

## Hamlet's Calibans as Shakespeare's Politic Barbarians: A Theoretical Portrait of a Colonizer

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### Abstract

This paper proposes to read *Hamlet* as a text with post-colonial subtext and its hero as a prototype of colonizer. As demonstrated in the textual analysis, the potent symbol of “hot blood” and the image of barbarism it entails is the subject. What I’m dealing with here is Marxian materialistic motif embedded in a colonial wish—through an intense study on the sociological poetics of that barbarian image, the hero, I argue, can be seen to embody the social being who relies on the sociality of the marvelous to determine consciousness, not the other way around. This paper does not see colonizer as being sinful, but rather man as being problematic, i.e., when man becomes colonizer, he becomes problematic by default. The issue presented here is therefore to correctly interpret the colonizer’s cognitive method in their capitalistic colonial venture.

A homological study of Greenblatt, Kristeva, and texts of *Hamlet* shows that the concept of barbarism could be easily, and probably necessarily, appropriated by the colonizer in the act of colonizing. Kristeva warns that we tend to alienate the foreigners and see them as strangers, barbarians, and enemies. Though we detest and hate them, the barbaric foreigners, who usually live out of meaningful political context, are the Other in ourselves, because it is them that awaken the dormant possibility of the existence of otherness. On the other hand, Greenblatt’s materialistic theory of colonialism calls our attention to a new level of dialectical relationship between Self and Other. Through the power of imagination, particularly “the colonizing of the marvelous,” the colonizer graphically represents the barbarity of the strangers, and creates categories for the benefit of inventory and learning, and finally achieves the goal of “possession.”

As could be inferred from his many philippic tirades, Hamlet is the materialistic man who thinks, speaks and acts like he is superior to other people while engaging in his revenge business. Hamlet insists on looking at everyman and everything with merciless excoriation and even compound the idea of the Self with materialistic thought of barbarism of epical proportions. Alienation seems to bury deep in his soul, waiting to hatch a new Other which will in turn breed a more authentic Self. This paper attempts to show how Hamlet barbarizes the Elsinoreans including kings, subjects, courtiers, friends, family, and the second sex, his mother and girl friend. He even barbarizes himself to purchase persuasion. With his ghost father, he seems blind-folded, since as an intellectual, he seems to hold no grudge against his monarchical-patriarchal image; but with the fatherly surrogate, Claudius, he seems to come back too soon to the identity of the traveler-colonizer, who with moral and religious prejudice seems to take a dim view of the welfare of the community. In sum, with all the rest of the key Elsinoreans and probably to his audience, he assumes the role of the nihilistic civilized Christian humanist individual; to us centuries later and far away, he may look like a civilized hero of high profile, but unfortunately also a Western capitalist colonizer deeply and finely versed in hegemonic manipulation.

**Key words:** Post-colonialism, Hamlet, Caliban, marvelous, Marxism, travel discourse

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## 殖民者畫像的理論辯證： 從哈姆雷特的卡利班們到莎士比亞的野蠻政治學

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### 摘要

本文認為莎翁名劇《哈姆雷特》在某種程度上可以用馬克思後殖民主義次文本概念加以詮釋，並可以將其所刻畫的主人翁看成心境複雜的殖民者雛形。我處理的是殖民思維中的唯物母題——我認為哈姆雷特一角體現一個社會現象：意識不決定人的存有，人依賴驚異的社會現象來決定意識。也就是說，不只人的社會生活，從野蠻的社會學中，我們也發現，是社會存有決定人的意識，意識無法決定人的存有。本文不認為殖民者有什麼原罪，卻主張人本身是有問題的——某種程度上是本惡的，尤其是成為殖民者時，他自自然然地便產生問題。這兒，我要討論的議題是如何正確地詮釋殖民者在其資本殖民旅行冒險過程中所展現出來的認知方法。

Greenblatt、Kristeva 以及和哈劇相關論述均說明，野蠻的概念很容易被殖民者濫用。Kristeva 警告，外國人常被異化，被視為陌生人、野蠻人甚至敵人——我們討厭他們，恨他們，但是這些在社群中不產生任何廣泛政治意義的「野蠻」外國人其實是我們心中的他者，因為他們提醒我們，「他者」的確存在。Greenblatt 的後殖民唯物理論則提醒，「自我」與「他者」之間存在全新層次的辯證關係。想像力量大，尤其是「將驚異概念加以殖民」的想像尤其巨大，透過野蠻的社會學中的驚異概念，殖民者生動地再現陌生人的野性，並且製作目錄加以保存、取用、學習，最後達成「擁有」的文化資本累積目的。

莎翁的哈姆雷特一角性好攻擊、話多義長，某種程度上，深刻而廣泛的體現唯物思想本質，因此在前現代文學中，頗具代表性。不管是想的，說的，還是做的，即便是從事復仇（與殖民無關），他總是咄咄逼人，好像高人一等。觀察事情也好，與人相處也罷，他不但書空咄咄，更喜以史詩式的野蠻概念物化自我。其人言辭令人激賞，卻常有殖民者野蠻化別人、異化他者的深重嫌疑。筆者認為，異化深埋其人靈魂，等待時機孵化新的他者，以讓此他者轉而育成較為可信的自我。故本文細細論述他如何將 Elsinore 所有的人野蠻化，包括其國王、大臣、賓客、朋友、家人等，母親和女友等女性亦無一倖免。最後他還不忘凝視自己，將自我帶進無止無盡的野蠻國度，讓自我與他者進行無窮無盡的唯物辯證，其目的其實只是為了定位自我。總之，這個知識份子雖然擁有令人無比訝異甚至心嚮往之的巨大靈魂，但亦有許多盲點：一方面對父親言辭中昭昭然之父權意識，他不發一言；另一方面，看父親的代理人，即 Claudius，他卻一貫地迅速回到殖民旅人的身份，無論是道德上，還是宗教上，都充滿偏見。尤有甚者，我們發現，他嚴重忽略普羅大眾之階級利益，起碼，他的長篇獨白從不紆尊降貴，為社會底層喉舌。簡言之，此一悲劇人物或許能扮演倍極虛無的文明人，或輪廓深刻、懂得自省的英雄；但對受過殖民之害的讀者，他則可能提供一個擅長文化霸權操作的殖民者畫像。

**關鍵字：**後殖民主義、哈姆雷特、卡利班、驚異、馬克思主義、政治社會、旅行論述

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## I. Introduction

'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,  
And do such bitter business as the day  
Would quake to look on. (*Hamlet* 3.3.379-83)

This is a story about a curious and contagious feature of human vice, and its origin is materialistic—an expression of a wish that hides away its colonial subtext. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern just informed Hamlet that the King was “marvelously distempered” by the play he has helped produce (3.2.293). After these two school fellows left, Hamlet delivers his fifth soliloquy (3.2.379-90), acknowledging that revenge demands drinking “hot blood” (3.2.381). The potent symbol of “hot blood” and all that contagious and marvelous/wonderful image of barbarism entails is the subject of this paper.

Although the process of resistance was there, I am willing to situate this paper in relation to postcolonial discourse because it does discuss a certain crime the colonizers commit in history—treating the Other as “marvelous” alien and labeling its human possibility as barbarism. But it should be thought so with reservation, for what I’m dealing with here is Marxian materialistic motif—Marx used to say that our consciousness cannot determine our being; on the contrary, it is our *social* being that determines our consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Colonial act has never been a crime, and in history human sufferings were never only caused by events of colonizing. Therefore, to blame the colonizers in the name of colonizing seems to be a misnomer, for it is, after all, an economic production and a capitalistic enterprise. For survival and subsistence, the crime mankind commit can be a great deal more than just exploitation. Colonizing is a de facto survival skill of production and exchange developed through the history of labor and therefore must be acknowledged as a part of Marxian materialistic history. This paper does not see colonizer as being sinful, but rather man as being problematic, i.e., when man becomes colonizer, he becomes problematic by default.

