

## 『햄릿』에 대한 리얼리즘적 접근

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### 〈요 약〉

본고의 목적은 햄릿 왕자가 복수를 유예해 나가는 이유를 중세에서 근세로의 이행기라는 역사적 맥락과 관련지어 검토하는 것이다. 이 시기에는 중세 귀족계급이나 신흥 부르주아지 어느 쪽도 사회의 주도권을 장악하지 못한 상황에서 궁정을 중심으로 하는 통합이 일시적으로 이루어졌었다.

햄릿이 복수를 유예하는 이유는 자신이 제거하려 하는 악이 궁정을 중심으로 하는 질서와 불가분의 관계에 있다는 인식 때문이다. 즉, 햄릿은 사회의 근본적 개혁 없이 문제 해결은 불가능하다는 사실을 뼈저리게 깨닫는다. 봉건적 생활양식에 대한 그의 회의는, 부친의 복수를 하려는 레어티즈나 봉건적 명예를 중시하는 포틴브라스와 대조되어 더욱 두드러진다.

묘지파는 광대들의 '보충적 시각'은 작품의 지배적 가치에 도전한다. 이들의 평등주의적 세계관은 햄릿에게 교훈을 주고 그의 언어구사에 영향을 미칠 뿐 아니라 유토피아적 세계를 미리 보여주는 적극적 기능을 하기도 한다.

햄릿이 자신이 처음에 거부했던 봉건적 가치관으로 복귀함에 반해 리어왕이 자신의 깨달음을 끝까지 고수한다는 사실은 『리어왕』이 『햄릿』보다 한 걸음 진전한 작품임을 증명한다. 왕위를 계승하는 포틴브라스 역시 에드가에 비해 경험의 폭이나 깊이가 부족한 인물이다. 『햄릿』의 결말부가 『리어왕』의 결말부에 비해 주인공의 깨달음을 받쳐주지 못한다는 것은 분명한 사실인데, 이 점은 16세기 휴머니즘의 한계, 더 나아가서 휴머니즘의 이론과 실제 사이의 괴리를 반영하는 것이다.

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## A Realistic Approach To Hamlet

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### 〈Abstract〉

The purpose of this paper is to examine the reason of Hamlet's procrastination in relation to the transitional period from medieval to modern. Neither the medieval aristocracy nor the newly arising bourgeoisie grasps the hegemony to lead society. Out of this turmoil the temporary unity is formed around the court and crown

Hamlet's procrastination is due to his humanistic awareness that the 'canker' which he wishes to uproot from that order is intrinsic to that order itself. The prince knows well the betterment of the world would be impossible without the radical reform of society. Hamlet's doubts on the feudal values are brought into relief by contrast with Laertes who is suitable for Thomas Kydian revenge-tragedy or with Fortinbras who serves the feudal honor code.

'The complementary perspective' through gravedigger-clowns challenges some of the basic values immersed in this play. Clowns not only teach the prince but also affect his language. Moreover, their egalitarian world view plays the positive role in looking forward to the future utopian society

*King Lear* shows an advance on *Hamlet*. Lear keeps his human awareness to the last, while Hamlet returns to feudal values which he has previously rejected. Fortinbras is much inferior to Edgar in terms of the range and depth of experience. The ending of *Hamlet* doesn't support the protagonist's awakening at all, which implies certain limitations in the sixteenth-century humanism and discrepancies between humanistic theory proper and its practice

## I . Elizabethan Drama and Social Upheaval

It is well known that the flowering periods of drama especially, tragedy coincide with the world-historical changes in human society. In the Greek drama we can find 'the clash of those social forces which in reality led to the destruction of primitive forms of society and to the rise of the Greek polis.' Also in the second flowering of tragedy during the Renaissance there is 'the world-historical collision between dying feudalism and the birth pangs of the final class society.' In addition at the end of the eighteenth century, which is the age of French Revolution and the preparatory stage for the Germanic reform, the flourishing of drama can be ascertained via the works of Goethe and Schiller.<sup>1)</sup> If, as Hegel asserted drama aims to portray 'totality of movement' in connection with the crucial conflicts of a period, it is reasonable that drama thrives in an age when life is full of such collisions.

