3.1. Publications related to my Fulbright Research Award


Trends in American Luther Research.
Parallels Between Luther’s Theology and Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

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The research was, first of all, a “metahistorical” investigation into three tendencies of American Luther scholarship: 1. hermeneutics; 2. theology of the cross; and 3. ecclesiology. I was interested to learn how these three tendencies reflected the changing perspective in American Luther Research in the second half of the 20th century.

On the other hand, however, I was interested to demonstrate that Luther’s theology can be applied to interpreting Shakespeare’s plays. Therefore I was investigating how Luther’s understanding of the hidden God can be applied to Shakespearian tragedy, especially Hamlet Prince of Denmark who was also student of Wittenberg. Luther, who called himself “God’s court-jester” (Hofnarr) saw history as one of the “masks of God” (larva dei) and God as hiding himself often in the mask of the Devil, developed a paradoxical theology (theologia crucis) that is, according to the paper, surprisingly compatible with the paradoxical artistic vision of Shakespeare, especially in Hamlet, King Lear and Measure for Measure. In discussing central motifs of Luther’s theology like deus absconditus; indirect revelation; revelation by concealment; revelation under the opposite (sub contrario suo); the “strange acts of God” (opus alienum), God’s “rearward parts” (posteriora); suffering (Anfechtungen and melancholy) we may provoke the latent, even if blasphemous, theological meaning in Shakespeare.
Parallels Between Luther’s Theology and Shakespeare’s Hamlet

1. Worm, worms and Worms

In Shakespeare’s Hamlet there is one curious and puzzling textual allusion that has long been noticed and deserves our attention. It is in one of Hamlet’s usual puns in Act 4 Scene 3 when he is responding to the question where he put the dead body of the murdered Polonius: 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. (4,3,19-25)

Critical editors of the drama since the 19th century have not only conjectured but recognized in the „emperor” a direct allusion to the Emperor Charles V, and in the „politic worms” and the „diet” a reference to the Diet of Worms. Harold Jenkins, the editor of the Arden Hamlet says in a footnote: „There is a play on diet, council, with reference to the Diet at the German city of Worms, presided over by the emperor. In 1521 it pronounced its ban on Luther after his famous refusal to recant.” Hamlet’s witty imagination is immediately expanding this insight:

A man my fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of that fish that hath fed of that worm. (4,3,28)

The imagery of eating, as has also been observed, evokes the idea of the Eucharist, one of the crucial controversial issues of the Reformation. “Yet the utter debasement of the ritual in the image of maggots as communicants, ingesting the mingled body of the beggar/king at the common ‘table’ of the grave appears to go beyond Luther”- says a recent critic.

However, critics have not yet noticed that Luther, who has been alluded in Hamlet’s pun, was also frequently using the image of the “worm” when he identified it with Jesus Christ on the cross.

For Luther the bronze serpent which signifies Jesus Christ is like a “harmful worm” as “Christ was also looked upon as a venomous worm to be shunned”. Christ endured to be ridiculed when he was regarded as a “vile worm”. (LW 4,340) He degraded himself so profoundly that he became less than men just a worm that is scorned by men (Psalm 22,26) However, in such physical weakness and poverty He attacks and destroys the enemy. This worm, says Luther in his commentary on Psalm 8,4 “is mocked, spit upon, scourged, crowned, and crucified….His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and His form beyond that of the sons of men…. He was despised and rejected by men”. (LW 12, 123) The American Luther scholar Kenneth Hagen says: “The meaning of Christ as worm on the cross carried the connotations of Christ being abject, the object of contempt, foresaken, nauseating, abominable, rotten stench, scandal, offensive or, simply, rotting worm”.

But that is not the end of the story. Commenting on the Genesis story of Sarah’s death Luther remarks:

it has pleased God to raise up from worms, from corruption, from the earth, which is totally putrid and full of stench, a body more beautiful than any flower, than balm, than the sun itself and the stars. (LW 4,190)

Both Shakespeare and Luther have provoked our phantasy and stretched our imagination to the utmost with their daring associations concerning the image of the worm. Therefore, it is our hope that it would not be a futile attempt to begin an unusual comparison of the two unique but perhaps not entirely unrelated minds of the Renaissance.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German theologian who lived and worked two generations earlier than William Shakespeare (1564-1616) the English poet and playwright. Both Luther and Shakespeare were creative geniuses of the 16th century who overwhelmingly contributed to the making of Early Modern Europe. I hope to demonstrate that in a certain sense the theological worlds of Martin Luther and the dramatic worlds of William Shakespeare are not incompatible with each other.

