..." soliloquy of all. The rest of his soliloquy isn't about suicide but vengeance.

There are several versions of the mixture school. Alex Newell regards the dramatic context as important and insists that the meaning of "To be, or not to be" is as to the

action against Claudius: "Is the play to be or not to be? — to act or not to act? — Is Claudius to be or not to be? — can evil, which fortune apparently favors, possibly be conquered? Am I to be or not to be? — shall I choose to live and suffer or shall I choose probable death by going ahead with this business?" (Newell 43). Though his opinion is about the revenge against Claudius, it seems that there are few other critics who advocate only the revenge theory. On the other hand, Harold Jenkins writes:

Any strict reading — one, that is, which adheres to the text without adding to it — must come close to [a view that] the 'question' of 'To be or not to be' [which] concerns the advantages and disadvantages of human existence, the discussion of which includes the recognition of man's ability to end his existence by suicide. (Jenkins 485)

Thus we can see that there are differences of opinion among critics of this school. This paper attempts to present a more proper interpretation of this soliloquy with special reference to the Ghost.

First of all, the context must be carefully considered, since it is the context which is the source of the problem of the suicide theory. In "O what a rogue and peasant slave..." soliloquy which is very close to "To be, or not to be," Hamlet blames himself for the delay of the revenge and decides to stage a play within the play. Its purpose is to check the reliability of what the Ghost says. He has doubts about the identity of the Ghost at that point. It is the Ghost which orders Hamlet to take revenge against Claudius. Therefore the question whether the Ghost is a devil is very important for him. Thus in the first chapter, the question about the Ghost is considered from the point of view of the context.

Next, the focus is put on "despised love" in the fourth soliloquy, as it is another point in common with the GHOST: When the matter of love is discussed in *Hamlet*, it is often only the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia which is picked up. However, Hamlet feels the betrayal of love not only by Ophelia but also by Gertrude, since his mother remarries with Claudius. As well as Hamlet, the Ghost of his father thinks the same thing. Indeed parts of the Old Testament also imply that marrying one's brother's wife is sinful. Hamlet and the Ghost both regard chastity in a marriage as primary. To apply Rougemont's theory of love here, their love corresponds to *agape*. But Gertrude and Claudius are opposite to them. Their love is passionate and its physicality is fre-

quently stressed by HAMLET. Their love corresponds to eros: Because of that, considering the vow in marriage as important is another common feature between Hamlet and the Ghost, and the target of their hostility is also Claudius, the murderer of Old HAMLET: In the following chapter, another motive in addition to the murder is studied by focusing on the matter of love. Then, after these elements are totally examined, "To be, or not to be" soliloquy is reconsidered.

Chapter 1 : Hamlet and the Question of the Ghost

When the matter of the context is considered, the "O what a rogue and peasant slave..." (2.2.502-58) soliloquy is very important. For it is very close to "To be, or not to be." At the end of this soliloquy, Hamlet plans a play within the play to ascertain the reliability of what the Ghost says. We can assume from this that he has doubts about the identity of the Ghost at that point. It is the Ghost which orders Hamlet to take revenge against Claudius. Therefore the question whether the Ghost is a devil or not is very important for him. In the play, it is after Hamlet hears from Horatio and other followers what they have seen that he first meets the Ghost. Then he asks what the Ghost is:

Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet,
King, my father, royal Dane. (1.4.40-45)

At this point in time he has a question whether the Ghost is a good spirit or not. Lewes Lavater writes on Elizabethan spiritualism in *Of Ghosts and Spirits Walking by Night* printed in 1572 as follows: "The papists in former times have publicly both taught and written that those spirits which men sometime see and hear be either good or bad angels, or else the souls of those which either live in everlasting bliss, or in purgatory, or in the place of damned persons" (Hoy 114). Dover Wilson also writes about this book:

Indeed, the book is so germane to the ghost scenes that there seems to me a high probability that Shakespeare had read it. In any case, Hamlet himself is clearly steeped in the opinions which Lavater expounds, and his attitude

towards his father's spirit cannot be comprehended without taking these views into account. (Wilson 63)

According to this book, being confused like Hamlet seems a matter of course for the Elizabethan. Though Horatio is sceptical about the spirit, it is because he is a student of Wittenberg and highly sophisticated by reading as well as Hamlet.