The Elizabethan period against which Shakespeare wrote was equally an epoch of social

1) For the above argument; See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell(Harmondsworth Penguin Books, 1962), p.101, pp 111-112.

upheaval.<sup>2)</sup>

Sixteenth-century English society, in its economic relations and political structure, its morals and manners, was in many significant aspects unlike those forms and organizations that we normally associate with either the heyday of the feudal classes or the rise to power of the bourgeoisie. It was an age of social compromise and economic confusion which yet achieved, politically, a temporary stability and a cultural balance distinctly its own. In the sphere of economics, traditional forms of trade and agriculture existed side by side with the newly emerging modes of capitalist enterprise, and an unprecedented and often conflicting number of heterogeneous developments and activities resulted.<sup>3)</sup>

Neither the medieval aristocracy nor the arising bourgeoisie grasps the power to lead society. Out of this turmoil the court and crown arise as the focal point of the nation's political, religious and cultural life. But this temporal unity holds unceasing conflicts and collisions between two forces beneath its serene surface. In addition Renaissance brings about alteration in people's consciousness. The medieval world view focused on God loses its position in proportion as the idea spreads that life may be changed through men's activities.

The peculiar strength of the Elizabethan drama comes from the contact of Renaissance Humanism with the popular cultural tradition which was transmitted through the theater of the folk. The popular culture during the medieval period, such as morris, maying, sword-dance, mummings, morality plays and miracle plays contains the critical perspective on the ruling class. Indeed the critical consciousness about the ruling class was the common ground of humanism and the popular tradition. Humanist dramatists did not reject but expropriated this tradition. As Weimann said, "once the humanist contribution to the drama is seen in its wider moral and imaginative implications, it can more significantly be related to the popular tradition. The interplay of popular taste and humanist endeavor has indeed often been observed; it has been pointed out that classical models, Senecan or Terencean, enriched the popular drama while the popular tradition, in its turn, saved the drama from academic stiffness."<sup>4)</sup>

Shakespeare was the typical dramatist in this age when humanism and the popular culture made contact with each other. On the one hand through grammar school he received humanists' introduction to the classics and to a view of human nature that was, in essential points, no longer medieval. On the other the fact that he was not only a dramatist but also a player makes it easy for him to meet with the popular tradition transmitted through the folk theater. Shakespeare turns these two points to his advantage. As an example we can count his creative use of 'clowns'. Till then the function of clowns was to give audience

2) For the account of the Elizabethan England; See Robert Weimann, "The Soul of the Age: Towards A Historical Approach to Shakespeare", *Shakespeare in a Changing World*, ed. Arnold Kettle(London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1964), pp.20-6.

3) *Ibid.*, p.20.

4) Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed, Robert Schwartz(Baltimore and London; The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), p.180.

enjoyment or comic relief irrespective of plot. But Shakespeare's clowns play an organic role in the work's whole meaning.<sup>5)</sup> 'The complementary perspective' through clowns challenges, supplements, enriches, modifies, inverts, or criticizes some of the basic values in the play as a whole.

Our concern here is what Hamlet's real dilemma is, i.e. Hamlet's procrastination. Actually, at least two times, Hamlet is urged to revenge his father's death by the ghost 'in the same figure like the King that's dead.' (I, 1, 41)<sup>6)</sup> Many critics refer his procrastination to unstable nervous quality, shock from his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage, melancholy pessimism, Oedipus complex, sensitivity unfitting him for the crass burden of his duty to take revenge, or delight in thought unfitting him for crucial action, and so on. But none of these, I think, are sufficient to resolve what is called 'the Hamlet mystery.' The right way of solution is to be found in the historical approach for it is no use hunting for a pure essence of Shakespeare, outside time and space. Lukács appreciates Shakespeare's great tragedies as follows.

...in the great tragedies of his maturity (*Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, etc.*) he used the legendary anecdotal material of the old chronicles in order to concentrate certain social-moral problems of this transition crisis even more powerfully than was possible when tied to the events of English history ... For this reason the great tragic figures of Shakespeare's maturity are the most colossal historical types of this transition crisis.<sup>7)</sup>

We can count Jan Kott as one of critics who read *Hamlet* historically. He tries to get at our modern experience, anxiety and sensibility through Shakespeare's works.<sup>8)</sup> So Kott extracts but the existential meaning from the famous 'To be, or not to be' speech. This kind of retroactive reading can not teach us the adequate meaning of *Hamlet*. The proper appreciation of *Hamlet* is possible only when we take Shakespeare as the writer of the transitional period into full account.

