

A Collective Study of Hamlet

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A Collective Study of *Hamlet*

Lizhen Liu (No. 2008001)

Task 1: Annotated Bibliography (about 1000 words)

1. Bottiroli, Giovanni. (2019) *To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity. Lacan's Errors and His Disappointing Interpretation of Shakespeare*. Enthymeme, n. XXIII, pp. 250 - 285.

This article has a detailed study on “to be and not to be” on examining Hamlet’s desire for identity. Therefore, the article begins with a distinction between “the desire to be” and “the desire to have”, which is a new way illustrated by Freud, but he did not fully develop it. Therefore, the desire to be is described as a prisoner of the Oedipus complex, from Freud’s “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1921). Hamlet undoubtedly represents an image of perfection, an ideal Ego... (p. 261) Bottiroli categorizes three theorems of the modal revolution and argues that Hamlet was doing a self-exploration for his superior identity, instead of just a paralysis. Furthermore, we need to underline the difference between an overflowing of energies and the search for the non-coincidence. (p. 263) under the torment of his father’s sudden death and his mother’s quick marriage, “to be and not to be” represents Hamlet was staggering through the search of both his ego and his identity.

2. Edward Andrew (2019) *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*, The European Legacy, 24(6), 662-683, DOI: 10.1080/10848770.2019.1575073

This article is a book review of Rhodri Lewis's book --- *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (2017), published by Princeton University Press. In Lewis's book, he illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of the historicist approach to thought championed by Quentin Skinner, who assisted him in drawing Lewis's theme of hunting in the perspective of *Hamlet*, as a Machiavellian drama, which kind of drama is about how the rulers use immoral methods to take control of power and success. By comparing *Hamlet* with its contemporaries, such as Dekker's play, Sidney's poems, et. Lewis defined Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as a tragedy of humanism on hunting.

Edward Andrew cites what Lewis emphatically asserted that is "humanist philosophy ... is bull shit" (p. 252), but he also points out what Lewis ignores, that is in the 16th and 17th centuries, the religious conflicts were plaguing Britain and Europe, such as the Bloody Mary and so on. Edward Andrew agrees with Lewis on the idea that it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience, but he also points out that Lewis did not interpret what that conscience was clearly. Edward Andrew views *Hamlet* as a pioneer of modern subjectivity by continuous self-exploration and concludes that truth can be found in Shakespeare's literature and it is an everlasting transhistorical phenomenon. That is the reason why we should

study Shakespeare's *Hamlet* now. Edward Andrew calls for defunding to facilitate increased spending on military technology at the end of this article.

3. Amir Khan. (2015) *My Kingdom for a Ghost: Counterfactual Thinking and Hamlet*, Shakespeare Quarterly, Published by Johns Hopkins University Press. 66(1), 29-46 DOI: 10.1353/shq.2015.0002

This article begins with the removal of King Claudius's confession in *Hamlet* to construct an overwhelming obstacle in how Hamlet gets to know what happened in the play. Without Claudius's confession, what the ghost told Hamlet had no solid evidence and Hamlet cannot jump into the conclusion that Claudius is the murderer. Amir Khan's purpose of this paper is to pose the counterfactual question: Why should Hamlet have not a second thought on killing the new king of Denmark, his stepfather? He seemed to be convinced by the ghost and said to Horatio before he heard Claudius's confession, "I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (ll. 263 – 264). Amir Khan agrees with Bradley who thought it was Hamlet's sick soul "diseased" with melancholy (p. 39) that led this drama to be a tragedy. In the conclusion, Amir Khan argues that the problem of delay is the key issue in fighting against injustice.

4. Larry Weiss (2019) *The Branches of an Act: Shakespeare's Hamlet*

Explains His Inaction, *Shakespeare*, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.

DOI: 10.1080/17450918.2019.1581836

This article analyses Hamlet's monosyllabic words in the perspective "that action is the inevitable consequence of stimulus, intention, ability, and lack of hindrance, and, relying on the conventions applicable to soliloquies". Larry Weiss use "cause ... will ... strength ... means" to describes what happened in *Hamlet* and "imagination ... resolution ... act" to illustrate how Hamlet took his revenge. First, Hamlet knew five things: ① Hamlet did not full acknowledge Claudius' murder; ② but Hamlet believed he has the right to kill Claudius; ③ Hamlet also had the will to do so; ④ Hamlet even had the opportunity and physical ability to do so; ⑤ Hamlet was never stopped by external circumstances from doing the deed. (p. 5) In his "How all occasions" soliloquy, Hamlet explained why he failed to fulfill his promise to assassinate Claudius, the murderer of his father. Larry Weiss cannot agree more with A. C. Bradley who felt that the lassitude accompanying melancholy can also have a disabling effect (Bradley: p. 104–09) At the end of the article, Larry Weiss sums up that Hamlet's paralysis in action is the result of his fear of mental suffering under his long depression.