The issue is not that colonizers often barbarize the peoples whose concept of capital, modes of production, and technology of consumption and exchange are historically different. The issue is to correctly interpret the colonizer’s cognitive method in their capitalistic venture. This paper is different from most of Hamlet criticism in that I propose to read *Hamlet* as a text with post-colonial subtext possibilities—to some extent, all English texts after the Enlightenment Movement should be read in this way. A homological study of Greenblatt, Kristeva, and texts about *Hamlet* shows that the concept of barbarism could be easily, and probably necessarily, appropriated by the colonizers in the act of colonizing. Used to characterize human vice, barbarity seems less problematic than other human crimes, say, genocide. But many literary texts yield evidence that when the colonized are labeled with the features of “barbarian” or “savage”—witness the image of the Irish natives in the hand of Edmund Spenser—the colonizers can then wield their

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<sup>1</sup> In “Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*,” Marx writes: “In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (McLellan 390-91).

moral and sometimes religious weapons without being disturbed by guilty conscience.<sup>2</sup> When this phenomenon happens, colonizing act is no longer an economic act; it turns culture into capital and texts into weapons of conquer.

Kristeva believes that we tend to alienate the foreigners and see them as strangers, barbarians, and enemies. Even though we detest and hate them, the barbaric foreigners, who usually live out of meaningful political context, are the Other in ourselves, because it is them that awaken the dormant possibility of the existence of otherness. Therefore, possibilities between them and us fail: “the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder” (1). To think in postcolonial terms, this means that when the colonized are redefined as barbarians, the colonizers begin to have a job of alienation cut out for them. The process of redefinition usually accumulates cultural capital and paves the way for full-fledged invasive cultural investment and capitalistic exploitation. The purpose of alienating the foreigners, the strangers, the barbarians—the Other, is to deny its homological relationship with the Self.

Like in his other renowned discourse on New Historicism, Greenblatt’s materialistic theory of colonialism calls our attention to a new level of dialectical relationship between Self and Other. His logic is like this: Through the colonized, the colonizers have a better chance to know themselves. This is because he is an observer, discoverer, to-be-conqueror, and the last victor. In colonizing act, mimetic practice was an advanced cultural technology the colonized not yet developed, and its agent, literary text, serves as the cultural capital of the colonizer. Through manipulation of “wonder” phenomena<sup>3</sup> and the power of imagination utilized as political strategy— particularly “the colonizing of the marvelous” (*Marvelous Possessions* 24-5),<sup>4</sup> he graphically represented the barbarity of the strangers, and created categories for the benefit of inventory and learning, and finally achieved the goal of “possession” by which, I think, he means us to relate to the concept of “private property” as expounded in Marx in his *Communist Manifesto*.<sup>5</sup> For the colonizer, the dialectical relationship between Self and Other proceeds in this way: He discovered that in order to understand the colonized, he must repeatedly depend on difference for recognition, and to represent the latter’s fantastic feature he must resort to the language of the marvelous.

I probably should first explain the ramifications of the Calibanian image implicated

<sup>2</sup> For the image of Spenser’s Wild Man, also see *The Faerie Queene* 4.7.5.

It was to weet a wilde and saluage man,  
Yet was no man, but onely like in shape,  
And eke in stature higher by a span,  
All ouergrowne with haire, that could awhape  
An hardy hart, and his wide mouth did gape  
With huge great teeth, like to a tusked Bore:  
For he liu’d all on rauin and on rape  
Of men and beasts; and fed on fleshly gore,  
The signe whereof yet stain’d his bloody lips afore.

<sup>3</sup> Cunningham believes that “Wonder is a function of pity and fear” (64). “Wonder in Shakespeare is the effect of tragic incident and tragic style, as well as of the marvelous turn in events. But this does not exhaust the complexity of the notion of wonder; one more strand at least remains to be unraveled. For the notion derives not only from the tradition of literary criticism, as the proper effect of marvelous events, and the tradition of rhetoric, as the proper effect of marvelous eloquence, but it derives also from the tradition of philosophy, in which wonder is the primary cause of learning” (94).

<sup>4</sup> Marvelous as the colonizer’s cultural capital is defined by Greenblatt as thus: “The marvelous is a central feature...in the whole complex system of representation, verbal and visual, philosophical and aesthetic, intellectual and emotional, through which people in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance apprehended” (*Marvelous Possessions* 22).

<sup>5</sup> Marx writes: “Capitalists increase accumulated labor in order to gain their own private properties” (26).

in the title of this paper. According to Frank Kermode, Caliban is the “core” and “ground” of *The Tempest* (qtd. in Jenkins 1982: xxiv-xxv). He “represents nature without benefit of nature,” and is able to stain “a divine beauty with the crimes of ambition and lust” (xxi-xxv). He is “a representative Indian [of America]” (xxxiii), and is bestial, ugly, unruly, unnatural, and in a word, graceless, an absolute embodiment of human evil (xlii). Drawing from this image, this paper argues how the spectacular plenum of the Elsinoreans serve as Hamlet's Calibans to erect our hero as a man “full of purpose” (Coleridge 436).

“Politic” is another significant concept that may be in need of clarification. Many of Shakespeare's characters are “politic worms” (4.3.20), originally used, ironically, by our hero to satirize Polonius's breed of mankind who bear two essential features: “Politic,” referring, positively, to “sagacious, prudent, shrewd,” and “civic, civil, and political” people (qtd. from OED); “worm,” referring, negatively, to humanity's insignificant, worthless, dust-like nature only functioning to recycle life and death. The definition of “politic” weighs what is socially public against what is socially private, while that of “worm” denotes a Pythagorean philosophy of life—bestial life. In *Hamlet*, it is this type of politic worms the hero is set to struggle with, and the result is nothing but disastrous, at least in human terms. To Hamlet, all Elsinoreans are politic worms—himself no exception, living on other people's flesh (4.3.16-25). They belong to a new breed of the Calibans, falling into barbarism along the trajectory of the social life in which pre-bourgeois ideological practices were for the first time rampant in an unprecedented capitalistic urban culture which was, we can rest assured, London.

We can see Hamlet's sociopolitical self working from the new identity of a traveler he assumes after he returns to Elsinore from Wittenberg of Germany. From a postcolonial point of view, travelers or colonizers often assume a special human relationship, a social and political authority almost, with the natives of the place (or the people who never really travels far) they first set foot on or just return to, and from their horizon the natives often seem backward, ignorant, or barbaric (Brotton 1998: 28-9). This situation happens when Prospero, representing exactly that, is exiled to Caliban's island. Prospero's colonial situation has no doubt been subject to heated debates,<sup>6</sup> but what critics haven't discussed enough, though, is that a similar though arguably less obvious situation also happens to Hamlet when he returns to Elsinore, which, according to our authoritative hero, is “a prison” (2.2.243), whose people belong to “Nature's livery,” i.e., who are primitives (1.4.32).