## II. Hamlet's Tragic Dilemma —Why Does Hamlet Procrastinate

Why does Hamlet procrastinate? From the first Denmark is shown to be immersed in the chaotic state because of the rumor that Fortinbras is levying the forces to recover territory lost when his father was killed in battle with the late King. Such lines as 'some strange eruption to our State' (I, 1, 69), 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (I, 4, 90), and so on are repeated. This gloomy atmosphere is linked with death imagery through Hamlet's monologue below.

5) See Ibid, pp.237-46

6) William Shakespeare, *Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Complete Pelican Shakespeare: The Tragedies*, ed Alfred Harbage (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981) All quotations come from this edition.

7) Lukács, pp.182-3.

8) See Jan Kott, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*, trans Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen, 1967), pp 47-60.

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,  
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,  
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
 Fig on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
 That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature  
 Possess it merely. (I.2.129-37)

In Act III, scene 1 we can find many references to death besides. After Hamlet ascertains 'ghost's word'(III, 2, 275) through the play within the play, even the apocalyptic imagery—“ 'T is now the very witching time of night,/When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out/Contagion to this world”(III.2.373-5)—appears. We are anxious to know the identity of these dark images and come to think of the relation of this darkness with Hamlet's procrastination. It is no doubt that his seeming death-wish is basically due to 'his father's death and our o'erhasty marriage.'(II, 2, 57) as Gertrude said. Ernest Jones explains Hamlet's delay like these.

For some deep-seated reason, which is to him unacceptable Hamlet is plunged into anguish at the thought of his father being replaced in his mother's affections by someone else. It is as if his devotion to his mother had made him so jealous for her affection that he had found it hard enough to share this even with his father and could not endure to share it with still another man.<sup>9)</sup>

But we cannot help feeling that this kind of psychological explanation does not meet our impression on this work. There remains something more important behind his procrastination.

In Act III, scene 3 Hamlet encounters Claudius alone at prayer. He refuses to avenge his uncle under the pretext that if he kills Claudius a-praying he may come to Heaven. But the fact that Hamlet does not admit Lord's admonition, “avenge not yourselves... Vengeance is mine: I will repay”(Romans 12: 19) is obvious. If he believes His notice he may entrust vengeance to God and claim his throne with ease. But he ponders on the meaning of personal vengeance persistently. In Act III, scene 4 ghost reappears to scold Hamlet for his 'blunted purpose'. (III, 4, 112)

Why does Hamlet procrastinate? We can find ample evidences, if we try, that Hamlet is likely to become the exemplary medieval king like Henry V. Because he is 'the most immediate to our throne'(I, 2, 109) it is fair for him to claim the throne. Even Claudius indicates that he wins public confidence.(See, IV.3.4. and IV.7.16-21) At the end of play Fortinbras also comments on Hamlet: “For he was likely, had he been put on,/To have proved most royal.”(V.2.386-7) It is possible that he is able to rule more successfully and

9) Ernest Jones, “Hamlet and Oedipus”, *Hamlet: A Casebook*, ed. John Jump(London: The Macmillan Press, 1968), p.52.

more efficiently than any other medieval king. Then why does he delay his vengeance and refuse to claim his throne?

We can gain the following lamentation as a clue for solving our problem.

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite  
That ever I was born to set it right!( I 5.188-9)

In Act I Hamlet alone is shown to wear the black suit of mourning in the court. This proves the fact that there might be a considerable distance between Hamlet's values and the prevalent values of the court. The corrupt, senile, and eccentric members of court, such as Claudius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are presented through animal imagery. Claudius is compared with 'satyr'( I . 2, 140)as well as with 'that incestuous, that adulterate beast.'( I . 5, 42)Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are both 'sponge'(IV, 2, 12) and 'adders fanged.'(III, 4, 204) Hamlet said to Polonius that 'I would you were so honest a man'(II, ii, 176) as a fishmonger. These remarks make us wonder whether Hamlet criticizes only the corrupt members of court or the court itself. That is, the point at issue is like this : Either Hamlet casts doubts on the order itself formed around the court or Hamlet criticizes only the corrupt, bourgeois-like members of court with little thought of the feudal order itself. Anyway to his thought vengeance is not a simple matter. Let's refer to John Holloway's argument.