Another notable point in this speech is that he calls the Ghost "King, my father, royal Dane." It shows that Hamlet supposes that the Ghost is his father's spirit though he has doubts about its identity. For Lavater writes about four ways to discern good spirits from evil spirits in the book, too. The second one seems to be most appropriate to this case¹:

Their second note is to descry them by their outward and visible shape. For if they appear under the form of a lion, bear, dog, toad, serpent, cat, or black ghost, it may easily be gathered that it is an evil spirit. And that, on the other side, good spirits do appear under the shape of a dove, a man, a lamb, or in the brightness and clear light of the sun. (Hoy 115)

The Ghost in *Hamlet* appears as a man. Not only Hamlet but also Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo witness the shape of King Hamlet as an apparition. Judging from this fact and what Lavater says, it seems that Hamlet regards the Ghost as his father's spirit.

However, his doubt doesn't disappear, since Hamlet doesn't take action about his father's revenge as soon as the Ghost tells him about the murder of the King. Though he could have other reasons for delay, he says that he will take revenge when he is ordered to do it by the Ghost:

GHOST. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.

HAMLET. Murder?

GHOST. Murder most foul, as in the best it is,

But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

HAMLET. Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love

May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.25-31)

Despite this Hamlet cannot decide to take vengeance. After he sees the Ghost, he joins Horatio and Marcellus. Though he admits that "It is an honest ghost" (1.5.138), Hamlet

makes his officers swear never to speak about what they have seen and heard:

HAMLET. Never make known what you have seen tonight.

HORATIO and MARCELLUS. My lord we will not.

HAMLET. Nay but swear't.

HORATIO. In faith

My lord not I.

MARCELLUS. Nor I my lord in faith.

HAMLET. Upon my sword.

MARCELLUS. We have sworn my lord already.

HAMLET. Indeed, upon my sword, indeed.

GHOST. Swear. *Ghost cries under the stage*

HAMLET. ... Never to speak of this that you have seen,

Swear by my sword.

GHOST. Swear.

HAMLET. ... Never to speak of this that you have heard,

Swear by my sword.

GHOST. Swear. (1.5.144-61)

Hamlet himself surely sees the Ghost and communicates with it directly. However, he tries to forbid them to speak of the Ghost three times. It shows that he is in doubt whether he should accept what the Ghost says. After all, Hamlet cannot believe the identity of the Ghost completely.

Because of that, Hamlet does nothing about revenge though he continues to think about it. If Hamlet undoubtedly believed the Ghost to be his father's spirit, he would take revenge at once. Therefore it is natural to assume that Hamlet still has a doubt about the identity of the Ghost. If the Ghost were his father's spirit, Hamlet's revenge would be considered as legitimate. On the contrary, if the Ghost weren't his father's spirit, his revenge would be considered treason. So the question whether the Ghost is his father's spirit or not is most important for Hamlet. In other words, the identity of the Ghost is the premise for his vengeance, since the danger of death accompanies the revenge. On account of this, he cannot take revenge against his uncle immediately.

When Hamlet sees the players, he comes up with the idea of putting on a play showing something like the circumstances of his father's murder to ascertain the reli-

ability of the Ghost. A. C. Bradley also writes: "He planned it, according to his own account, in order to convince *himself* by the King's agitation that the Ghost had spoken the truth" (Bradley 98). So his conscious motive for it is based on his doubts about the Ghost. At the end of "O what a rogue and peasant slave..." soliloquy, he expresses his uneasiness about the Ghost:

The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil — and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. (2.2.551-58)

This soliloquy obviously means that Hamlet has had the doubts about the Ghost since he first met it. He is still in doubts about the Ghost: Then, shortly afterwards, comes the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. Furthermore when he speaks to Horatio about the play, he expresses the suspicion about the identity of the Ghost:

If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damnèd ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy. (3.2.70-74)

Thus the question about the Ghost always accompanies the vengeance. It follows then that it is no wonder that Hamlet expresses doubt about the Ghost in the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy.