Hamlet is characterized by his inclination to judge people around him through morality. As one critic says, “In every encounter he has with the faction of the court, his often brutal treatment of them stems from the passionate conviction he has in the moral assessment he has made of them” (McElroy 1973: 39). In the beginning, a phenomenon is already haunting our communal sense: Many of Hamlet's actions, speeches, and colloquies dealing not only with the Court but also with his estranged family show that our hero comes back from Wittenberg, a city famous for the dawn of Protestant Reformation and famed for disputational skills, to a world which used to be his home polis.<sup>7</sup> This place appears estranged, uncivilized, and I may add—barbarous to him.

<sup>6</sup> Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, in *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, citing Hayden White to provide a portrait of the wild-man image of Caliban, report that “[f]rom biblical times to the present, the notion of the Wild Man was associated with the idea of the wilderness—the desert, forest, jungle, and mountains—those parts of the physical world that had not yet been domesticated or marked out for domestication in any significant way” (62).

<sup>7</sup> The fact that Hamlet returns home from Wittenberg looks less like a coincidence than an argument for the true spirit of Puritanism—which Shakespeare repeatedly mocks at in his works, cf., Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Jacques in *As You Like It*. For puritanical emphasis on work and resistance of pleasure, cf. Max

Elsinore has become toweringly mysterious and riddling, so much so that different factions of the Court begin to terrorize him as the repressed that has returned. On top of the visitation of the ghost, what appears even more estranged is where he and Horatio pose as foreign travelers observing the drinking customs of the local inhabitants. This is the people of his native country, the “distracted multitude” (4.3.4) who, according to Claudius, adore him “like the spring that turneth wood to stone, / Convert[ing] his gyves to graces” (4.7.19-21), i.e., whatever he does is right. Yet Hamlet here, though thoughtful and sympathetic, accuses them of tainting the name of Denmark.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, there is an initial distance between the observer and the observed. The London audience could not miss the irony of the place: The more Hamlet appears to be foreign to the drinking habit, the “vicious mole” of the Elsinoreans, the more absurd he looks on stage:

But to my mind, though I am native here

And to the manner born, it is a custom

More honour'd in the breach than the observance. (1.4.14-6)

Hamlet is saying that a small defect in the custom—drinking and reveling—has tainted the whole virtuous and noble Elsinoreans because it lances at the blood and manners. But this phenomenon is still inchoate. As the story continues to unfold and the language of the marvelous develops, we observe that it gradually looms large to cover most of the people Hamlet is galvanized to make sense with.

## II. Hamlet's Barbarous Courtiers

### (1) Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Two of the most salient figures involved in Hamlet's wonderful and marvelous quasi-foreign expedition of sociopolitical identity is this twin courtiers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern onto whom Hamlet projects the characters that he believes to come from a custom “More honour'd in the breach than the observance.” As Levin has remarked, “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not really bad fellows” (29), we do not necessarily see these two fellows like Hamlet, but it is true that Hamlet never gives them their fair share as fellow being. He is more willing to treat them as barbarians. In many of Hamlet's “verbalistic combat” (Levin 1959: 39) with them, he never allows them to get the upper hand, though they are “brought up with” Hamlet (2.2.11), as Claudius points out, and “two men there are not living / To whom he more adheres,” according to Gertrude (2.2.20-1). This is actually the playwright's loophole, for they are arranged as buffoons, and they feed our hero with stage lines, rendering him a true human being at the expense of them, as if the school fellows were uncivilized—the essential feature of a barbarian. For example, in their first spying assignment, Hamlet gets to explain—with majestic language—the reason why he has lost interest and faith in life. “What piece of work is a man” is a rhetorical question, meaning that man doesn't measure up to the sacred motive with which he is created. The undertone seems to directly point at the barbarous listeners—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In 3.1, when the King complains of how “The terms of our estate may not endure / Hazard so near as doth hourly grow / Out of his

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Weber's comment on the Protestant origin of the capitalistic spirit in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930): “The real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life. In fact, it is only because possession involves this danger of relation that it is objectionable at all. For the saints' everlasting rest is in the next world; on earth man must, to be certain of his state of grace, ‘do the works of him who sent him, as long as it is yet day. Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God, according to the definite manifestations of His will’ (157).

<sup>8</sup> Jenkins points out that Horatio is also a Dane, but he speaks as if he is not familiar with the custom.

brows" (3.3.4-6), they understandably respond by broaching the political theory that "Never alone / Did the king sigh, but with a general groan" (3.3.22-3). But Hamlet develops a "sponge" theory against them. He says that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sponge

that soaks up the king's countenance, his  
rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the  
king best service in the end: he keeps them, like  
an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to  
be last swallowed: when he needs what you have  
gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you  
shall be dry again. (4.2.11-20)

Better metaphor cannot be found to describe Shakespeare's barbarous courtier, for here we find a shred of truth about life in the court whose representatives these two courtiers serve. Hamlet has called them "adders fanged" (3.4.205), and now he sees one more animalistic image in them: an ape, which yields the image of the hegemonic ruler's sycophant. In appearance, it seems that Hamlet is accusing the master, but in reality his distaste lies in the baseness and slavishness of the slave. Hamlet obviously hates the image of the slave, but to see the whole weight of it burdened on his schoolfellows is not what we expected. This is why at the ending macabre when the ambassador from England enters the stage to report that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead" (5.2.376) we do not feel a thing except irony, for before this final event they were already labeled. As the story unfolds, we find that Hamlet should be the one who knows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern better than any other characters in the play, because the phenomenon of sponge will also take its toll on him: He himself will have to be seen as a barbarous courtier.

## (2) Osric

Though only a small part, Osric is another wonderful courtier occupying a very significant place in our library of Calibans, because without him we wouldn't be sure how much the Elsinoreans corrupt humanity and what kind of moral standards Hamlet demands from them (2.2.359-62; 3.4.155-6; 5.1.135-8). In a time when the entire society affects finical manners, Osric represents the worst of those middlemen who feed on the society, who depend their sociopolitical life on trading with others in the court, such courtiers as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. To Hamlet, Osric is the best example of the politic barbarians who are always convening to profit themselves. This is why he makes this sarcastic comment on Polonius' death: "a certain / convocation of politic worms are e'en at him." The following is Hamlet's evaluation of Osric:

A did comply with his dug before he sucked it. Thus  
has he—and many more of the same bevy that I  
know the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of  
the time and, out of an habit of encounter, a kind of  
yeasty collection, which carries them through and  
through the most fanned and winnowed opinions; and do  
but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out. (5.2.184-91)

Elsinoreans like Osric would curtsy to their mother before they profit from her nursing. Fashion and frivolity indulge them in platitudes and small talk, and trendy vocabulary enables them to hold their own with the politicians they are negotiating with. Lived experiences are not their strong suit, so put them to real social conflicts, and we would find them break their bubbles. This reminds us of Hamlet's criticism of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as the king's "sponge." To Hamlet, a courtier shall so behave to please the

king, and to please the king means to be a sponge, to bow before he robs of his victims, to use the froth of fashionable clichés, disregarding the “fanned and winnowed opinions.” Compared with the judgment Osric gets from Hamlet, Ophelia, even though paying the price of love and vanity with her death, actually receives fairly good treatment from Hamlet.