At least twice, Hamlet refers explicitly to his having taken on (albeit unwillingly) the task of the revenger whose narrower function may have been to avenge a wronged kinsman, but whose wider one was to purge from society the evil which it could not otherwise escape.<sup>10)</sup>

L.C.Knights also who holds that Hamlet's irresolution is not mere irresolution about the performance of a specific act claims that Hamlet's procrastination is closely linked with more wider and more comprehensive question.

It is this that is the center of interest, and the question that is as often pursued, almost, as it were, in isolation from the full imaginative effect, why does Hamlet delay? is entirely subordinate to the wider and more inclusive question. What is the impact on Hamlet's consciousness of the world with which he has to deal?<sup>11)</sup>

Now we gradually approach the core of our problem concerned. It is certain that Hamlet doesn't fear action as such. Virtually he prepares 'The Murder of Gonzago', the play within the play to test 'ghost's word' and manages affairs on the ship toward England very well. Then why does Hamlet delay his revenge and refuse to claim his throne?

In Act II, scene 2 during dialogue with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz Hamlet compares Denmark to a prison. In the above we have said that there is something more important in Hamlet's procrastination beside his psychological reason. We can assume that owing to

10) John Holloway, "Hamlet", Ibid, pp 161-2

11) L.C.Knights, 'Hamlet' and other Shakespearean essays(Cambridge Cambridge Univ Press, 1979), p.33

personal experience—‘a father killed, a mother stained’ (IV, 4, 57)—he comes to see the world in a different way. In addition the experience of Wittenberg must have taught Hamlet a humanistic and rationalistic viewpoint. He received the humanistic education which is incompatible with the feudal revenge code. Historically “the decline of the ‘revenge-tragedy’ and changes in the feudal concept of ‘honor’ run parallel to the strengthening of a centralized state apparatus in the late years of Elizabethan reign.”<sup>12)</sup> Hamlet ponders on the possibility whether or not the world may get better through his revenge, and he doubts that possibility grievously. Because the values and attitudes which corrupt personal relationships are essentially the same which resides at the corrupt core of the public world. The vices which Hamlet wishes to conquer are not personal ones but intrinsic to the feudal Denmark society

The revolutionary nature of Hamlet’s view of the world is that he sees tyranny and murder and inhumanity not as unfortunate abuses but as the norm and essence of the court of Denmark, not as blots on a society he can accept but as integral parts of a way of life he now finds intolerable. ... He ceases to behave as a prince ought to behave and begins behaving as a man, a sixteenth-century man, imbued with the values and caught up in the developing and exciting potentialities and the new humanism.<sup>13)</sup>

To Hamlet the betterment of the world is impossible without radical reform of this prison-like society. The human and moral meaning of the order itself formed around the court concerns Hamlet. In a coastal highway Hamlet sees the powers of Norway and Poland going to wage war for “a little patch of ground/That hath in it no profit but the name.” (IV.4.18-19) Hamlet’s comments on this vain war proves the fact that he is not only tormented by his doubts about the meaning of the feudal honor or name but makes nothing of it.

Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats  
Will not debate the question of this straw.  
This is th’ imposthume of much wealth and peace,  
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without  
Why the man dies. (IV.4.25-29)

In Act V, scene 2 Hamlet comes to play a fencing match with Laertes. He says, even if he loses the match he ‘will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits’, (V, 2, 171) This utterance makes us recall Falstaff’s monologue in I Henry IV.

... Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or  
take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no  
skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word.  
What is that word honor? Air—a trim reckoning! ...  
.....Honor is a mere scutcheon—and  
so ends my catechism (I Henry IV, V.1.131-39)

12) Arnold Kettle, “From Hamlet To Lear”, ed. Arnold Kettle, p.153, footnote, No.1.

13) Ibid., p.147

It is plain that personally he makes nothing of the feudal code such as honor or revenge. His awareness reflects the fact that he recognizes the changing world and takes its human meaning into consideration.