5. S. C. Boorman. (1987) *Human Conflict in Shakespeare*. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul. DOI: 10.4324/9781003137429

Conflicts are the core of Shakespeare's drama, no matter they are interior or exterior. Hamlet and Othello are all good examples to illustrate the tense conflicts from not only the wars with themselves, but also the wars with other striking and important characters around them. S. C. Boorman's *Human Conflict in Shakespeare* (1987) starts with two rapid tours around human conflicts: one is the traditions of Elizabethans inherited and the other is the plays of Shakespeare's predecessors and contemporaries. (p. 555) To describe these conflicts of soul vs. body, reason vs. fantasy, order vs. disorder, private man vs. public man etc., Boorman makes this "warfare of our nature" to be the central idea to study Shakespeare's works, through Shakespeare's great linguistic power to express traditional ideas of proper conduct with tensions into our real-world life. Shakespeare's dramas, life is neither black nor white. It is much colorful. Therefore, Shakespeare's characters are not more clear-cut as good or bad figures. They are much more vivid and complexed with discordant natures. They are living beings of flesh and blood, which makes Shakespeare's plays to be more accepted. To sum up, this book demonstrates the process of a human approach to Shakespeare in the search of human touch, instead of human conflicts.

Task 2: Critiques and a close reading exercise (about 2000 words)

**A Study on the Ghost in *Hamlet*
from the Perspective of Freud's Theory of Death Instinct**

Lizhen Liu (No. 2008001)

1. Freud's Theory of Death Instinct

Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939), was famous for his founding of Freudian psychology. Because he was one of the early neurological researchers in contributing psychoanalysis into human history and cultural interpretation, he was thought to be one of the most creative thinkers of the first half of the 20th century. His theory of death instinct is one of his great contribution to the world.

Freud theory of death instinct is based on a hypothesis that human behaviors are all motivated by some degree of instincts. Freud (1998: 35) described these elastic instincts as “a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state” which will react with the external forces as “a manifestation of inertia in organic life.”

Freud declaimed that there are two different instincts: life instincts and death instincts. In Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920: 30), he argued that “an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things”, such as self-preservation and sexual instincts, which are also called Eros or the sex instincts. But later, Freud was shaken by the

devastation of World War I and thought that there existed some aggressive instinct or self-destructive instinct in human beings. Therefore, he amended his early instinct theory, and to be the first one to propose his death instincts. He pointed out that “the aim of all life is death and, looking backwards, that inanimate things existed before living ones”. (Freud, 1920: 32) This kind of aggressive and cruel instincts is described as the root of self-destruction, so they are also called as Thanatos or the death instincts.

Compared with the life instincts which call for the survival of human beings to have a better life, the death instincts encourage people to free from tension by achieving death. From Freud’s point of view, “aggression is an original, self-subsisting disposition in the man” (Freud, 1930: 122) if a person suffers from a war or any other painful experience, he may have an unconscious desire to die or to destroy. This destructive behavior will be expressed either as self-destruction to one’s own or as aggression and violence to other things or other people. And by aggression and violence outward, one may avoid the tendency of self-destruction. “In this way the instinct itself could be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self.” (Freud, 1930: 118 - 119) In other words, if the destruction directed against the external world towards death, such as attack, murder, war, fighting and so on, it is also a kind of life instincts because it prevents the self to do self-destruction, such as behavior like

suicide, self-mutilation and so on. Hence, he concluded “this aggressive drive to be the derivative of the death instinct, which, together with the life instinct, formed the two main forces in the struggle of life” (Akhtar, 2011: 3)

Therefore, Yiannis Gabriel (1983) concludes in his book *Freud and Society* to classify death instinct into three kinds: external aggression, internalized self-aggression and repetitive behavior. External aggression refers to a domination over the forces of nature and other people, and is always represented in the form of wars, violence, or any other destroying behaviors outwards. Internalized self-aggression describes destroying behaviors inwards, such as a sense of guilt, self-abuse, self-accusation, or even suicide. Repetitive behavior manifests in compulsion to confess or to judge the unpleasant experiences, either consciously or unconsciously.