### (3) Laertes

Just as what he speaks to Horatio of Laertes, “to know a man well, were to / know himself” (5.2.137-8), Hamlet creates the image of his “foil” Laertes from the inmost part of his politic soul. Laertes appears rather early in the play giving advice to Ophelia (1.2) and then disappears till he leads an angry mob storming to the court of Elsinore demanding answers to his father’s brutal death (4.4). When we first see him as a student pleading to the King for continued study in Paris (1.2), he, like Hamlet, still carries the image of a young and impetuous student. And when he reveals his belief that his sister’s young love is one of passion and should not be taken too seriously because Hamlet’s body belongs to the state, i.e., his body is not his in the body politic, we see a budding young politician. His father’s action of sending his man Reynaldo to spy on him in Paris comes as a bit of an illogical surprise (2.1), but we are also made aware of the contrast he serves to Hamlet’s agonizing and embarrassing loss of both parents. When he reappears in 4.5, driven by revenge, he is seen to be doped by the King into conspiring an unfair fencing match with Hamlet. All in all, according to our infamous Osric, he is a model of gentleness, “absolute gentleman, full of most excellent / differences, of very soft society and great showing,” “the card or calendar of gentry,” and “the continent of what part a gentleman would see” (5.2.107-11). This is indeed a fairly positive assessment of a Renaissance young man. Twice in the play, our royal Hamlet treats him with respect, if a little condescendingly, one in Ophelia’s funeral, the other when the duel is about to start. But as audience we know that Hamlet is just paying lip service because the playwright makes sure that before the funeral scene we have already got Laertes’s young and impetuous politic image in mind. Ophelia, who obviously has been wont to receive his advice, can tease him like this:

But, good my brother,  
Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,  
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven;  
Whiles, like a puff’d and reckless libertine,  
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,  
And recks not his own rede. (1.3.46-51)

Though good at adapting to the fanfares in the court, Laertes is known for his frivolous life style, at least in his family. And as allowed by his father, Laertes can go with “drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling, drabbing” (2.1.25-6). Obviously, there is a rupture between the image of the respectable and the frivolous Laertes—one seeking to protect family honor, the other a young man of the senses, and it seems that Hamlet is already aware of it when he openly expresses apology to Laertes on Ophelia’s graveside. This is why when Laertes accuses Hamlet of evil-doing: “cursed head / Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense / Deprived thee of” (5.1.240-2), Hamlet can respond with a serene understatement:

What is he whose grief  
Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow  
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand  
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,  
Hamlet the Dane. (5.1.247-51)

Pointing out how wounded himself is, he means to treat Laertes as his equal. But later when situation worsens into violence, Hamlet loses it. It seems curious why Hamlet takes such a dim view of Laertes—himself having always complained that the time is out of joint, and cursed is the spirit that gave him life to set it right. Considering the fact that it is he who has brutally, though accidentally, killed Polonius, we feel that the following derogative judgment is unfounded:

'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do:  
Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?  
Woo't drink up eisel? eat a crocodile?  
I'll do't. (5.1.269-73)

Besides all the complex philosophical depth in the soliloquies he has previously delivered, this is also typical of Hamlet, passionate and impetuous with diatribes: All in all, Hamlet fails to do Laertes justice.

### III. Hamlet's Barbarous Kings and Their Subjects

#### (1) Claudius

Though of all the symbolic Calibans Claudius is probably the only evil one the young Hamlet does not derive from imagination, his complete stage history shows that he can be misconstrued, both thematically and aesthetically. Whether intended or not, Claudius yields a picture of a sociopolitical figure who is "convincing, genial, magnanimous, clearly adroit in managing councils of state" (Barker 1984: 158). Thus his life and death appear less Caliban-like than our eponymous hero wills him to be. As true antagonists in the game of honor, they are treated as equals though Claudius has always been more pregnant politic barbarian. This probably derives from the fact that Claudius is a surrogate of what Hamlet wishes but refuses to be—a real king. This king does exhibit his kingly magnificence. In their separate struggle toward the path of a less corrupt state that is Denmark, only in the scene where Claudius wants Hamlet to tell the whereabouts of Polonius' corpse does he ever use harsh language against Hamlet (4.3).

Our first impression with Claudius comes from the Ghost's vituperation (1.5.42-91), wherein the object of our hero's revulsion is described as "incestuous" and "adulterate beast:"

With witchcraft of his wit, 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. (1.5.42-6)

The Ghost's accusation that the new King used witchcraft to seduce the Queen leaves doubt in the audience's mind, although right after that Hamlet's action more agrees than disagrees with this accusation. However, since this is the Ghost's words against Hamlet's, it stands to reason that we do not believe yet. Indeed, Claudius is not all murderer since in many occasions he does act like the head of the body politic. And against his guilt of regicide we do see Claudius more than once shows conscientious judgment. For example, his conscience is inadvertently jogged when Polonius gives instructions to Ophelia to spy on Hamlet by acting lonely (3.1.44-8). Alarmed and edged by this deceptive act of play, Claudius reveals moral dilemma:

O, 'tis too true!  
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!  
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,  
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it  
Than is my deed to my most painted word:



terms of the fruits of human civilization—reason: “Divided from herself and her fair judgment / Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts” (4.5.85-6). Compared to many of Shakespeare's more charming or more resolute villains such as Shylock, Macbeth, Othello, Malvolio, Caliban, to name just a few, his evilness seems relatively more elusive, and is susceptible to overestimation—particularly by Hamlet. In aesthetic and thematic terms, he is an inadequate opponent of Hamlet, given the large, philosophical structural burden the character of Hamlet takes on. When T. S. Eliot says that *Hamlet* is an artistic failure (179), I think he might as soon refer to the misdirected accusations of Claudius' evil nature. As a double of Hamlet, Claudius, like other characters, is supposed to broaden Hamlet's twin image of moral and political action and inaction but expectably fails, all because he is too early and too soon incriminated by Hamlet's conscience.

## (2) Fortinbras

Fortinbras is a minor character yet functioning very socio-politically in that he does not participate in the actions of the plot yet frames and thickens it more than any other characters in the play. He is, as it were, to this play what Caesar is to the overarching tone of *Julius Caesar*. If the Ghost, good or evil, symbolizes the distress that afflicts the conscience of the nation, then Fortinbras embodies the ruthless institution designed to redress it, albeit a bit ironically. When we first hear of him, he is only a radical politician of the enemy (1.2). Then with the development of the plot he grows and becomes a military activist, against which Hamlet's ineptitude is marked out (2.2). Later, marching through Danish territory with twenty thousand soldiers, he rapidly dominates the political atmosphere of the play. It is here Hamlet calls up the image of the beast:

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more. (4.4.32-5)

Thinking of beast serves twofold function—it may be Hamlet himself, but it may also be his opponent, and in the latter case all men and women in the mysterious and riddling world are equally bestial. Here, in his last monologue, our hero re-examines the meaning of worldly success by meditating on his opponent's quick military response to the adversary's territorial challenge. Fortinbras, according to his mind's eye, can dare danger and have thousands of his soldiers die “even for an egg-shell” (4.4.53). Does this mean that one must learn to quibble over such trifles as a small piece of land?

Rightly to be great  
Is not to stir without great argument,  
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw  
When honour's at the stake. (4.4.53-6)

The answer can be found from his earlier comment on mankind as “the paragon of animals”—what makes man a piece of work is “honor,” but to Hamlet the substance of honor is in need of “reform,” like the actors' playacting in the *Mousetrap*. Fortinbras's concept of honor is problematic because moral equilibrium is not delicately measured to balance social reality. Thus Fortinbras is moral embarrassment and his action legitimizes Hamlet's inaction.