As an example of Hamlet's humanistic awareness let us see his famous speech.

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 To die, to sleep—  
 No more—and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heartache, and the thousand nartual 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 :  
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
 Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
 The pangs of despised 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? 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 traveler returns, puzzles the will,  
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have,  
 Then fly to others that we know not of?(III.1 56-82)

Two kinds of explanation are possible for this speech. If we interpret 'to be, or not to be' as 'to die, or not to die,' it leads to the kind of reading that Hamlet comes to catch the sense of evil prevalent in the universe. Of course, in some sense, Hamlet is fascinated by death, but this does not exhaust the whole meaning of *Hamlet*. This reading is nothing other than the reduction of Hamlet's dramatic and historical dilemma in the transitional period to the metaphysical anguish. Another way is to read this passage in question as 'to kill and to be king or not to kill and not to be king'. Hamlet knows well that he cannot stop the rotting trend of Denmark merely by revenging and becoming a King. Concerning this passage Lawrence's explanation is remarkable. It is reckless of us to try to summarize his astonishing remarks, so the best way is to cite his pages in detail however long they may be.



At the bottom of his own soul Hamlet has decided that the self in its supremacy, Father and King, must die. It is a suicidal decision for his involuntary soul to have arrived at. Yet it is inevitable. The great religious, philosophic tide, which had been swelling all through the Middle Ages, had brought him there.

The question, to be or not to be, which Hamlet puts himself, does not mean, to live or not to live. It is not the simple human being who puts himself the question, it is the supreme I, King and Father. To be or not to be King, Father, in the Self supreme? And the decision is, not to be....

The King, the Emperor is killed in the soul of man, the old order of life is over, the old tree is dead at the root. So said Shakespeare. It was finally enacted in Cromwell....

Before Cromwell the idea was "For the King", because every man saw himself consummated in the King. After Cromwell the idea was "For the good of my neighbour", or "For the good of the whole." This has been our ruling idea, by which we have more or less lived.<sup>14)</sup>

F.R.Leavis comments as follows: "Lawrence relates the plight of Hamlet, and of Shakespeare who created him and transmuted in that disquieting way the traditional Hamlet theme, to a great change in the European psyche. Hamlet in his 'involuntary soul'...has decided not to be—decided that the will to be King, Father and Supreme I (ego) in his turn isn't in him".<sup>15)</sup> It seems reasonable to read Hamlet's above speech as the expression of his historical—to use Lawrence's phrase, philosophical—dilemma in transitional period from medieval to modern. We can count Hamlet's attitudes toward Ophelia as another example of his concrete 'philosophical' dilemma. In the churchyard scene Hamlet told her brother, Laertes that he loved Ophelia so much that "forty thousand brothers/could not with all their quantity of love/make up my sum." (V.1.256-8) We cannot doubt his love toward Ophelia is honest. Nonetheless Hamlet bids Ophelia go 'to a nunnery.' (III, 1, 121) "For Hamlet and for Ophelia," Jan Kott observes, "it means that in the world, where murder holds sway, there is no room for love."<sup>16)</sup> Of course Hamlet confirms Ophelia's innocence or chastity. But she is also a member of the corrupted Danish court. So Ophelia, together with Gertrude, is "at once a touching reminder of what might have been—the unity and health of the whole state—and a victim of its actual illness and disunity."<sup>17)</sup>

What we have examined as Hamlet's historical dilemma is brought into relief by contrast with Laertes, or with Fortinbras. Three young men—Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras—aim to avenge their fathers' death, respectively. While Hamlet doubts the feudal code and represents the newly arising humanistic spirit as examined above, Fortinbras and Laertes accept the feudal mode of life. When young Fortinbras who is 'of unimproved mettle hot and full' ( I, 1, 96) levies the forces 'to gain a little patch of ground/That hath in it no profit but the name,' Hamlet comments on it as follows :

14) D.H.Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy*(Kingswood : The Windmill Press, 1956), pp.70-2.

15) F.R.Leavis, *English Literature in our time and the University*(1969 ; rpt. Cambridge . Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970), p.156. Leavis contrasts Lawrence's reading with T.S.Eliot's which puts emphasis on 'sex gone wrong'.

16) Jan Kott, p.50.

17) Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater*(1949 ; rpt. Princeton : Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), p.107.

Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means  
 To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me.  
 Witness this army of such mass and charge,  
 Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
 Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,  
 Makes mouths at the invisible event,  
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
 To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,  
 Even for an eggshell Rightly to be great  
 Is not to stir without great argument,  
 But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
 When honor's at the stake How should I then,  
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,  
 Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
 And let all sleep, while to my shame I see  
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men  
 That for a fantasy and trick of fame  
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
 Which is not tomb enough and continent  
 To hide the slain?(IV.4 45-65)

On the one hand Hamlet envies Fortinbras's simple view of honor and scolds himself for his procrastination. On the other his speech denotes the tone that this kind of action is not satisfactory. In Act IV having heard of Polonius's death and secret burial Laertes returns from France. He invades the castle at the head of a mob in order to revenge his father's doubtful death. Laertes believes, without doubt, that to avenge his father's enemy is the only and best way in which a son can do toward the dead father.

How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.  
 To hell allegiance, vows to the blackest devil,  
 Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit!  
 I dare damnation To this point I stand,  
 That both the worlds I give to negligence,  
 Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged  
 Most throughly for my father.(IV.5.130-36)

In this sense Laertes and Fortinbras are foils to Hamlet. We cannot doubt that Laertes is the most suitable hero for Thomas Kydian revenge tragedy. But that Laertes is abused by Claudius demonstrates the fact that simple views of the world are unfit for the new age That is, the feudal world view can no longer handle or settle problems in the changing and already changed world. The new vision and perspective are urgently needed which are commensurate with the newly emerging society. Hamlet's procrastination is due to his awareness that the personal revenge is inadequate to solve these problem and he can't find appropriate actions

for it. But Hamlet might be on the road to this vision.

As aforementioned, the sixteenth-century English society witnesses the collision between dying feudalism and the arising bourgeois society. Not only Hamlet's experience and recognition but also Fortinbras's and Laertes's case show the inadequacy of feudal attitudes in transitional period. Though Shakespeare sees the inevitable collapse of the court and crown, he acknowledges the feudal virtues through Laertes's valor or Fortinbras's honor. But it is plain Shakespeare does not favor bourgeois attitudes against feudal ones. Claudius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, despite their position in the court, all represent bourgeois attitudes. The latter two courtiers betray Hamlet for their ambition. Claudius who is selfish, ambitious, and ruthless is epitome of all the bourgeoisie. He poisoned his brother to usurp a throne and to keep Gertrude as his wife. In Act III, scene 3 Claudius prepares to dispatch Hamlet to England on the pretense that "the terms of our estate may not endure/Hazard so near's as doth hourly grow/Out of his brows."(III.3.5-7) But his real plan is to make the British king kill Hamlet. In addition he abuses Laertes's simple mind to kill Hamlet. All these people are likened by the imagery of the play to animals like 'beast,' 'satyr' and 'adders fanged.' As Arnold Hauser said, Shakespeare "seems to have lost his confidence in Machiavellian absolutism and a ruthlessly acquisitive economy."<sup>18)</sup>

Hamlet's complex situation as a man and a prince does allow his procrastination no longer. So there comes the sad, almost passive acceptance of the need to act as a prince in order to cure the canker of Denmark.

Does it not, think 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?(V.2.63-70)

But the 'canker' of Denmark is not to be cured through this kind of revenge. Because vices committed by Claudius are not his personal ones but closely connected with the feudal society, the 'canker' of Denmark cannot be uprooted without reforming society itself. But it is impossible for the prince in the sixteenth-century Denmark to find efficient means to reform society. Hamlet himself does realize this limitation severely. In this sense Hamlet is defeated not by enemies or tragic flaws but by history itself.