Death instinct does ups and downs as incentives, especially when something unexpected happens and thoroughly breaks the balance of life instinct and death instinct and pushes the development of a disaster into a fast pace or a person into a dead state with negative emotions such as upset, hate, anger, indifferent, gloomy, ashamed, and embarrassed. The death instinct sometimes causes anti-social acts, such as abuses, murders and wars. However, all men have death instincts, but not everyone has these destructive behaviors to himself or to others. Death instinct seems not to

work on everybody respectively, but people may often reenact the painful experience to learn from death instincts.

Freud also believed there is a harmonious relationship between life instincts and death instincts. He further stated that “The emergence of life would thus be the cause of the continuance of life and also at the same time of the striving towards death; and life itself would be conflict and compromise between these two trends.” (Freud, 1984: 381) The aggressive and compromising between life instincts and death instincts goes throughout our entire lives, till death instincts lead our lives into destruction.

To sum up, Freud’s life instinct and death instinct, or say, Eros and Thanatos are closely related to each other. It is not only because they are opposite to each other, but also because they are compensatory to each other that makes Freud’s psychology a huge success in the 20th century. In fact, life is a combination of both life instincts and death instincts through conflicts and compromises. Freud’s theory of death instinct is always applied to analyzes tragedies, for in most tragedies, because of fate, a flaw in personalities or a misunderstanding in communication, heroes or heroines will die in the end (to meet a destructive ending) through a series of downfalls. *Hamlet* is one of them. We will set the ghost, or old Hamlet for example to reveal how death instinct works.

2. A Study on the Ghost in *Hamlet* from the Perspective of Freud's Theory of Death Instinct

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) was one of the greatest playwrights in the Renaissance, whose four representative tragedies are *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. Living in a time of pseudoscience coexisting with the developing science, Shakespeare inherited some supernatural elements in his plays, such as ghosts, witches, fairies. With the help of Freudian Death Instinct, we will have a close reading on the ghost in *Hamlet* to find out how tragedies come into being.

2.1 The War as the Historical Background Information of the Ghost's Death Instinct

The ghost of old Hamlet first appeared in Scene I, Act I. Horatio describe what he saw with his impression to the old king by saying:

As thou art to thyself.

Such was the very armor he had on.

When he the ambitious Norway combated;

So, frowned he once, when in an angry parle,

He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice. (p. 7)

This refers to wars against Norway and Poland, respectively. It is well-known that people will slaughter each other on the battlefield without mercy in order to win the war. Where there is worship, there is confession. Although the old king was be loved and honored in Denmark, the war itself

is a double-edged sword since it is a sin for him to build his reputation based on wars.

Wars represent cruelty, blood, suffering and killing. People are tormented even after the war for they will have something to repent of for the rest of their lives. And it is a commonplace to confess your sins to God for forgiveness, otherwise, you will never be welcomed to Heaven. In Scene V, Act I, the ghost said:

*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. (p. 42)*

Therefore, there are solid evidence that the ghost had tested through blood in wars. According to Freud, wars are extremely aggressive destruction as a derivation of the death instinct. If we return to historical background information happened before, we will discovery that the bloody fights with swords and arrows had driven the old king's life instinct to be repressing to death. In other word, the old king's life instinct is so powerful that he uses his death instinct to kill the Norwegian and the Polish, but it never let him free from guilty.

2.2 The Murder as the Incentive for Hamlet towards the Ghost's Death Instinct

When the old king was fighting in wars on the boundary of Denmark, schemes were played in the palace of Denmark. Otherwise, the transfer of power would not be so smooth, and the quick remarriage of the Queen would not be so harsh after he was murdered by Claudius, his brother. The ghost was angry and accused:

*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, disappointed, unaneled,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head. (p. 45 - 46)*

It is said that the most extreme behavior of death instinct towards outside is killing others. The ghost asked Hamlet to take the revenge to kill Claudius by saying: "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not, ..." (p. 46), but he also left some life instinct in forgiving his beloved wife. The ghost said: "Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven" (p. 46) The ghost's discrimination between love and hate is clear-cut. When the ghost revealed the truth of his death to Hamlet, he also concerted his son's reason and passion by saying "Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive." (p. 46).

However, facing with the sudden death of his father and the quick remarriage of his mother, Hamlet's spiritual prop collapsed after he heard the murder told by the ghost. On the one hand, Hamlet pretended to be mad

as an internalized self-aggression by self-abuse and self-confinement. On the other hand, Hamlet was almost successful in an external aggression: an assassination of Claudius, but Hamlet stopped because Claudius was confessing. The ghost's meeting with Hamlet played as a turning point in Hamlet's life. Since then, death instinct was haunted around the rest of Hamlet's life, which made Hamlet ponder resentfully.