## (3) Polonius

Polonius probably demonstrates a profound implication of Hamlet's Calibans better than any other characters. In the closet scene, Hamlet's initial brutal mockery at the body of Polonius “Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool” (3.4.31) and the ending merciless

excoriation that “This counselor / Is now most still, most secret and most grave, / Who was in life a foolish prating knave” is not enough to describe who Polonius is (3.4.215-7). He may be both secret and grave, and in several occasions prating to not only Hamlet, but also his own daughter, son, and even to the King and Queen (2.2.95ff). But he is surely not such a bad person as deserves brutal death. Except underestimating Hamlet’s intransitive soul,<sup>9</sup> bullying his daughter, spying on his son, he has done nothing except serving his King. His is everyman’s life, untimely stalled by murder, though Horatio euphemizes it as one of “accidental judgments” (5.2.387). To name a few things that do not advance Hamlet’s legendary life of high “moral sensibility” (Bradley 103), Polonius is the father of his lover Ophelia, a fact that seems to slip through Hamlet’s moral dilemma and the playwright’s dramatic art. Moreover, on Ophelia’s graveside, Hamlet doesn’t sound like he is offering heartfelt apology to Laertes when he has the opportunity. And in the fishmonger scene, he suffers too much to help Hamlet build up his image of a witty prince:

POLO. Do you know me, my lord?

HAM. Excellent well; you are a fishmonger. (2.2.173-4)

In the film directed by Kenneth Branagh (1996), Polonius was changed from a “tedious old fool” in Laurence Olivier’s 1948 film to a more somber subject of the King. I think the reason is that Branagh has seen Olivier film’s representational problem. History of criticism obviously bears too much burden against which Hamlet has shaken off his own buffoonery at the stake of Polonius. When concluding that Polonius belongs to one of the “tedious old fools” in the books which write nothing except “words, words, words,” Hamlet, it seems, reads too much reality into his ideological imagination, just like the attitude he shows in the weasel dialogue with Polonius, appearing a little after the performance of the Mousetrap in 3.2. Hamlet’s interpretation of this event is lopsided as usual: He becomes too intellectual for Polonius. No wonder Branagh, against Olivier, felt that he must follow Hamlet’s footsteps and “reform it altogether” (3.2.37). On the whole, the death of Polonius serves to enlighten our perception of Shakespeare’s politic barbarians in that the mock rite of Eucharist is given and received among all major Elsinoreans, Hamlet included:

CLAU. Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

HAM. At supper.

CLAU. At supper! where?

HAM. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms are e’en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that’s the end. (4.3.16-25)

Transformed from Eucharistic cycle, ironically, the rite commemorating the earthly,

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<sup>9</sup> Margreta de Grazia, with R. A. Foakes (44), claims that before the 1800s, *Hamlet* had been sometimes curiously deemed “barbaric,” but in the past two centuries it has been quite consistently read in light of a “modern Hamlet” bespeaking an agonizing intransitive soul: “Genius, it would appear, is always in advance of history. Shakespeare was ahead of his time and history took centuries to catch up. Only after the auroral advances of the Enlightenment was it possible to perceive the phenomenon of Hamlet’s intransitive inwardness” (1). According to Francis Barker, this intransitive inwardness is “centred in means which are apparently its alone” (163). McGee seems to hate the idea that we may even enjoy Hamlet’s existential angst in his mental argument of spiritual and “political correctness” of revenge: “But we cannot therefore suppose that the Elizabethan audience would have reacted similarly—that they also would have been perplexed by Hamlet’s attitude to revenge” (10-11).

dust-like nature of humanity here serves, not as a religious matter, but a symbol of a consumer society that gives Hamlet his distaste of life. It seems that the phenomenon of political barbarian derives not only from Hamlet's imagination, but also from his real social experience.

#### IV. Hamlet's Barbarous Sex

For Hamlet, women as a gender challenges all moral assumptions and thus constantly requires redefinition, and since the Elsinoreans are good at nothing except leveling all values and perverting amorous relations into incest, women should be defined as the barbarous gender and men's scapegoat to salvation. On the whole, love produces the most defining theme of the play not only because Gertrude and Ophelia are Hamlet's mother and girlfriend, but also because to the Elizabethans, love is more than love—it's also politics: For Queen Elizabeth's courtiers, "the use of an amorous vocabulary...express ambition and its vicissitudes" (Marotti 398).<sup>10</sup> This connection of love to one's socio-political reality is arguably why when we first see Hamlet soliloquizing, he curiously relates the meaning of his entire life to the opposite sex's moral behavior, specifically, to love. For Hamlet, the reality of life is revealed through "too too solid flesh" and if it were not for the canon, one would easily stop it. Such suicidal motif runs throughout the play, culminating in the hero's fourth soliloquy (3.1.56-87) and ultimate death.

When Hamlet in his first soliloquy (1.2.129-59) complains that the lived world is meaningless like an unweeded garden that "grows to seed," our curiosity about his embedding female gender morals in the meaning of life has already run rampant. It's baffling to see how meaninglessness of life can rise as a result of a mother's hasty and incestuous marriage. It seems that Hamlet's intransitive soul derives not from a single source of despair but from something way larger and deeper. His comparison of (1) his father to Hyperion and Hercules and (2) himself and Claudius to satyr does not make sense either, but his losing track of the time does deliver a message: He is close to breaking down. It seems easier to attribute this to religion-related despair rather than personal or a whole gender's fault. The fact is that he has a scathing contempt for his mother, whose hanging on to his father he glosses as the sin of gluttony: "she would hang on him, / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on" (1.2.43-45). A site of wonder in the play, women's barbarous nature is to blame for most of the unfortunate events in one's life. Under such pretext, he develops tremendous revulsion against the entire female gender. First, women are weak: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (1.2.146), and when women appear mournful, their tears are fake, "Like Niobe, all tears" (1.2.149), and women are worse than beast, living in a world without reason: "O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason, / Would have mourn'd longer" (1.2.150-1). In short, anticipating the advent of the Metaphysical movement, Hamlet's functional metaphors overstate the issue of woman's inconstancy which in turn leads to the metaphors of prison-wish and death-wish.<sup>11</sup> We admire our hero's extraordinary power of poetic imagination, but we cannot ignore the subtext through which the playwright works out his intent on social mobility. As Arthur Marotti says, love lyrics often served as a way of

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<sup>10</sup> See Arthur Marotti's "'Love Is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order." Marotti argues that Elizabethan poets were encouraged to use "an amorous vocabulary by her [the Queen's] courtiers to express ambition and its vicissitudes" (398). And "ambition and envy were thus translated into amorous 'hope' and 'jealousy,' the socially more acceptable terms" (399). In short, the language of love was a language of politics.

<sup>11</sup> Also see John Donne's "Go and catch a falling star."

metaphorizing the poets' "rivalry with social, economic, and political competitors" and "reflected courtly striving for the rewards available in hierarchical societies that functioned according to systems of patronage and that allowed...forms of social mobility" (398). No doubt, the language of love in the Renaissance could be used to express personal ambition.

### (1) Gertrude

It has been said that even Claudius is allowed what Gertrude is not—an interiority (Dillon 74). It's quite true, for Gertrude, essentially a gentle and caring mother, obviously does not deserve so much of her beloved son's diatribes, and the playwright never gives us a reason why the character of Gertrude should enjoy so much mystery.