The degree to which Hamlet, in the last act, capitulates to the values he has previously rejected—the extent to which he gives up the battle to act as a man rather than as a prince—corresponds, I suggest, to the actual possibilities in the year 1600 of putting into practice

18) Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art: Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque*, trans. Stanley Godman(1951; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p.142.

the ideas of the new humanism or, perhaps more accurately, holds the mirror up to nature in the sense that certain limitations in sixteenth-century humanism and discrepancies between humanist theory and practice are revealed.<sup>19)</sup>

It is unfortunate for Hamlet to be born to set the time 'out of joint' right. But it is still more tragic that he cannot put into practice adequate means commensurate with his humanistic awareness acquired during his painful efforts. This is the real tragedy of Hamlet

### III. 'The Complementary Perspective'

In the first chapter we have said that Shakespeare's clowns play an organic role in the work's whole meaning. Also we said that 'the complementary perspective' through clowns challenges, supplements, modifies, or criticizes some of the basic values in the play as a whole. Two kinds of vehicles for 'the complementary perspective' appear in this work: One is the interlude scene usually serving a choric function, e.g. the gravedigger clowns and the other is the assimilation of popular elements in the actions and attitudes of the main characters themselves, e.g. Hamlet's 'antic disposition.' Throughout this work in question especially in Act II and Act III, Hamlet's irreverent perspective focusing on the more corrupt members of court draws from the background of the common worker<sup>20)</sup>

Gravedigger clowns reject not merely dominant values of this play—values formed around the court and clown—but bourgeois values. In other words, they reject all the values which stem from class-divided society. Two rustics don't neglect the actual difference deriving from class distinctions.

... .If this had not been a  
gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o'  
Christian burial.(V.1 21-3)

However the egalitarian perspective sharply distinguished from bourgeois perspective is intrinsic to them.

... ..There is no ancient gentle-  
men but gard'ners, ditchers, and grave-makers They  
hold up Adam's profession.(V.1 27-9)

If there were no 'great folk' while Adam delved and Eve span, and if the 'houses' that a gravedigger builds 'lasts till doomsday,' both the beginning and the end of the human race can be viewed in an egalitarian perspective. The inverting structure of the comic interlude scene affects the theme and vision of Hamlet's tragedy. Hamlet himself draws the lesson<sup>21)</sup>

19) Arnold Kettle, p 147

20) See Robert Weimann, ed Robert Schwartz, pp.127--33, pp.238-9

21) Ibid., p 240

To what base uses we may return, Horatio!  
 Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of  
 Alexander till's a find it stopping a bunghole?.....  
 No, faith, not a jot, but to follow him thither  
 with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it ; as  
 thus : Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alex—  
 ander returneth to dust ; the dust is earth ; of earth  
 we make loam ; and why of that loam whereto he was  
 converted might they not stop a beer barrel?  
 Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,  
 Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.  
 O, that that earth which kept the world in awe  
 Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!(V.1.190-203)

Hamlet also notes that “the age/is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so/near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe.”(V.1.130-132) In fact the wit of the clown comes so near the experience of Hamlet that it affects his language.

Weimann sums up clowns's values and its role in Hamlet as follows.

Their impact on the main action is, from the point of view of ideology, of such a quality that prebourgeois standards of social equality are brought to bear on the privileges and divisions characteristic of class society.... But the gravediggers are more deeply integrated into the plays positive meaning, and as such looks forward also th the gaoler in Cymbeline... In Cymbeline there is an almost utopian tone in the equalizing position of the gaoler....

Thus, Shakespeare's integration of popular structural forms achieved a sense of “contrarietie” involving new areas of meaning that resulted from a popular complementary perspective.<sup>22)</sup>

Two rustics' values and Hamlet's lessons in them enrich the whole meaning of this work in that they challenge the existing values and look forward to the future.

#### IV. Ending of Hamlet Compared with That of King Lear

So far we have examined both the inadequateness of feudal attitudes in transitional period and Shakespeare's criticism against bourgeois values. While Hamlet as the sixteenth-century prince cannot but return to the feudal values he has previously rejected, King Lear does not yield to the feudal values. King Lear puts his predicament to extremity. From this angle it is reasonable to compare Hamlet with King Lear.