Chapter 2 : Love of Hamlet and the Ghost

The main relationship between Hamlet and the Ghost is between one who is commanded to take revenge and the other that orders revenge to be taken. Following the Ghost's order, Hamlet tries to avenge the murder of his father. Yet is the Ghost's direction his only motive for the vengeance? Is not there any other motive? The aim of this chapter is to examine this problem, paying special attention to the similarity between

what Hamlet says about Gertrude and what his father does.

Hamlet is in black when he first enters, since he has lost his father. But his uncle Claudius and his mother Gertrude present a very different appearance; they don't appear concerned about the King's death. They got married soon after it. Hamlet's first speech "*(Aside)* A little more than kin, and less than kind" (1.2.65) means that Claudius becomes his stepfather by Gertrude's remarriage. However, he feels a deep antipathy to them, especially to Gertrude, as he thinks his mother has betrayed King Hamlet. Recalling the affectionate relationship between his parents, Hamlet thinks that Claudius compares very unfavourably with his father:

That it should come to this!

But two months dead — nay not so much, not two —
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face roughly — heaven and earth,
 Must I remember? why, she would hang on him
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on, and yet within a month —
 Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman —
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed my poor father's body
 Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she —
 O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
 Would have mourned longer — married with my uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules — within a month,
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,
 She married. Oh most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets. (1.2.137-57)

This soliloquy is focused on the theme of his mother's betrayal. The theme continues to upset him throughout the play. As he says, Hamlet also considers that his mother's

remarriage is immoral. However, it seems that his speech puts emphasis on the depth of his mental shock rather than the immorality of the incestuous marriage, since he doesn't mention the wickedness of this wedding. What occupies his mind is not the sinfulness of Claudius but his betrayal of love in marriage. Significantly, this soliloquy occurs before Hamlet hears about the Ghost from his followers. So it is important to introduce his state of mind to the audience before the issue of the murder is raised. We can consider it as evidence of his own thinking. After that, he sees the Ghost.

The Ghost speaks to Hamlet about the murder and orders him to take revenge against Claudius. But the main motive of the vengeance seems to be that Claudius has seduced Gertrude, and that she has accepted him, since the Ghost also emphasizes not the wickedness of this marriage but her unfaithfulness to King Hamlet. The Ghost describes Claudius as follows:

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts —
O wicked wit and gifts that have the power
So to seduce — won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming virtuous queen. (1.5.42-46)

What horrifies and distresses the Ghost is his wife's unfaithfulness. The word "will" means "carnal desire" (Schmidt 2:1370). Therefore this passage surely implies that they were intimate with each other before King Hamlet's death. There is a strong implication that Claudius and Gertrude have not only a sinful marriage but also an affair while King Hamlet was still alive. The Ghost thinks of Claudius as a seducer rather than a murderer. As for Gertrude, the Ghost laments her "falling" as a woman:

O Hamlet, what a falling off was there,
From me whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline
Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
To those of mine.
But virtue as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,

Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
And prey on garbage. (1.5.47-57)

The point of this speech is that Gertrude has broken the vow she made in the marriage ceremony. The Ghost actually explains the detail of the murder to Hamlet after the above speech, because as he says, the primary motive for the vengeance is "his foul and unnatural murder" (1.5.25), the killing of himself. However, his words about the vengeance are inserted between the above lines and those filled with the anger for the adultery as follows: "If thou hast nature in thee bear it not; / Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damnèd incest" (1.5.81-83). The facts of the murder have not been unknown to Hamlet, so the Ghost must tell him the truth which Hamlet doesn't know early in the speech. Yet the Ghost does not do so. His speech begins to mention the adultery and ends with that of Gertrude. According to his speech, it is natural to understand that the core of the Ghost's anger is focused on the unfaithfulness to him rather than the murder. The Ghost cannot admit the betrayal of love in marriage at all. On the other hand, Hamlet after seeing the Ghost also expresses a strong antipathy to his mother: "O most pernicious woman!" (1.5.105). Gertrude betrays King Hamlet. It is his mother's sin that captures Hamlet's mind at this point.