In the first council scene (1.2), we have already had no reason to agree with Hamlet's annoying melancholy. Gertrude acts and speaks with motherly kindness. It is Hamlet—the boy, the man, the son, and, unfortunately, the prince—who cannot deal with the ordeals of social life. But we see a great deal of good family politics in Gertrude. When Claudius believes that there is something dangerous in Hamlet's transformation and so he "shall sift him" (2.2.58), Gertrude has attributed it to "[H]is father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage" (2.2.57). Though Gertrude tolerates Claudius and Polonius' plan to conduct "lawful espials" on Hamlet (3.1.31), this is understandable, because as a mother she wants to know what really has happened to his son. Gertrude, the woman who gave birth to our hero, is never really given an opportunity to explain her gender. In the Mousetrap, Hamlet dupes the player-queen to speak such an offensive speech:

The instances that second marriage move  
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love:  
A second time I kill my husband dead,  
When second husband kisses me in bed. (3.2.177-80)

With this, a caustic question is then directed at Gertrude: "Madam, how like you this play?" Her reply is styled with a soft understatement: "The lady protests too much, methinks" (3.2.224-25)—she is only saying that the player-queen reveals too much of her heart, a very indirect displeasure. Hamlet knows how hurtful this speech is, but he insists on pursuing this issue in public. Claudius notices this, and cautions Hamlet that there should not be any more offensive details. Hamlet replies with a lie, saying "they do but jest, poison in jest; no offence / i' the world" (3.2.229-30). The decision is made: Gertrude's second marriage is a transgression of gender ethics, and the son will expose her weakness right there and right now. In the closet scene, Hamlet goes all out to expose what he believes to be the female gender's erroneous ideological practice. The accidental murder of the king's chamberlain cannot get him to show remorse. Gertrude is shocked by the brutality, only to hear her son say that he will wring her heart to see if "it is proof and bulwark against sense" (3.4.35-38). She asks what wrong she has done to deserve such humiliation, with which her son retorts with even more cruelty. She has, he says, done such horrible things as "blur[ring] the grace" and making sweet religion a "rhapsody of words" and the entire earth "thought-sick" (3.4.41-51). Later on, Gertrude is asked to compare her two husbands, one deceased, the other living, to two landscapes: The fair mountain is dominated by the gods, Hyperion, Jove, Mars, and Mercury; the moor only fits to be "battered on" by fools (3.4.61-5). What kind of a son would do this? No wonder the Ghost must revisit him to "whet" his "almost blunted purpose" (3.4.111). But the demand of the comparison is not the worst part of this time's ironic family quarrel between mother, son, and ghostly father. Gertrude's five senses, the body that is solely hers, are maliciously offended:

Ha! have you eyes?  
You cannot call it love; for at your age  
The hey-day in the blood is tame...  
...Sense, sure, you have,  
Else could you not have motion; but sure, that sense  
Is apoplex'd....  
.....  
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,  
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,  
Or but a sickly part of one true sense  
Could not so mope. (3.4.65-79)

No individual has such a right, and more crime cannot a son commit against his mother. How can a caring mother, facing such a moral scrutiny, muster any strength to fight back? It seems easier to view Hamlet as being insane and his hatred against Gertrude symptom of being misogynist. Some mothers might have to give up on her son, but not Gertrude. She continues to hope on for her son, and performs two miracles to protect her son. First, following the closet scene, we come to see her lying to Claudius when he asks her what happened. Knowing the danger of the question, she conceals her agreement with Hamlet (3.4.199-201) and lies about Hamlet's being "Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend / Which is the mightier" (4.1.7-8). Second, in the duel scene, she empties the poisoned cup, though probably without knowing the truth of it. This is, I think, the playwright's intention: Whether knowingly drinking from it or not, Gertrude has done nothing wrong except being a gentle and saving mother to her son, at least this is how Laurence Olivier glossed it in his 1948 film.<sup>12</sup> Taken all together, Hamlet's accusations against the female gender reveal that it's probably not misogyny, nor moral sensibility that is plaguing him. It's something else.

## (2) Ophelia

As with Gertrude, we're never sure who Ophelia is (Dillon 74), except that she is madly in love with Hamlet. The life and death of Ophelia is as ambiguous as everyone else that dies on stage. This is probably the fate of all Hamlet's Calibans. Eventually, it seems that she functions dubiously in the plot because we feel she serves more to illustrate Hamlet's showy love<sup>13</sup> and sociopolitical identity than her as a human being. Like Gertrude, she does not deserve all the indiscriminate excoriations Hamlet burdens her. Aesthetically speaking, however, she does well to explain how Hamlet confounds the self with the other in the play. In the first two scenes where she is put on stage, she spends most lines feebly explaining Hamlet's infatuations with her, only to be refuted, first by Laertes's theory of body politic, and then by Polonius's theory of puppy love (1.3.101; 1.3.129). Love on the level of passion is inadequate, which makes Ophelia an instrument by which the playwright vents Hamlet's outburst of melancholy:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard;

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<sup>12</sup> In his 1948 film, Olivier has more than one shot at Gertrude staring at the poisoned up and then deciding to drink from it. Obviously, Olivier proposes to see Gertrude as being completely aware of Claudius' murderous conspiracy in the duel. Russian made Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 film, Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film with Mel Gibson, and the most recent Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film all refute Olivier's suicidal point of view.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Edwards of 1985 Cambridge Edition comments on Hamlet's "love": "It is hard to know what right Hamlet has to say ["I loved Ophelia"] when we think of how we have seen him treat her.... For those of us who to any extent 'believe in' Hamlet, Shakespeare makes things difficult in this scene [5.1]" (56). Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor of the 2006 Arden Edition cite Edwards to discuss "reading against Hamlet tradition" (32ff).

Then goes he to the length of all his arm;  
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,  
He falls to such perusal of my face  
As he would draw it. (2.1.87-92)

This outburst results not only from denial of love as commendable human feelings but also from the secrecy of putting on an “antic disposition” he earlier sealed with Horatio and the sentinels (1.5.180). Situated in an extremely dangerous and riddling world of corruption and political espionage—“the compelling powers of the real” (*Marvelous Possessions* 23), Ophelia is just another salient target of Hamlet, whose personal vendetta is taking its tolls on every Elisoreans and what Elsinore represents. Confused by Hamlet’s insanity, Ophelia simply cannot understand what the matter is with her ex and slowly fades into despair and death. Empathizing with her, we understand this: She is assigned the job of spokesperson of her gender. She belongs to the gender whose dishonesty invariably gets the upper hand of whose beauty because, ironically, the latter holds bawdy nature. It is not true that Hamlet never really loves Ophelia, or Ophelia really should go to a nunnery because men are all “arrant knaves.” It is just that Hamlet, burdened with so much social reality, simply cannot manage the business of love any more:

I am very  
proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at  
my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, im-  
agination to give them shape, or time to act them in.

(3.1.124-7)

This self-deprecated confession of personal social ordeals ensures Hamlet’s villainy more than Ophelia’s crime—if there is any. The accusation that Ophelia is helping her father and the king spy on him is quite unreal. What Hamlet is really saying is that the world is no woman’s island, and men’s political villainy (“proud, revengeful, ambitious”) is why Ophelia should not marry and produce heirs:

If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague for  
thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as  
snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a  
nunnery. (3.1.136-9)

Men are monsters because they are born of women. Moreover, with “plast’ring art” and physical movements to please men, and with their intellectual naiveté, her gender is truly disturbing:

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God  
has given you one face, and you make yourselves  
another. (3.1.144-46)

Later in 5.1 he reiterates this misogynist theme:

Now get you to my lady’s chamber, and tell her, let  
her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must  
come. (5.1.186-89)

In sum, probably because of her symbolic youth and the potent image of breeder of humanity, Ophelia is more of a woman than Gertrude, and therefore takes more blame.