2. „The Masks of God” and the Dramatic Nature of Luther’s Theology

It is a commonplace to suggest that Luther was far from being a traditional systematic theologian. Of his personal dramatic temperament (conversion, temptations etc.) I shall speak later. Now I will argue that there was definitely a dramatic aspect in his theology. Eric W. Gritsch has shown us that Luther’s self image in his address To the Nobility of the German Nation was that of a „court-jester” (Hofnarr) and as Gritsch says, Luther appears to have worn his heart on his sleeve, tipping his cap to the troubled consciences of common folk, ringing his bells to warn the mighty in both church and world of God’s unyielding power, and tapping his feet to the tune of the gospel’s cheering and chilling news of Christ’s lordship in a world nearing its end.

Indeed, Luther seems to have radically appropriated and even enacted St. Paul’s paradox about wisdom and foolishness especially in his theologica crucis to which we shall return later.

Moreover, Luther very frequently used such dramatic terms in his theology as „game”, „laughter”, „theater”, „disguise” and „hiding”. In 1532 he lectured on the „laughter of God” in Psalm 2 suggesting that God’s laughter was a way of hiding his wrath from the stupidities of mankind. This should teach us to see our adversaries as if they were part of a „comical spectacle”. In Luther’s non-dogmatic
dramatic theology comedy and tragedy, laughter and weeping, concealment and revelation, hiddenness and recognition are in a complementary relationship with each other.

2.1. The Various Masks of God

Luther never failed to emphasize the difference between the revealed and the hidden God (deus revelatus and deus absconditus). The real God (deus per se), or, the naked God (deus nudus) is never identical with what we experience of him either in his revelation or his hiddenness. Luther frequently mentions with St Paul (1Cor 4, 9) that Christians have become a „spectacle“ for the world (theatron to kosmo). In this theatrum mundi where Satan and his angels disguise themselves as angels of light (2Cor 11,14) and the Pope and the hypocrite clergy pose as representatives of God, it is necessary for God also to hide himself under various masks.

One of his favourite quote is from Isaiah 45,15: “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself” and he comments on this passage that “For under the curse a blessing lies hidden; under the consciousness of sin, righteousness; under death, life; and under affliction, comfort.” (LW 4,7).

Luther also spoke about creation and history as the „face or mask of God“ (larva dei). „Now the whole creation is a face or mask of God. But here we need the wisdom that distinguishes God from His mask. The world does not have this wisdom. Therefore it cannot distinguish God from His mask.” (LW 26, 94)

For Luther God governs this world by secular roles and authorizes: „those masks of judges, magistrates, teachers, doctors, and lawyers are necessary... it is God’s will that under these masks you should serve His ordinance and man’s need... Without these masks peace and discipline could not be preserved“. The whole world is a Mummenschanz, a masquerade and while a „masked God may frighten others, Christians know that behind every divine mask there is a gracious God."

God hides himself beneath human wordly powers (LW 9,41) and even our human achievement: “He uses our effort as a mask under which He blesses us” (LW 9,96)

Moreover, God hides himself but in his very word as well. With his promises as masks he protects human beings from the absolute, naked God. Concerning Psalm 51 he says that David is „speaking with God as He is dressed and clothed... in such... a pleasant mask... this God we can grasp and look at with joy and trust” (LW 12,312)