He gives vent to his aversion to Gertrude in the closet scene again. When she asks him if he remembers to whom he is talking, he replies in the strongest terms: "You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife, / And, would it were not so, you are my mother" (3.4.15-16). Here, Hamlet's concern is the adultery. He never forgets his mother's sin. On the contrary, thinking of it always never fails to produce some of the strongest emotional reactions in the play:

Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicer's oaths. Oh such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words. (3.4.40-48)

The rose is a symbol of true love, and the blister is assumed to mean the branding of a harlot on the forehead. It is implied that Claudius and Gertrude have had an affair during King Hamlet's lifetime though Hamlet does not answer his mother's question "Ay me, what act, / That roars so loud and thunders in the index?" (3.4.51-52) directly. Gertrude has degenerated from a rose to a blister. The words "Such an act /... makes marriage vows / As false as dicer's oaths" represent his deep antipathy to his mother who broke the vow in marriage. As Dover Wilson also writes: "... the scene in act 3 between mother and son is inexplicable unless Hamlet has something more against her than her hasty marriage" (Wilson 293). What Hamlet is most disgusted with is not the impetuosity but the fact of mother's wedding itself. Moreover, he continues:

Have you eyes?
 Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
 And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
 You cannot call it love, for at your age
 The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
 And waits upon the judgement; and what judgement
 Would step from this to this? (3.4.65-71)

The phrase "this fair mountain" means his father, and the phrase "this moor" represents his uncle. In Hamlet's opinion, her mother's love for Claudius isn't the genuine love, since it is ruled by lust. This speech as a whole shows Hamlet's view of love. Carnal desire isn't love for him, as it contravenes the promise made in marriage. The true love for Hamlet means to be constantly faithful to his or her spouse like King Hamlet.

When Hamlet's view of love is compared with the Ghost's, a point in common between them is that they regard the vow and chastity in marriage as having primary importance. Paul writes in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 7, Verse 4: "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." Gertrude's adultery with Claudius before King Hamlet's death is the sin against Christianity. As contrasted with them, Hamlet and the Ghost consider that the chastity in marriage is vitally important. This view is grounded on the Bible. Therefore Hamlet's and the Ghost's view of love is classified as Agape, or Christian love. Denis De Rougemont also writes about the Christian marriage

in his book *Love in the Western World*: "... the *promise* which marriage means ... can and should mortgage the future of conscious acts which I take on — to love, to remain faithful, to bring up my children" (Rougemont 310). Gertrude seems to have made such a promise in marriage. However, she betrays it through failing to keeping faith with her husband. Hamlet and the Ghost cannot forgive her, because King Hamlet is faithful to his wife. Rougemont also writes about man's chastity as follows: "... a man does not control himself owing to lack of 'passion' (meaning 'power of the libido'), but precisely because he loves and, in virtue of his love, will not inflict himself. He refuses to commit an act of violence which would be the denial and destruction of the person" (Rougemont 315). The Ghost displays some of the features which Rougemont describes. The first is his attitude to Gertrude in the Ghost scene. Though the Ghost directs Hamlet to avenge the murder of his father, he forbids Hamlet to harm her. He says to Hamlet:

... nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To pick and sting her. (1.5.85-88)