Death is an everlasting topic to everyone. No one can escape from this most cruel reality and most saddening truth. This repetitive behavior was full embedded in Hamlet's monologue: to be or not to be? That is the question. (Shakespeare, 2010:134) Here "to be" represents the life instinct while "not to be" represents the death instinct. Both life instinct and death instinct intertwined with each other in Hamlet's long-time inaction. But at last, Hamlet took the revenge and killed Claudius at the cost of his own life. When he was dying, he asked his friend to tell this tragedy to the world but said nothing about the future of Denmark, as a country, let alone to consider the settlement of Denmark after the death of King Claudius. Therefore, the most serious flaw in this tragedy is no one concerns about how to end this tragedy from the perspective of life instinct of Denmark.

To sum up, the ghost in *Hamlet* started the story by driving Hamlet's death instinct towards the murderer --- Claudius and made the whole story run. William Shakespeare, the Zeus of human literature, used his God-like talent to create the ghost in *Hamlet* to vividly unfold the hidden murder. It

is an innovative study to interpret the ghost in *Hamlet* from Freud theory of death instinct for it was the murder of the old king that was the incentive to change Hamlet's life instinct and death instinct. With the destruction of the outer world (the death of Claudius) and the destruction of the inner world (the death of Hamlet), Shakespeare's humanism thought in *Hamlet* was shining harmoniously in the Renaissance era and ever since.

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Task 3: An essay applying one or more theoretical approaches to (a) primary text(s) of your choice. (5,000 words)

**To Be or not To Be:
a Struggle of Life Instinct and Death Instinct**

Lizhen Liu (No. 2008001)

Abstract: *Hamlet* is one of the four great tragedies written by Shakespeare. “To be and not to be” is one of the most famous monologies spoken by Hamlet to represent his hesitation and inaction towards life and death. This essay applies Freud’s theory of life instinct and death instinct to analyze his struggle in taking the revenge from the viewpoint of Hamlet’s identity crisis. The most creative point in this essay is that it also proposes a bold hypothesis that Hamlet might be the son of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude.

Key words: to be or not to be, life instinct, death instinct

Life is not so easy, and death is never so hard. Conflicts and negotiations go through all our literature works, especially in tragedies. *Hamlet*, one of Shakespearean great tragedies, is of no exception. Back to the Renaissance, Christianity was the dominant religious belief, and people were wildly convinced that human beings were created by God and assigned each a special function to serve God. Just as God was the ruler of

the universe, the old King, Hamlet's father, was the sovereign of Denmark, his kingdom, and the commander of his royal family. Life and death play a delicate balance in this hierarchical world. Everything ran smoothly till all of a sudden, he died.

Hamlet's father died in such a sudden that he did not have time to leave a word to his son. But where was Hamlet? Hamlet was studying in German! Then how old was this eager student? According to his dialogue with gravediggers in Act V of *Hamlet*, he was 30 or something for the first clown said he had done gravedigging for "thirty years" since "the very day that young Hamlet was born". (Shakespearean, 2002: 256) Then it refers to us that his mother, Queen Gertrude, must be forty-five or more, which was certainly not the most beautiful time in a woman's life? Why did the new king, King Claudius, decide to marry this mid-aged woman^①, who was his former sister-in-law and who was just widowed in less than two months? As the king of Denmark, King Claudius certainly had many other choices that might lead to a different life without facing Hamlet's death threats so often.

To deal with these life and death questions in Hamlet, we would like to apply Freud's theory of life instinct and death instinct to analyze what happened behind this story.

Chapter One: Freud's Theory of Life Instinct and Death Instinct

Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) was the father of psychoanalysis who

was famous for his study on consciousness and sub-consciousness. The latter has a great influential impact throughout the first half of 20th century. In his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), one of his masterpieces, Freud pointed out the essence of the unconsciousness and discussed the uncanny relationship between the consciousness and the unconsciousness. Freud's viewpoints that a self-subsisting unconsciousness is a watershed in modern intellectual horizon, really shook the world in modern psychology. Freud argued:

The assumption that there are unconscious mental processes, the recognition of the theory of resistance and repression, the appreciation of the importance of sexuality --- theses constitutes the principal subject matter of psychoanalysis and the foundations of its theory. (qtd. in Green and Lebian, 1996: 147)

Based on this assumption, Freud further developed it into life instinct and death instinct in his books *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Civilizations and Its Discontents* (1930). Freud declaimed human behaviors are motivated by two different instincts: life instinct and death instinct. Life instinct and death instinct act as "a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state" which will react with the external forces as "a manifestation of inertia in organic life." (Freud, 1998: 35) it has something common with the theory of reincarnation, that is, everything living dies and after its death, it can be

inorganic again and be reborn. Death for the living is inevitable.