In the performance of the Mousetrap, Hamlet treats Ophelia with more brutal mockery. Here lying down at her feet he lashes out more of his revulsion of the female gender by making more sexual innuendo (“That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs,” 3.2.117), even though this time he is mocking at his mother’s second marriage within her earshot, which is really irrelevant to Ophelia. The theme of woman’s inconstancy appears again:

HAM. look you, how cheerfully my

mother looks, and my father died within these two hours.  
OPH. Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.  
HAM. So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for  
I'll have a suit of sables. O heavens! die two  
months ago, and not forgotten yet? (3.2.124-29)

This is not to “catch the conscience of the king,” but to mock at Ophelia and her youthful gender and sensual image. We doubt that whether Hamlet is aesthetically fake, a puppet, so to speak, manipulated by the playwright to concretize what Caliban means socially.

## V. Hamlet's Barbarous Self

Hamlet treats the Elsinoreans brutally but his honesty conveys epical depth. He curses the courtiers, Kings and their subjects, the second sex, but he also pounces on himself with exactly the same curse. From his soliloquies we repeatedly get the same conclusion: He thinks that man, himself no exception, graceless and therefore barbarous. In the first soliloquy (1.2.129-59), the council was just dismissed by the King and his melancholic image is set against the backdrop of a public ceremony with full sociopolitical implications. Here we see nothing if not a very private and disturbed soul. Life, he believes, is impure, blemished, tarnished by evil. For example, with a husband “but two months dead” (1.2.138) his mother got married, a blossoming symbol of evil indeed, fitting the description “'tis an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed” (1.2.135-6). Therefore, “[f]railty, thy name is woman” (1.2.146). His conclusion is thus man, including himself, and the world are unruly, ugly, unnatural, and graceless. This grim view of man has puzzled criticism for centuries, but I think the playwright's intent was aesthetic (Knight; Mack). He wants his hero to think, speak and act exactly like that. The occasion of the second soliloquy (1.5.92-112) is Hamlet reflecting on the Ghost's murder accusation against the King, revealed to urge revenge. Amidst Hamlet's sworn vows to revenge, there are two things worth noting: One is his metaphorical use of the “table” of memory—he says he will “wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, / That youth and observation copied there” (1.5.99-101). He will replace all joys of the world with the intention of revenge. The other is that he again connects women with “the smiling damned villain” (1.5.106). Not only does he again imply that his mother's gender is full of moral weakness, he also expresses doubts against man and life, including his own. His self-deprecation may be philosophical, but its substance is excoriation and excessive revulsion.

Clearly, the first two soliloquies are written to characterize a proud though frustrated intellectual. Pondering on this amazing and extravagant soul, we begin to wonder what substance makes up such a man of extremes. The intention, I think, is to have the Self engage in a dialectical conversation with the Other: What the playwright offers is a strong self-conscious being with its “interiority unfulfilled,” as Barker sagaciously describes it. Religion, politics, and social existence do not have him, so besides despising all men and women, he must also deprecate himself. Spiritually and physically, nothing satisfies his conscience, which the editor of the Cambridge Edition defines as “religious meaning of an implanted sense of right and wrong” (Edwards 1985: 50). He is attracted to all human conflicts and his conscience cannot find any exit.

The third soliloquy and the fourth broach the subjects of playing and social being to further reveal human barbarity. Embarking on the road to revenge, Hamlet inadvertently encounters the problem of human existence. In the third soliloquy, the playwright makes full use of the theme of “playing” to deepen and broaden our hero's self-deprecation. He speaks the third soliloquy (2.2.543-601) because the emotional aplomb of the players

appalls him. To him, playacting is nothing but a postmodern bit: What you see is what you get—the rest is either surreal or hyperrealistic. Playing seems to challenge the power of the real but it never gives it any credit. His hatred of the power of the unreal makes him distrust the Elsinoreans, and deprecate himself and the world with “word, word, word” (2.2.192). He becomes a “rascal,” a “John-a-dreams,” a “coward,” “villain,” who is “pigeon-liver’d and lack gall,” and then a “slave’s offal,” “ass,” whore,” “drab,” and “scullion” (2.2.543-601). On the whole, what Hamlet really hates is what he perceives in himself. The hatred is the “I-see-him/her-in-me” kind of revulsion. The playwright becomes the main character, and the character he describes is his Self. Ironically, Hamlet needs playing to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.601). In other words, both the playwright and the character he creates regard theatrical business as sinful, but it is sin only insofar as the real world must live with. If this play gives us something to embody the alienated unconscious, then Hamlet’s distrust in the Other is a challenge of the Self, and doubt of the Self is the beginning of knowing the Other.

Between the fourth soliloquy (3.1.56-87) and the third we only see how Claudius and Polonius attempt to pry on Hamlet’s insanity through Ophelia. Gigantic metaphors are used to point out that man’s social being is a path that leads to death and nothingness. The nihilistic sentiment embodied by this magnificent soul<sup>14</sup> makes us concede that Self cannot be defined, and politics, religion, and social existence cannot produce authenticity, authority, and autonomy. Religious self-awareness does not allow man to die for revenge, since the concept of the “undiscovered country” forstalls it. Self-awareness does not allow one’s social being to work either, but galvanizes him into action against the outrageous fortune. Like in other tragic plays, our hero is created to face death and seek spiritual liberation, only to find that the meaning of death, dominated by religion, hasn’t entered the sociopolitical and socioeconomic realm. If we do not read Hamlet’s thought as an ideological form and practice, it would be difficult to explain this situation. The bourgeoisie ideology represented by Hamlet has developed into a state where religion no longer has the authority to define the Self and the real world does not give it new substance. In short, the real does not allow him to define himself.

The fifth soliloquy and the sixth bring us to the more “marvelous,” “supernatural,” and “religious” aspects of our hero’s path to self-conscious regicidal revenge. Through more thoughts, human barbarity reaches its highest notch. In the fifth soliloquy (3.2.379-90), Hamlet still cannot bring himself to undertake “a surgical operation to remove a cancer from human society” (Edwards 58) even though he has already found the truth of his father’s murder through observing Claudius’s reaction to *Murder of Gonzago*. He again vows to “do such business as the day / Would quake to look on” (3.3.382-3), i.e., he will disregard all moral (and thus religious) conscience and begin to kill, because serving as the “thing,” the play has already confirmed the regicide. The use of the metaphors of witching time and hot-blood drinking suggests that the world is already teeming with futility (“sterile promontory” 2.2.299), barbarity and human sin. Revenge not only would worsen it but also would make it a great deal more disturbed, absolutely useless to human life (“a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours” 2.2.302-3). When he says, “O, heart, lose not thy nature” (3.3.384), he feels evil, not hopelessness. He does not want to admit it, but he seems to believe that inaction can stall the progress of human evilness. The sixth soliloquy (3.3.73-96) is spoken to respond to Claudius’ confession which he just overheard on his way to see his mother in her room. Regicide confirmed, killing a praying man still means awarding him with heavenly life. What Hamlet wants is to send the devil straight down to hell, not give him a free providential pass to salvation.

<sup>14</sup> William Hazlitt believes that the character of Hamlet “is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment” (165).

In the Renaissance, the cosmos is a vast space of purgatory from which one has no way to escape except through suffrages of the spectators (i.e., prayers) who have faith in the remission of institutional power.<sup>15</sup> As a spectator, Hamlet's speech of "hire and salary" does not rectify any of the evils Claudius represents, but ironically affirms the materialistic base of man's relations with Providence, thus shattering the possibility of Christian eschatology. The playwright seems to be at once mocking at the hero's impossible mission and mourning for the world in general.