Although he now finds Gertrude unfaithful to him, he does not want his son to punish her for her conduct. He wants her to realize what she has done by herself, as the Ghost still loves Gertrude. The Ghost repeats to Hamlet his order not to punish his mother in the closet scene. When Hamlet exhibits his aversion to her, the Ghost appears in front of them. At this point, though the Ghost again encourages Hamlet to take revenge, he tells Hamlet not to punish her:

This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
Oh step between her and her fighting soul:
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet. (3.4.109-14)

Putting together this speech and his speech in Act 1, it is certain that the Ghost does not want his son to punish his wife. The Bible says in The First Epistle General of John 4:19: "... he first loved us." In other words, the God loved us as we are and with our limitations. Likewise, the Ghost loves Gertrude with all her unfaithfulness as she is.

Therefore his love for Gertrude faithfully reflects Christianity. On the other hand, Hamlet regards the vow in marriage and keeping virtue as of primary importance, too. Such a view is also a reflection of the Bible. It can be said that both of them have a Christian view of love. Thus what led Hamlet and the Ghost to take revenge against Claudius is not only his murder of King Hamlet but also his betrayal of Christian love.

Chapter 3 : Love of Claudius and Gertrude

In contrast to Hamlet and the Ghost, Claudius and Gertrude seem not to care about the sin of incestuous marriage and adultery. In other words, they have a different view of love from Hamlet's and the Ghost's, because, as I suggested earlier, we can reasonably assume that Claudius and Gertrude had sexual relations before King Hamlet died. In fact the Bible prohibits infidelity: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14), "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness" (Leviticus 18:16) and "Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbour's wife, to defile thyself with her" (Leviticus 18:20). Despite the prohibition, why do they commit adultery? If they had a Christian view of love, they wouldn't do such a thing. Moreover, this is the incestuous marriage which is forbidden by Church. Judging from these facts, we can suppose that Claudius and Gertrude hold a passionate, physical desire for each other. It is undoubtedly contrasted with the love which Hamlet and the Ghost believe is proper to Christianity that regards chastity in marriage as very important. The crucial difference between the two lies in the way of loving. Christianity demands lovers to care very much for each other. Old Hamlet's love for Gertrude is nothing but Christian love. But Gertrude's love for Old Hamlet is not. She loves him erotically, as is shown in Hamlet's following speech:

... so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly — heaven and earth,
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, ... (1.2.140-45)

The impression given by Hamlet's speech is that Old Hamlet's love for Gertrude isn't sexual but spiritual. His love for her seems to be boundless. It means that he considers

her not as an object of sexual desire but as his equal. Rougemont writes about Christian love as follows: "Christianity has asserted the complete equality of the sexes, and this as plainly as possible. ... Once she is man's equal, woman cannot be 'man's goal'" (Rougemont 312). In contrast, Gertrude's attitude towards him seems to be ruled by carnal desire. She clings to Old Hamlet and at the same time she seems to commit adultery with Claudius. Taking her way of loving into account, it is supposed that Gertrude is weak with passion and she considers men as the object of sex. Rougemont calls such a passionate love "Eros." He defines Eros as "complete Desire" (Rougemont 61). According to this definition, Gertrude can be categorized as a possessor of limitless desire, as she cannot keep faith in marriage. She regards Old Hamlet just as the focus of her lust. Therefore, it is natural that Hamlet and the Ghost consider her behaviour as unfaithful: her passionate love is based on carnal desire. The closet scene shows it more clearly than Hamlet's words, as he directly speaks to her about love there. He severely criticises her sexual desire, regarding it as lust:

GERTRUDE. O Hamlet, speak no more.

Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grainèd spots
As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET. Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty.

GERTRUDE. O speak to me no more.