The bloody devastation of World War I (1914 - 1918) gave us all a lesson that death instinct is of great significance in our sub-consciousness. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920: 30), Freud argued that “an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things”, often described as self-preservation, sexual instincts, or love instincts, which were later called Eros or the life instincts. But there are some aggressive instincts that lead to self-destruction or destruction on others in human beings. Therefore, he amended his early instinct theory after the first world war, by proposing his idea of death instincts. He pointed out that “the aim of all life is death and, looking backwards, that inanimate things existed before living ones”. (Freud, 1920: 32) This kind of aggressive and cruel instincts is described as the root of self-destruction, so they are also called as Thanatos or the death instincts.

To sum up, life instinct, as the base of our lives, stems from sexual instinct with pleasure-seeking for a better life, while the opposite, death instinct, reflects the request of destroying our lives into a disastrous status. Life instinct and death instinct are not only opposite to each other, but also integrating with each other. In a word, these two instincts coexist in the whole process of our lives through both competition and cooperation.

Chapter Two: Hamlet's Identity Crisis under Freud's Theory of Life Instinct and Death Instinct

No one is an island. Hamlet's identity comes from the historical circumstances he belonged to. Stuart Hall (1932 -), a famous British scholar is well-known for his study in cultural transmission and ideology. He (1995) defines identity as an ethnic group or individual's belongingness to its history. He (1995: 8) argues that identities "actually come from outside, they are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition" (Stuart Hall, 1995: 8) It is thought that identity is a kind of sub-consciousness with complexity to define the day-to-day existence of every human beings. Identity crisis, as a term of psychological crisis based on a lived weakness or a loss in a human being as "an unconscious striving for continuity of experience." (Erikson, 1994: 19) before a psychoneurotic casualty.

Hamlet had no identity crisis until the murder had happened. In other words, his meeting with the ghost is the turning point in his life. On the one hand, before he returned to Denmark to attend the dead king's funeral², he was a happy prince with a heroic father and a lovely mother. On the other hand, in less than two months, his mother harshly remarried to King Claudius, his uncle. What a sudden and what a ridiculous thing!

In Act I Scene II, Hamlet described what a happy family he once had:

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 too roughly. Heaven and earth!

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown. (Shakespearean, 2002: 38)

But this lively and carefree prince soon met one of his biggest challenges in his life --- his mother's quick remarriage. He could not bear things changed in this way, and fallen into self-doubt and self-deny:

By what it fed on-- and yet, within a month--

Let me not think on 't:

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 galled eyes,

She married. O, most wicked speed, to post

With such dexterity⁸⁷ to incestuous⁸⁸ sheets! (ibid: 38)

This quick remarriage was like a blanket with which something was covered from the public's eyesight, but it was also an irrefutable evidence

that there was something wrong within it. Why in such a hurry? Was there a lover relationship between King Claudius and Queen Gertrude? As a model couple, why Hamlet's father and mother had only one child? Was Queen Gertrude forced to get into her second marriage by some reasons undiscovered? But why did Queen Gertrude's reactions afterwards seem enjoying her relationship with King Claudius? Then we can refer that King Claudius and Queen Gertrude might have a love affair, but how long had this relationship lasted? Which king was Hamlet's biological father? In other words, Hamlet's identity was questionable.

Hamlet's father may be King Claudius. Here we propose two main reasons:

First, it was the hash remarriage. It was odd that King Claudius had no ex-wife or someone like this appeared in this story. For as Hamlet's uncle, Claudius had no relationship with other woman except Queen Gertrude, and he even had no child mentioned in this story. It has the possibility that there was a hidden true love between Claudius and Gertrude for a long time. According to Hamlet, the dead king was always fighting outsider the palace, for example wars against Norway and Poland. But Queen Gertrude was not that kind of tough women who could fight against all the schemes in the palace. Then Claudius, as the old king's brother might take the responsibility and run the country when the old king launched wars outside. They must have a close cooperation in organizing

Denmark in an ordered way to let the country live healthily. That might be why at the time of regime change, Hamlet was not the first choice of the next king. That was not because Hamlet was far away in Germany when the old king died. It was that Hamlet, as an adult, had no operative ability demonstrated in how to run Denmark, as a country. That is why when Claudius became the new king, we had not heard any couriers, such as Polonius, Voltimand, etc., who against it publicly. We even can get some clue that it was not uncommon to pass the crown to one's brother instead of his own son at that time. In Scene II, Act I, Claudius was holding a meeting:

Now for ourself and for this time of meeting.