Almost all of the main courtiers except Horatio meet thier finish in Act V, scene 2. During fencing match Laertes wounds Hamlet with the envenomed rapier, and in the scuffle they exchange weapons, and the prince wounds Laertes. Drinking to her son's success, the Queen unwittingly swallows poisoned cup which Claudius has prepared for Hamlet. As they are dying, Gertrude and Laertes reveal the villainy of the monarch, and Hamlet kills the monster

22) Ibid., pp.240-41.

with the poisoned rapier. From the hands of Horatio he wrests the poisoned cup, begging his friend to live to “report me and my cause aright/To the unsatisfied.”(V.2.327-9) After the tragic *dénouement*, Fortinbras, who serves the feudal concept of honor, arrives to restore order to the distracted country. Francis Fergusson praises the recovery of order by Fortinbras: “The widespread malady of Denmark is clear at last; and with the end of Claudius and his regime it is gone like a bad dream. Fortinbras appears at last in Denmark: a new hope for a new, purged state.”<sup>23)</sup> Examined in the light of Hamlet’s recognition that murder and inhumanity are not mere blots on a society he can accept but integral parts of the feudal court and crown, Fortinbras’s recovery of order falls far short of the prince’s awareness. We can’t accept Fortinbras’s order for nothing.

Let us haste to hear it,  
And call the noblest to the audience.  
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.  
I have some rights to memory in this Kingdom,  
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.(V.2.375-9)

His order means a return to the feudal mode of life and *nothing but* the defeat of almost everything for which Hamlet stands. Therefore the recovery of order does not promise the brilliant and hopeful future. “The point about Fortinbras, as we have seen, is that he is incapable of understanding what Hamlet had understood; so that there is, despite the survival of Horatio, a distinctly hollow sound in the closing commonplaces of the play.”<sup>24)</sup>

*King Lear* shows an advance on *Hamlet*. In some sense Hamlet’s consciousness itself comes short of Lear’s final awareness. After refused by Goneril and Regan Lear sets out into the wild night with his fool. On the stormy heath, Lear hurls his defiance at the elements, and joined by Kent, seeks refuge in a hovel which is already occupied by Edgar, who has adopted the disguise of poor, mad Tom o’Bedlam. Lear undergoes the bitter experience of poverty and feels the economic inequality sharply.

Your houseless poverty—  
. . . O, I have ta’en  
Too little care of this; Take physic, pomp;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them  
And show the heavens more just (*King Lear* III.4.26-36)

Thou wert better in a grace than to answer with thy  
uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no  
more than this? Consider him well....  
.....  
Thou art the thing itself, unaccommodated man is no  
more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.  
Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here. (*King Lear* III 4.96-103)

23) Francis Fergusson, p.110.

24) Arnold Kettle, p.171.

Hamlet doesn't have the same kind of concrete experience as Lear does on the popular lives. Furthermore, the prince doesn't break out of the closed circle of loathing and self-contempt but succumbs to reality. Of course the regenerate Lear doesn't have the actual ground on which he can reform society according to his recognition. But he doesn't surrender but treasure his understanding to the last. At least Lear's understanding enables him to respond to Cordelia's love.

At once *Hamlet* and *King Lear* ends with the implication of the accession of a new king. But there are great differences between Fortinbras who lays claim to 'some rights of memory in this Kingdom' without hesitation and Edgar who recognizes what is deficient in him.

The weight of this sad time we must obey,  
 Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say,  
 The oldest hath borne much; we that are young  
 Shall never see so much, nor live so long. (*King Lear* V.3.324-7)

Fortinbras doesn't understand Hamlet's tragic dilemma and doesn't know his own inferiority, either. Moreover he has no contact with the popular lives, whereas Edgar, disguising himself as Poor Tom, lives the popular lives. In fact Edgar has not seen what Lear has seen, but he has seen and felt enough to recognize the quality of Lear's experience, and to know that he does not know.<sup>25)</sup> But Shakespeare connotes that Edgar's rule won't meet with Lear's radical vision.

Shakespeare's greatness is: Although he grasps the inevitable collapse of the feudal classes, he doesn't seek an alternative plan in newly arising bourgeoisie. His disillusionment leads neither to nostalgia for the dying feudalism nor to existential anguish. His vision looks forward to the promising future. Belief in the human nature and historical consciousness which is closely connected with the popular perspective make possible his achievements. Moreover, as Lukács argues,<sup>26)</sup> Shakespeare combines the most admirable instinct for the basic conditions of all historical circumstances with the most subtle psychological insight into each individual characteristic and the most lucid understanding for the moment of transition in which general and particular motives coincide, and it is to the combination of these three qualities that Prospero's wand owes its omnipotence and irresistibility.

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25) See *Ibid.*, p.171

26) See Georg Lukács, p.102.

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