These words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more sweet Hamlet. (3.4.88-96)

It is not until she is criticised by Hamlet that Gertrude grasps the true nature of her love for Claudius and understands how she has been corrupted by carnal desire. The fact that she has seen the existence of "black and grainèd spots" in her own soul shows this. This phrase symbolises the sinfulness of her love passion for Claudius. Old Hamlet loves his wife as a Christian husband and feels a deep affection for her. Hamlet has believed in his father's love for Gertrude as Christian love. Now he denounces his mother, who as he now knows had loved her husband only physically and regarded him

as the object of boundless desire, as what is shown by her bewilderment in the lines quoted above. The gap between Gertrude's way of loving and both Hamlet's and the Ghost's is so deep. Rougemont writes about the difference between Eros and Agape as follows:

To be in love is not necessarily *to love*. To be in love is a state; to love, an act. A state is suffered or undergone; but an act has to be decided upon. ... That shows how different are the meaning of the word 'to love' in the world of Eros and in the world of Agape. It is seen even better when it is noticed that the God of Scripture *orders* us to love. (Rougemont 310)

According to him, to be in love is a state and to love is an act. Agape is an act, namely an act of deciding to love even after passion goes out, whereas Eros is a state, namely a state of suffering the unruly impulse of the flesh which goes out as time passes. Gertrude is in love, as her love is erotic. She merely regards him as the object of physical desire. On the other hand, Old Hamlet loves her as she really is and would not blame her even after he has noticed her adultery.

Gertrude's present husband Claudius is a holder of Erotic love, too. As well as Gertrude, he regards a woman as the object of sexual desire. For one of the motives for the murder is to get the queen. In the praying scene, he confesses the truth:

My fault is past. But oh, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain th'offence? (3.3.51-56)

His speech shows that the purpose of the murder is to obtain not only the crown, but also the queen. Accordingly it can be said that he killed his brother partly because of carnal desire. He was attracted by Gertrude during Old Hamlet's lifetime and was not able to restrain his desire so that he ignored the morality of Christianity and committed adultery with Gertrude. If his love were Christian, he wouldn't want to injure her physically and spiritually. He is in love like Gertrude. To use Rougemont's words, Claudius' love is not "an act" but "a state." In fact he considers the love as "a state" in Act 4 Scene 7. Here Claudius suggests to Laertes that he should take revenge on Polonius'

murder. Claudius asks Laertes how much he loves his father. Then Claudius speaks to him:

... I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it,
And nothing is at a like goodness still,
For goodness, growing to a plurisy,
Dies in his own too much. (4.7.110-17)

What Claudius emphasises here is that nothing can keep its goodness forever and that this can be true of love. He regards love as temporary. His view of love seems to be similar to Rougemont's view of Eros as a state. Love means not "an act" but "a state" to Claudius as he thinks it to go out as time runs on. The object of erotic love ceases to be one when passion is lost. He doesn't love her as she is, but is in love merely temporarily. We now see that Claudius' love is Eros as contrasted with Hamlet's and the Ghost's love as Agape.

Conclusion

As we have already seen, Hamlet still doubts the identity of the Ghost at the point of the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. Though Hamlet is ordered to take revenge against the murder of Old Hamlet, he doesn't know whether the Ghost is his father's spirit or not. So he decides to stage a play portraying the circumstances of the murder in front of Claudius and his mother to ascertain whether what the Ghost has said is true or not. His decision is made just before the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. Under the circumstances, it is almost improbable that Hamlet wants to commit suicide. Hamlet's mind is occupied with the question whether the Ghost of his father is a devil or not. In the famous line "To be, or not to be, that is the question" Hamlet does seem to question the identity of the Ghost.

Moreover Hamlet and the Ghost both detest the betrayal of Christian love. They regard the chastity in marriage as very important which informs Christian love. However, Gertrude and Claudius have a different view of love from them. They regard love

as erotic and passionate. So Hamlet and the Ghost find Gertrude inconstant and have a deep aversion for Claudius. When Hamlet says, "How stand I then, / That have a father killed, a mother stained, / Excitements of my reason and my blood" (4.4.56-58), he is seeking to justify taking revenge. The Ghost says: "Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand, / Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched;" (1.5.74-75). It is noteworthy that the revenge of the murder has a close relationship with the anger at Gertrude's defilement and that the target of their antipathy is Claudius. The betrayal of Christian love which Hamlet and the Ghost discern now motivates them to take revenge. Taking all of these factors into account, we must interpret Hamlet's fourth soliloquy:

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. (3.1.56-60)

The famous first line does imply that whether the Ghost is a devil or not is the very question. Hamlet still doubts the identity of the Ghost. He goes on to ask himself whether it is nobler in the mind to endure the hard days doing nothing or to avenge the murder of his father so as to end his pain. There is no objective proof that Claudius has murdered Old Hamlet. If the Ghost were merely a deceiving devil who tells a lie about the cause of his death, Hamlet could not justify his motive for the revenge. It would be regarded as an unreasonable treason against Claudius as a ruler. On the other hand, if the Ghost were not a devil but his father who tells the truth about the cause of his death, his vengeance could be justified. So the question of the Ghost's identity is a matter of primary importance to Hamlet. Besides, the danger of death necessarily attends the vengeance. Then, Hamlet's thought turns to the problem of death:

To die, to sleep —
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to — 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep —
 To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. There's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life, (3.1.60-69)

If Hamlet died, or metaphorically speaking, slept, as a result of the revenge, he could end the heart-ache and the much physical pain. It may be the best ending of his life, as he suffers from the incurable deep anguish of love. Though Hamlet takes a Christian view of love, Gertrude's love is erotic. She regards Claudius as just an object of sexual desire and gets married with him. On the other hand, Ophelia obeys Polonius' command and refuses Hamlet's courtship. He admits Gertrude's and Ophelia's view of love to a certain degree, and yet it is not what Hamlet believes to be true. Therefore he thinks that he is betrayed by Gertrude and Ophelia. If Hamlet died as a result of the vengeance, he could end "The pangs of disprized love" (3.1.72). If one died, one would dream. When one thinks of the dream, one cannot help hesitate to die. The fear of death leads everyone to desire longevity. It seems that the Elizabethan have an awful dread of afterlife. In *Measure for Measure*, Claudio expresses his fear of death to his sister:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
 To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot;
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod, and the dilated spirit
 To bath in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice;
 To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thought
 Imagine howling — 'tis too horrible!
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life
 That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
 Can lay on nature is a paradise
 To what we fear of death. (*MM.* 3.1.118-32)

Quoting this passage, J. M. Murry asserts that we must restrain our modernist view of the world which tends to slight the traditional imagination of afterlife. (Murry 251-54) Therefore it is quite natural that Hamlet should have a dread of death like Claudio. He cannot set out to take revenge on Claudius. If Hamlet took revenge, he might have to die. He awfully fears death. Furthermore, he still doubts the identity of the Ghost, as he has no objective proof of the murder of his father. His concern with afterlife is closely associated with his doubt of the identity of the Ghost. Hamlet's soliloquy continues:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th'unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? (3.1.70-76)

Though there are enumerated common hardships which men are doomed to endure in real life, they suit quite well with Hamlet's present situation. As he says, "The time is out of joint: O cursèd spite, / That ever I was born to set it right" (1.5.189-90), the phrase "the whips and scorns of time" seems to allude to the fact that he is ready to avenge the murder of his father in corrupt Denmark. The phrase "Th'oppressor's wrong" appears to suggest Claudius' murder of Old Hamlet. However, no one knows the truth except Claudius. Though he confesses the sin of the murder in the praying scene, Hamlet only hears about it from the Ghost. Moreover, the two phrases "the proud man's contumely" and "The insolence of office" seem to allude to Polonius. He is killed by Hamlet because of his insolence. Also it is Polonius that orders Ophelia to refuse Hamlet's courtship. The phrase "The pangs of disprized love" appears to mean the anguish of Hamlet himself who has suffered from his own betrayed love. He thinks that not only Ophelia but also Gertrude disprized his Christian love. The fact which Claudius has yet to be punished appears to be described by the phrase "the law's delay." Though it denotes the postponement caused by judge's dereliction, it also connotes that the justice isn't dispensed and criminals go unpunished. "[T]he spurns / That patient merit of th'unworthy takes" appears to denote the murder of Old Hamlet. As Hamlet says, "A was a man, take for all in all. / I shall not look upon his like again" (1.2.186-