Thus much the business is: we have here writ

To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras, –

Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears

Of this his nephew's purpose, – to suppress

His further gait herein, in that the levies,

The lists and full proportions, are all made

Out of his subject: ... (ibid: 30)

Claudius' speech here indicates that in Norway, the son of the old king did not get the crown and his uncle was taking charge of the country. King Claudius further addressed "my cousin Hamlet, and my son, -" (ibid: 30) but Hamlet denied it by saying "A little more than kin, and less than

kind.” (*ibid*: 30). The queen enlightened her son on this pain by saying: “Thou know’st ’tis common; all that lives must die, Passing through nature to eternity.” (*ibid*: 34) which wished Hamlet to have more life instinct under the sunshine rather than to have more death instinct in depression. King Claudius could not agree more. He also hoped Hamlet to have a bright future by living with them. He said:

To do obsequious sorrow: But to persevere

In obstinate condolment is a course

Of impious stubbornness. ’Tis unmanly grief

...

As of a father, for let the world take note

You are the most immediate to our throne

...

And we beseech you: bend you to remain

Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,

Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son. (ibid: 34-36)

In this speech, King Claudius not only redefined Hamlet’s identity as the future king by saying “*You are the most immediate to our throne*”, but also proposed to Hamlet to live with them to be trained as the future king by being their courtier, cousin, and son. Hamlet also stated that he would obey his mother, unwillingly.

If Hamlet did not meet the ghost and if he did not pry into King

Claudius's consciousness by the play he directed, everything might not crash in such fierce conflicts. In other words, Hamlet's life span would be much longer, if he were a happy prince of Denmark in the later time, even if he just pretended to do so.

Second, it was the truth of the old king's sudden death. It was ridiculous that there were names for courtiers, officers, soldiers, etc., but there was no name for the old king. We may address him as old Hamlet, but this expression is vague and dim. As a powerful king, running Denmark for decades, he seemed to have been a devil for many years. On the one hand, when he was alive, as a winner of wars in fighting with Norway and Poland, he had extorted excessive taxes and levies on his people and killed without mercy towards his enemies. That was why he said he suffered a lot after his death. On the other hand, when he was dead, his "lovely" wife married with his "loyal" brother, and his kingdom was collapsing. As a ghost, he delivered the truth out:

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, disappointed, unaneled,

No reckoning made, but sent to my account

With all my imperfections on my head. (ibid: 48)

"If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not, ..." (p. 68) The ghost asked

Hamlet to take the revenge to kill Claudius, but he also left some life instinct in forgiving his beloved wife. The ghost said: "Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive ... Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven" (p. 70) The ghost's discrimination between love and hate is so clear-cut that the fire of revenge was burning into a blaze in Hamlet's heart. But the ghost never explained why it was so sudden.

This murder could not even be a carefully planned one, compared with how King Claudius wanted to kill Hamlet by the hand of Laertes, the son of Polonius. In the latter, King Claudius took advantage of Laertes's revenge toward Hamlet by using a sword poisonous. He even had Plan B by preparing a toxic wine. If Hamlet died in this duel, without Laertes' confess, nobody knew the truth and Claudius achieved what he wanted. What a "brilliant" strategy! But how about the first murder he committed?

According to the ghost, the old king was completely unconscious about the murder approaching. He never thought his wife, Queen Gertrude, was not royal to him. Even after his death, the ghost still said: "*From me, whose love was of that dignity That it went hand in hand even with the vow I made to her in marriage.*" (*ibid*: 68) In that morning, he was having a nap as usual in the orchard, when his brother Claudius crept in. But why did Claudius commit this murder by his own hand? It was very uncanny as to the "wicked wit and gifts" (*ibid*: 68) of Claudius. At that time, Claudius, as the brother of the king, was one of the most powerful men in Denmark.

He had no need to worry about his materialistic needs. He even could lead a luxurious life as one of the important couriers. Had he ever thought his assassination could be witnessed by someone else in the orchard? If he failed in the assassination, the cost might be his own life. What did drive him to take such a desperate measure on impulse? It must be something that was strong enough to threaten Claudius' life. If we combine what happened after the murder, we are surprised to find that it might be a piece of news on the way which was that Hamlet was the son of Claudius.

If Hamlet's biological father was Claudius, and this news was going to be discovered by the old king, then it was a strong death instinct that threaten both Claudius and Gertrude. According to the description of the old king in *Hamlet* which was enclosed in my previous part of this task, the old king never showed any mercy to his enemy, then both Claudius and Gertrude would die if the old king found out the truth. Only this hypothesis is a desperate motivation for Claudius: to live or to die.