One of Luther’s favourite biblical heroes is Joseph from the end of Genesis. Joseph was sold by his brothers and through much suffering and affliction he got to the court of the Pharaoh. “God allows Joseph to be crucified, hurled in prison” (LW 8, 30). “For he saw God’s back and waited until God should reveal and show forth His salvation” (LW 7,103). This Joseph who had been tortured both by his brothers and his God is concealing his identity from his brothers when they come to Egypt. Instead of vengance he, as Luther says, plays a “very pleasant delightful game” by hiding a cup in his younger brother Benjamin’s sack (LW 7, 237). The brothers are afflicted just as he was tortured and tried by God. “At the end of the trial, however, they see the greatest goodwill and love.” (LW 7, 237). For Luther Joseph thus becomes a God-figure: “After our liberation we have the same feeling about God, who allows us to be tried and afflicted in order that we may prove what His good and pleasing will is (Rom. 12:2).” (LW 7, 237) Joseph acts in a strange way with his brothers just as God also acts in a strange way with human kind. ”He afflicts us with evils and misfortunes of every kind”. (LW 7,237) God also plays with us and says: ‘Because you are well pleased with your hypocrisy, flatter yourself, and dream that you are cleansed of every sin, I will disclose to you and show you what kind of person you are in My sight and will remove from you that mask of smugness and hypocrisy.’

Thus Joseph played the deus absconditus with his brothers; he tortured them to make them repent. His brothers are frightened they think they are confronted with the devil. But at the end in the recognition scene he reveals that “I am your brother Joseph” just as God reveals his true self and true work (opus proprium) after his “strange acts” (opus alienum). Joseph just as God reveals his mercy and love for his brothers in an indirect way.

If the world is a huge masquerade where both God and Satan wear masks to hide themselves the greatest problem for the believer is to recognize God under the mask:

everything seems exactly the opposite of what it should be, and then we see God’s work to be unjust. So God and Satan wear us with masks and external spirits so that we are led to believe that what is of God is Satan, and what is Satan is of God. (LW 17,127)

When commenting on Galatians 5,11 Luther again remarks:

Thus God wears the mask of the devil, and the devil wears the mask of God; God wants to be recognized under the mask of the devil, and He wants the devil to be condemned under the mask of God. (LW 27, 43)

2.2. Luther’s Theology of the Cross

The theatrical metaphor, the idea of the mask or, the notion of revelation by concealment are not accidental images for Luther but they form a coherent theology which scholars have come to call theologia crucis, the theology of the cross.

What is then, the subject matter of the theology of the cross? Against many misunderstandings and misconceptions Gerhard O. Forde says:

It is a particular perception of the world and our destiny, what Luther came to call looking at all things through suffering and the cross. He says that „it is so radical and deep for its time that it is still vital for our time”, this is a story that „claims us” and wants us to become theologians of the cross, it teaches us „to say what the thing is”, „to call a spade a spade”.
Luther first formulated his theology of the cross in the 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*. He called his theses „theological paradoxes“ which was the reformers' new way of forming argument against the traditional syllogism of scholastic theologians.

The central notion, the great divide between the way of glory and the way of the cross is described in theses 19-21 of the *Heidelberg Disputation*.

19 The man who looks upon the invisible things of God as they are perceived in created things does not deserve to be theologian. (Non ille dignus theologus dicitur, qui invisibilia Dei per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta consipi.)

20 The man who perceives the visible rearward parts of God as seen in suffering and the cross does, however, deserve to be called a theologian. (Sed qui visibilium et posterioria Dei per passiones et crucem conspecta intelligit.)

21 The theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. The theologian of the cross says what a thing is.

The theology of glory wishes, with human achievement and free will, „to see through“ the cross in order to find, by speculation, a „transcendant meaning“ (virtue, wisdom, goodness etc) and contemplate the invisible greatness of God. But Luther believes that „peering into ‘invisible things of God’ only ‘puffs up, blinds and hardens’“16. But the cross teaches us to see differently: the cross is not transparent, we cannot look behind it; it is a mirror and we have to look at it. We cannot explain the cross but we have to preach the cross. The theology of the cross reveals that things are not what they seem; it makes us recognize that there is a crucial discrepancy between appearance and reality. According to the theology of the cross it is the cross that reverses our way of seeing. Only by faith is it revealed that God concealed himself in the form of its opposite: in the shame of the cross. Luther’s imagination become almost blasphemous when he quotes Moses who wanted to see the face of God, but God showed him only his back, „rearward parts“ (posteriora). This was to teach and humble Moses. The cross likewise cuts down the wisdom of the wise, the vision of the theologian of the glory. It is only through suffering and the cross that we can come to know God. Only through this suffering can we learn what things really are, that the spade is a spade.