87), he often praises his father, comparing him with his uncle Claudius. The fact that Old Hamlet is killed by "adulterate beast" (1.5.42) must be an unbearable insult to Hamlet. As to the phrase "With a bare bodkin," Vincent F. Petronella writes as follows: "... there can be no question about the theme of suicide as it emerges through talk of the 'quietus' achieved by means of the 'bare bodkin'" (Petronella 78). The word "bodkin" has been often interpreted as a tool of suicide by proponents of the suicide theory. However, it can also be taken to mean an instrument for revenge contextually, since Hamlet is eager for the revenge as is shown in the third soliloquy which is put just before the "To be or not to be" soliloquy. Hamlet has so far dwelled on his fear of death from the standpoint of pain, but now, his thought turns to fear itself:

Who would 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 traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of? (3.1.76-82)

As we have already seen, the Elizabethan have a great fear of death. Hamlet says that unless one does have such a fear, a man will never hesitate to die. The phrase "The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" is apparently inconsistent with the fact that Hamlet actually sees the Ghost which returns from "The undiscovered country." Yet, he doubts the identity of the Ghost in the fourth soliloquy. Philip Edwards writes about Hamlet's doubt of the identity of the Ghost as follows: "Although it is possible that Shakespeare simply overlooked the application of this to the Ghost, it is much more likely that he intended Hamlet's concern about the authenticity of the Ghost in the previous scene (2.2.551-56) to be deepening in his present mood of intense pessimism" (Edwards 159). In this connection, Dover Wilson writes:

... the devil-theory seems triumphant; for it is clear that in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy he has either through "bestial oblivion" forgotten all about the Ghost or for the time at any rate given up the idea that it can have been his father's spirit, and that Shakespeare makes him speak of

The undiscovered country, from whose bourn

No traveller returns,

in order to inform the audience of this. (Wilson 74)

As I have argued so far, Hamlet neither forgot all about the Ghost nor gave up the idea that it can have been his father's spirit. His concern, or to use my own term, his doubt about the authenticity of the Ghost is deepening as Philip Edwards suggests. This doubt is the central theme of the "To be or not to be" soliloquy. If he had not been ordered to take revenge, he would only have had to be concerned about his father's death and mother's remarriage and would not have had to worry about the revenge. The very revenge which the Ghost orders Hamlet to take leads him to dwell on death and fear of it:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. (3.1.83-88)

The word "conscience" means "inmost thoughts" (Schmidt 1: 236). In other words, thinking too much can be an obstacle to action. If Hamlet took revenge against Claudius at once without doubting the identity of the Ghost, his heart wouldn't be torn with anguish. His conscience prevents him from taking action.

The central theme of the fourth soliloquy is the revenge against Claudius. The betrayal of Christian love supports Hamlet's motive for the vengeance. It is the Ghost who orders Hamlet to take revenge. Both of them firmly believe in Christian love. Thus it is to be emphasised that our due consideration for the crucially important role the Ghost plays in this play is indispensable to the valid interpretation of the famous line "To be, or not to be, that is the question."

Notes

- ① Lavater writes about the rest of the ways as follows: "First, they say that if he be a good spirit, he will at the beginning somewhat terrify men, but again soon revive and comfort them. ... Thirdly, we must note whether the spirit teach ought that doth vary from the doctrine of the apostles, and other doctors approved by the church's censure; ... Fourthly, we must take diligent heed whether in his words, deeds, and gestures, he do show forth any humility, acknowledging or confessing of his sins and punishments. ... For as the beggar

doth rehearse his own misery, so likewise do good spirits that desire any help or deliverance" (Hoy 115).

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