If Hamlet's biological father was Claudius, Hamlet also faced a fierce identity crisis. Because of this reason, Hamlet was invited to live with Claudius and Gertrude, and to be pointed as the future king by Claudius. But it was also because of this reason, Claudius and Gertrude were hard to explain it to Hamlet. Because of this misunderstanding, Hamlet was tempered by the ghost and decided to take a revenge.

At first, King Claudius was very friendly towards Hamlet, but facing

with the sudden death of the old king and the quick remarriage of his mother, Hamlet's spiritual prop collapsed after hearing the ghost story. Hamlet became more and more aggressive to everyone: he abused his lover, Ophelia; he cursed his mother, Queen Gertrude; he even almost succeeded in murdering the king, Claudius. If Claudius was not praying, Hamlet had taken his life. Hamlet even killed Polonius by mistake. Through all these facts, Claudius had known the whole story. Just as in Act IV, he told Laertes, the son of Polonius, "That he which hath your noble father slain Pursu'd my life." (ibid: 230), Claudius realized that Hamlet was the destructive force in the palace of Denmark. What were Claudius' reactions? On the one hand, he sent Hamlet far away to England as a father who wanted to isolate his son from the chaos of Denmark; on the other hand, he, as the king of Denmark, also wrote a letter to the king of England to kill Hamlet. It was an uncanny and complex attitude, combining both love and hate.

To sum up, Hamlet's life was doomed with his identity crisis. His self-deny, self-abuse, self-aggression and self-confinement were all evidence that he might have guessed out who his biological father was. No one can choose his biological father, but we can choose what we want to be. As to Hamlet's identity, he had two choices: to be the son of the old king or to be the son of the new king. Hamlet was facing both an internal aggression (self-destruction) and an external aggression (destroying others: such as curses to his mother, abuse of Ophelia and an unsuccessful assassination

of Claudius). Since Hamlet's meeting with the ghost, death instinct was haunted around the rest of his life, which made him anxious and restless.

Chapter Three: Hamlet's "To Be or Not to Be" under Freud's Theory of Life Instinct and Death Instinct

To be or not to be in Scene I, Act III, is the most contradictory proposition that Hamlet met. If Hamlet was the son of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, then what kind of person he wanted to be?

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? (ibid: 134)

It is very interesting that Shakespeare just stopped at "to be" without any further illusion. What should be next to "to be"? To be the son of the king or to be the son of the new king? To be loyal to his promise to the ghost or to be loyal to his words with his mother, Gertrude? To be alive as the prince of Denmark or not to be alive as the prince of Denmark? To be conscious to the murder of the old king or not to be? To be prepared to be the future king under the lead of King Claudius or not to be? To be a person alive with shame or not to be? To be a dead person with honor or not to be? To be aware of the future of Denmark or not to be? ... There are too many confusions like this need to be settled. In short, "to be or not to be"

represented that Hamlet was questioning his own identity.

Why “to be or not to be” is “a question,” not “a problem”? “A question” is to be answered, while “a problem” is to be settled. With the quick remarriage of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, it was not more than two months than the old king died. Since this marriage, Hamlet was in an embarrassed situation, with his identity questioned. Therefore, the question came to “did Hamlet want to be the son of Claudius?” or “what kind of person Hamlet would want to be?” The decision certainly would change Hamlet’s future life. In short, to be or not to be represented that Hamlet was considering how to choose his own identity by finding a way out.

Why “to be or not to be”, instead of “to do or not to do”? “To be or not to be” is much more of an inner struggle, while “to do or not to do” is much of an external struggle. The former is the first step, the base, while the latter is the action, the results.

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 wish'd.

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; (ibid: 134)

Hamlet took “to die” as “to sleep” represents that in his mind, “to be” is a life existence to avoid death while “not to be” is a fear towards death. In other words, Hamlet’s first choice was not to live, but to commit suicide, which was a severe self-destruction in the theory of death instinct. Life instinct provides the energy to urge our id (id, ego, superego forms the structure of the mind according to Freud) to strive for the satisfaction of desire, while this peaceful death instinct represents Hamlet’s self-destruction was breaking out under a great burst pressure --- identity crisis. In short, “to be or not to be” was defined as “to die or not to die” when Hamlet was facing an intensive sickness for life and a longing for death. By linking “to die” with “to sleep”, this obsession towards death came from his unclear identity that pushed him to throw all his inner conflicts to achieve a peace in mind.