The idea is that „God’s revelation can take place in the form of opposites, sub contrario. God does his alien and wrathful work before he does his proper and loving work; he makes alive by killing, brings to heaven by going through hell, brings forth mercy out of wrath.“17 The alien work is the opus alienum and the loving work is the opus proprium. In Isaiah 28, 21 it is called „the strange work“ and „the strange act“ of God. It is God who assaults and inflicts us, he causes the terrors of temptation, the *Anfechtungen*. In Forde’s words: „Knowledge of God comes when God happens to us“.18 Luther even goes so far as to suggest that God, in his alien work, becomes devil for us before becoming God for us: „God cannot be God unless revelation; hiding under the mask of the opposite; the world turned upside down; wrong perception (blindness); the *deus absconditus* (the hidden god); hiding under the mask of the opposite; the paradox of wisdom and foolishness; suffering as means of self-knowledge – these all seem to be very much in common.

In what follows we shall approach these issues in some of Shakespeare’s plays and hope to elucidate that the logic or mechanism of Luther’s theology is very much present in the plays despite Shakespeare’s apparent lack of interest in such questions as salvation, redemption, justification etc.

If we conceive Luther’s interpretation of Joseph as a God-figure in Genesis we may find in Shakespeare’s plays several Joseph-like God figures who hide themselves under a mask or disguise in order to reveal themselves. We shall be concerned with the figure of the Duke in *Measure for Measure* and analyse the presence of Luther in *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* and *Student of Wittenberg*.

### 3. Theological Potential in Shakespeare’s Dramatic Art

Now let us see how we can approach some of the tragedies of Shakespeare with Luther’s unique theology of revelation on our minds.

A central premise of our argument is that several of Shakespeare’s plays are of epistemological nature both about the self-knowledge and the knowledge of reality. That Shakespeare had probably no access to Luther’s theology and his concerns were entirely different from those of the Wittenberg theologian, needs no justification. Nevertheless his epistemological concerns about the nature of reality; the discrepancy between appearance reality; show and substance; concealment and distortion that God showed him only his back, “rearward parts” (posteriora). This was to teach and humble Moses. The cross likewise cuts down the wisdom of the wise, the vision of the theologian of the glory. It is only through suffering and the cross that we can come to know God. Only through this suffering can we learn what things really are, that the spade is a spade.

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### 3.1. Duke Vincentio in Measure for Measure

The most ancient source of the plot of *Measure for Measure* according to J.W.Lever’s Arden edition is the Latin letter written by the Hungarian student Macarius in 1547 (in the possession of the Hungarian National Archives). However the story about a wicked man promising not to execute another man provided his wifes sleeps with him and the request fulfilled, he nevertheless executed him, also captured Luther’s imagination as early as 152321 and he mentions that the story...
goes back to St Augustine's commentary on the Sermon of the Mount of the Lord (De sermone Domini in monte). Shakespeare, of course made the story somewhat more complicated than his sources. He invented the figure of the Duke who disguised himself as a Friar to create order out of disorder, to test or even to torture his people so that they should gain a new understanding of themselves. By means of human standards his game was hazardous and even inhuman as he „by direction” was finding „directions out”.

The Duke's figure is interpreted by István Géher as a real madman by others he is seen „like power divine” (5,1,367) as he re-enters Vienna and while he reveals the wickedness of the human heart and the end of the play. In an earlier discussion of the play I have suggested that the drama is structured on the principles of hiding and uncovering, concealment and revelation, closure and disclosure. The structure of this play is similar to the structure of a symbol in so far as Duke Vincentio conceals himself in disguise not only to learn about his people, nor to test them, but because he also wants to teach them: he does not merely wish to „know” but he wishes to „let them know”. What he cannot achieve directly and manifestly, he will be able to accomplish by concealment and deception, in secrecy and disguise. Only by hiding himself as a deus absconditus can he uncover the vices of Vienna, only by concealing his identity can he reveal the truth about the real impulses of the human heart.