Spoken when he, after killing Polonius by accident which leads to his being banished, observes Fortinbras march through the Elsinorean field, the seventh soliloquy (4.4.32-66) sums up all of the fears Hamlet's Calibans (i.e., including himself) and thus Shakespeare's politic barbarians have. Hamlet fears that the "chief good and market of his time" (4.4.34), i.e., his life, should only be spent in sleeping and eating like a beast. He confesses that what defines him as a prince, exactly just like Fortinbras in front of his eyes, supposedly with more reason, honor, and courage, really amounts to nothing except like Claudius. He questions man's "god-like reason," which reminds us of his reply to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern earlier, where he defines man as "beauty of the world, the paragon of animals" (2.2.307). He does not believe that courage and honor can be "unmix'd with baser matter" (1.5.104), broached in the second soliloquy, since ahead of him Fortinbras' willingness to sacrifice thousands of soldiers' lives shows that greatness lies not in fighting for noble causes, but in quibbling over a small piece of land, "for an eggshell," as he mocks (4.4.53). To him, human actions are either all done in "bestial oblivion" or in "some craven scruple" (4.4.40), or he would have proven a hero himself by killing Claudius. The conclusion "O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (4.4.66-67) is a convenient expression of rejection of the use of conscience as he, as a theatrical devise, so movingly has touched us in the fourth and fifth soliloquies. It is an escape from the real world to nothingness, affirming London audience that sin and death are immanent, and that purgatory is imminent.

## VI. Conclusion

In this paper I propose to treat Shakespeare's most read text with post-colonial subtext possibilities and read Hamlet as a colonizer, the materialistic man who thinks, speaks and acts like he is superior to other people while engaging in the business of revenge. Despite Benjamin's prophetic warning that "[T]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (256), today we live in an urban society where hi-tech culture lures us to believe that we are no longer inextricably bound up with human barbarism. Rereading *Hamlet* and we discover that this is certainly not true. Why does Hamlet, our typical Renaissance man, insist on looking at everyman and everything with merciless excoriation and even compound them with, not just dithering and blathering, but thought of barbarism of epical proportions? Is it because there is always a part of man that tends to do mischief, to engage in evil doing, to be cruel, to be, in a word, burdened with the threat of barbarism? That is, as Hamlet says, since "we are arrant knaves, all" (3.1.129), so only through brutality can we begin to deal with the "strangers in ourselves"? If so, the colonizer's acts of moral superiority, then, would not be without justification, and claim of self-awareness would make a great deal of sense.

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<sup>15</sup> In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Greenblatt expounds a new theory of the concept of "self-fashioning" he talked about almost twenty years ago. "The whole social and economic importance of Purgatory in [Renaissance] Catholic Europe rested on the belief that prayers, fasts, almsgiving, and masses constituted a valuable commodity—suffrages," as they were termed—that could in effect be purchased, directly or indirectly, on behalf of specific dead persons" (19). The result was that text after text was written on it.

But it seems that this strand of thought is erroneous. Granted that the introspective, self-deprecating, megalomaniacal, sardonic, and brutal hero can be understood and even empathized with a cautious measure of humanity, he is erroneous. He—with his language of the marvelous—wills mankind into exhibits of barbarism, and, ambitiously though admirably, inculcates a sense of self-proximity into thought. This seems to be the reason why the tragedy of the final macabre and utter destruction is inevitable: As a agent, even self and self-proximity cannot escape being intepellated as ideology. According to Greenblatt, the pursuit of a representational aesthetics of the Self using the “machinery” such as images, language of the marvelous, emotion of wonder, and other mimetic practices, no doubt caused capitalistic aesthetics to circulate (which he calls “mimetic circulation”) (*Marvelous Possessions* 120). The troubled self exhibited by Hamlet impresses centuries of critics, but its detrimental effects to history has not been adequately measured. The image of self-awareness that goes on a rampage angrily represented by Hamlet may earn our admiration—at least my long-time admiration, but since it is built on difference and alienation, it truly yields a lack that demands fulfillment. And in this aspect, we are grateful to the creator of the drama who depicts that image.

Through exhibiting Hamlet as a self-conscious colonizer and working with some of the main characters he struggles with, this paper attempts to show how Hamlet employs the language of the marvelous and “barbarizes” the Elsinoreans including kings, subjects, courtiers, friends, family, and the second sex, his mother and girl friend. With his ghost father, he seems blind-folded, since as an intellectual, he seems to hold no grudge against his monarchical-patriarchal image; but with the fatherly surrogate, Claudius, he seems to come back too soon to the identity of the traveler, who with moral and religious prejudice seems to take a dim view of the welfare of the whole community. In all these, we do not see any authorial voice divulging rights and wrongs, which leads us to believe that the playwright is struggling with what Greenblatt calls “the poetics of Purgatory.”<sup>16</sup>

Kristeva writes about the foreigner: “By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns ‘we’ into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities” (1). Hamlet’s Calibans as foreigners and strangers, as politic barbarians that resounds with the bad name of the Self, as the otherly “thing of darkness” in ourselves, certainly comes to the mind.<sup>17</sup>

On the European colonizing acts of Columbus and Bernal Díaz during the earlier centuries,<sup>18</sup> Greenblatt speaks of the “record of colonizing of the marvelous” through working with the relationship between Self and Other in the textual accounts of traveler-native encounter. He points out that there is a definite path for the intended conqueror and eventual victor to take in order to effectively gaze at the object that he wishes to possess, i.e., using “discursive strategies” that lead to “articulations of the radical differences that make renaming, transformation, and appropriation possible” (135). “The movement here,” Greenblatt says, “must pass through identification to complete

<sup>16</sup> In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Greenblatt explains how the Protestants hated and attacked the fraudulence of Purgatory, and Donne in his sermons also offered his defiance against this concept (45). All poetic efforts could not stop its being “hardened into the concept of ideology” through the course of history. So Greenblatt concludes: “What we call ideology, then, Renaissance England called poetry” (46). Shakespeare might have buried himself deep in this poetic struggle.

<sup>17</sup> In *The Tempest*, Prospero speaks of Caliban as “this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-6). Like Prospero, our hero Hamlet seems to assume too much responsibility and authority over the Calibans in his world.

<sup>18</sup> Columbus’s account is a successful case of “the colonizing of the marvelous,” while Bernal Diaz’s is not (*Marvelous Possessions* 24-5).

estrangement” (135). As the mark of inventorial and taxonomic efforts, renaming, transformation, and appropriation not only give the colonizer “possessions,” i.e., “private property,” but also lend him help to alienate the objects he attempts to own. Hamlet's Calibans experience a great deal of human sufferings. It makes us think that in attempting to save human soul, our hero has performed actions that, instead of bringing him close to the Calibans, pull him away from them. This is why Greenblatt says: “for a moment you see yourself confounded with the other, but then you make the other become an alien object, a thing, that you can destroy or incorporate at will” (135). I think that no matter how much humanity Hamlet endows us, what he unconsciously does is what colonizers would usually do—deliberately, willingly, and, to be blunt, dishonestly establishing a world of difference. Admittedly, this is not cultural invasion but humanity. But if the observed object is hegemonically manipulated to purchase barbarism, the observer's action, then, becomes cultural invasion. To the Renaissance audience, or any audience for this matter, the politic barbarism exhibited by the playwright and the character of Hamlet—the prince of mankind—certainly was not politically incorrect. “[C]aviar” or “the general” (2.2.433), who did the playwright vouch more? The answer was clear. Through our hero's many eloquent moral arguments, the capitalistic venture of the private enterprise gets further textual endorsement.

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