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

The 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 the 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 undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
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 pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (ibid: 134 - 136)*

This part represents his embarrassed situation because of his identity crisis: he was not dead, but he could not live full, either. At last, death became not only a negotiation to his family collapse, but also a solution to end his suffering in this conflict. "To be or not to be" emphasized on the consciousness and unconsciousness of "being" with all these internal and external troubles. He disgusted at the external injustice, but he was incapable at correcting everything fully as a human "being". It is a great struggle of his life instinct and death instinct.

One the one hand, "to be or not to be" is a symbol of his family's downfall, with his choice of whether he would disclose this angry and ugly

murder to all the people in Denmark. To be a prince alive but act as a dead person to be royal to his mother? Or to take the revenge to safeguard his honor as a man of integrity to keep his promise with his dead father? Hamlet was wondering for a long time. In short, Hamlet himself was a complexity of both life instinct and death instinct.

On the other hand, “To be or not to be” is also a symbol of his struggle of the suppressed id and the superego. Hamlet might be the son of Claudius, which made his suppressed id suffering, while Hamlet wanted to be the son of the old king, which was his idealized ego. Hamlet made great efforts to self-guard his indignity and personality. After the meeting with the ghost, Hamlet began a life struggling between his suppressed id and his superego.

To sum up, life and death are an everlasting topic to everyone. No one can escape from this most beautiful and most cruel reality. “To be or not to be? That is the question.” Here “to be” represents the life instinct while “not to be” represents the death instinct. It is a creative idea to study “to be or not to be” in *Hamlet* from Freud’s life instinct and death. With the destruction of Hamlet’s inner world, he wanted to die, to sleep, instead of to live. With the destruction of Hamlet’s outer world (revenge towards Claudius), Hamlet decided to bear the pain of his identity crisis and be conscious to do something great. Both life instinct and death instinct intertwined with each other in Hamlet’s struggle for the morality of dignity and autonomy.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In this essay, we proposed a creative idea that Hamlet might be the son of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. Then we got a reasonable story: Claudius was one of the most important courtiers in Denmark who helped to run the country in the palace, and Claudius and Queen Gertrude might have a certain kind of relationship during it while the old king was fighting in wars against countries, such as Norway and Poland. When the old king went back with victories, Claudius was suddenly told his disgraceful relationship with Queen Gertrude would be revealed to the old king, so he got a deadly poison to end the old king's life without a careful plan. Queen Gertrude might know the truth, but she had more motivation to live in herself, then she quickly remarried to Claudius to safeguard her statue which gave Hamlet an embarrassed situation: to be or not to be. This identity crisis not only makes Hamlet's isolation in his own world, for no one in Denmark would help him in overthrowing King Claudius' rule, but also makes Hamlet's desperate destruction both in himself and in taking revenge for the murder of the old king.

This essay digs clues hidden in the *Hamlet* on a bold hypothesis that King Claudius might be Hamlet's biological father. This was the most overwhelming obstacles in Hamlet's identity crisis. His famous monology "to be and not to be" represents his hesitation and inaction towards life and death. From the first ghost story of the dead king to the manslaughter of

Polonius, from the funeral of Ophelia to the death of Hamlet, from an assassination towards Claudius to the kill of Claudius, the theme of life and death broods over the whole play. Therefore, Freud's theory of life instinct and death instinct was suitable to be applied to analyze Hamlet's struggle in taking the revenge from his identity crisis. To destroy all including himself and to give Denmark a rebirth may be Hamlet's answer to "to be and not to be". Life is not so easy, and death is never so hard. Hamlet's tragedy comes from his struggle between his suppressed id and his superego because of his identity crisis.

All in all, based on the hypothesis that King Claudius might be Hamlet's biological father, Hamlet was facing a fierce internal and external conflicts. "To be or not to be" illustrates not only Hamlet's disgust at the external injustice, but also his inaction in fully displaying himself as a human "being". It is a great struggle of his life instinct and death instinct.

Notes:

- ① Queen Gertrude, aged 45 or more, may be even described as an old woman, if we consider *Hamlet* stems from a story of Denmark in the 12th century. At that time, people's average life span was comparatively much shorter than that of today.
- ② It is ridiculous that the dead king had no name to address as a person, instead of as a king. Someone may address him as old Hamlet, but hamlet is a word meaning a small village, which represents a quiet and peaceful

life which is certainly not suitable for an ambitious king as him. Then what was wrong? Who gave Hamlet such a name? What was the true name of the old king? And most important of all, why did the old king's name was concealed as a taboo in the play of *Hamlet* after his death? Was the murder of him an individual act or a collective decision?

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