Shakespeare's play is at the same time the Duke's grand „game” which he is to win although from time to time he might find himself on the verge of losing it. His name (Vincentio) is an adumbration of that victory which he is meant to manifest.

Now, this image of God does indeed conform to the God of „strange acts” in Luther's theologia crucis who also puts on „an antic disposition”, wears a mask and plays with human beings by afflicting and torturing them with Anfechtungen but under his opus alienum he is hiding his opus proprium. The Duke does conform to Luther's interpretation of Joseph's story as God hiding himself under a mask apparently to confuse, frighten those whom he loves but whom he also wants to be changed from within. The Duke just as Luther's God acts a strange game with his people for the sake and benefit of his people.

Steve Marx in his recent Shakespeare and the Bible remarks: „Like the gods of King Lear and the Book of Job, the God-figures of Measure for Measure and the gospels are hidden from the people they tempt, torment, and test.”

3.2. Hamlet

Recently some scholars have taken up the „Lutheran thread” in the play's texture. Raymond B. Waddington published an article „Lutheran Hamlet” where he proposed a speculative possibility that Shakespeare used Martin Luther as a prototype in constructing the character of the prince.

The most striking parallel is the impact of melancholy on Luther and Hamlet. Luther's melancholy what he called Anfechtung (spiritual temptation, assault by the devil, insomnia, depression) as it became known from Eric Erikson's psychobiography strikingly corresponds to Hamlet's frequently discussed melancholy, the Elisabethan malady. Luther said of himself. „Sadness (tristitia) causes disease. For when the heart is ill, the body becomes weak. The true diseases are those of the heart, such as sadness, grief and temptation. I am true Lazarus who is quite tempted by diseases.”

In Hamlet, the King says of the Prince.

There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger” (3,1,167-169).

Luther's conversion from his Anfechtungen and Hamlet's conversion from his melancholy has been compared by Steve Sohmer: „Young Martin Luther suffered a long period of guilt and depression (anfechtung), and eventually found conversion through humble surrender to God and his preordained providence. Hamlet undergoes a similar course of spiritual development, from lamenting his 'too sullied flesh' to believing there's a 'special providence in the fall of a sparrow'”.

Moreover, both Luther and Hamlet are associated with Hercules, who is also an emblem of heroic melancholy after the pseudo-Aristotelian Problemata. Luther was depicted in a cartoon attributed to Holbein as „Hercules Germanicus”. Herder said of Luther: „Like a true Hercules, he attacked the spiritual despotism which undermines or dissolves all free wholesome thinking.” Hamlet's burden to carry out the revenge is as heavy as Hercules’ „load ” and in recognizing his fate he has to fight with Nemean's lion's nerve (1,5,83) as Hercules thus is both the fighter and the victim (5,1,286).

However, parallel can also be established not only concerning common features of personality but also concerning philosophy and doctrine. Hamlet's self-understanding as being being both „scourge and minister” (3,4,175) evokes Luther's belief in the Christian being simul pecator et iustus (sinful and just at the same time). As it is known Luther rejected the „whore reason”, „bure Vernunft. The Ghost also speaks about Claudius’ „wicked wit” (1,5,44). Luther despised Aristotelian philosophy especially in approaching God (coram deo). Hamlet encountering the Supernatural gives the same „Lutheran” „anti-Aristotelian” lesson to Horatio:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
(1,5,174-75)

Luther especially warned against applying reason to heavenly matters and thereby confusing the two realms. Luther stood for the idea of the priesthood of all believers. In Hamlet the „closet-scene” in Act III Scene IV seems to be a fine illustration of this principle. Here Hamlet tries to make his mother repent.
Hamlet never repents, never feels 
prot

t until the day of doom. Luther even avoided talking about hell 
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conveyed through the writings of Thomas 
and tries to make confess her sins. Roland 
Mushat Frye in an article “Hamlet and 
the Protestant Confessional”13 says:

Within the Protestant frames of 
reference of the sixteenth century in England, Hamlet’s reproaches of 
his mother are skillfully designed to 
express the ultimate kindness, even 
through a seeming cruelty, or as he 
put it ‘I must be cruel only to be kind’ 
(3,4,179). Shakespeare’s dramatization 
of Hamlet’s private consultation with 
his mother, in addition to its poetic 
qualities, provides a fine example of 
how the ‘priesthood of all believers’ 
was expected to operate at the end of 
the first Protestant century.14

Richard Marius in an interesting article15 suggests that the whole play reflects the 
English understanding of Luther as 
conveyed through the writings of Thomas 
More. The play, according to Marius is "a 
mirror held up to religious confusion" 
especially with the idea of Purgatory, a 
discipline deliberately rejected by Luther 
and the English Protestants. Stephen 
Greenblatt in his most recent book Hamlet 
in Purgatory has also pointed out that 
Reformation theologians regarded ghosts 
and supernatural visitations as diabolical.16 
Luther even avoided talking about hell 
and he saw death (just as Tyndale did) as 
sleep until the day of doom.17

Marius is right in emphasizing that 
Hamlet never repents, never feels Protes-
tant guilt and that the play reflects faith 
and doubt just as the Elizabethan audience 
also usually believed in contrary things.

Marius’ main point is that instead of 
a pure Protestant faith from Luther’s 
Wittenberg Shakespeare took the idea of 
predestination and equated it with Greek 
fate. 19 Luther in his polemics against 
Erasmus claims that fate is more than the 
endeavours of men as “no man’s plans 
have ever been straightforwardly realized, 
but for everyone things have turned out 
differently from what they thought they 
would”20 Marius emphatically says: “Hamlet 
seems to build on this Lutheran insight.”21 
and goes on to demonstrate that the 
play is nothing but a series of failed 
projects and at the end of the play Hamlet 
‘understands to the full that the world is 
an unintelligible plaything of fate where 
human beings are incapable of effecting 
their will.”22

Whether Marius’ thesis is right, or, 
wrong, it is not my intention to decide. 
I only wish to show that an important 
aspect of Luther’s theology, without being 
misread by More, is still compatible with 
Shakespeare’s tragedy. This aspect is the 
idea of the theology of the cross as we 
have presented it above through the lenses 
of Forde and McGrath.

We should remember that Hamlet also 
rejected traditional speculation in favour 
of a new type of revelation: “There are 
more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, 
/ Than are dreamt in your philosophy” (1, 
5,174-75). This is undoubtedly the voice 
of a Wittenberg man. For Luther God 
conceals himself in the form of his opposite 
in order to reveal himself. Hamlet also 
“plays God”: he acts in a similar manner:
he puts on an "antic disposition" and plays 
the role of the madman, uses indirect 
means, such as the mousetrap scene, to 
find out truth:

The play’s the thing 
Whereto I’ll catch the conscience of the 
King. (2, 2, 600-601).

This corresponds to McGrath’s words, 
that God’s “revelation must be regarded 
as indirect and concealed.” At this point 
we cannot but recall a paradoxical mirror 
of Hamlet’s indirect revelation in Polonius’ 
advise to Reynaldo when he commissions 
him to spy on his son Laertes:

Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of 
truth; 
And does do we of wisdom and of reach, 
With windlasses and and with assays of 
bias, 
By indirections find directions out. (2,1,63-66) 
it mine)

What is in common between the radical 
thelogical vision of Luther and the 
radical artistic vision of Hamlet? Both of 
them are radically committed to searching 
and seeing reality as it is, “things as they 
really are”, without seam, pomp and 
circumstances. Hamlet’s encounter with 
the Ghost is an initiation into another, a 
rather naked and chilling reality. Hamlet 
is passionately driven towards the reve-
lation of this reality. In order to gain new 
knowledge he is even willing to go to hell 
just as Luther knew that God was taking 
him to hell: 
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin 
damn’d,

Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts 
from hell… 
…I will speak to thee. (1,4, 39-40, 43)

For Luther the theology of the cross, 
the cross is meant to reverse our way of seeing. Hamlet 
can help us readers and audience 
to reverse our way of seeing though at the 
expense of the hero’s tragedy.

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, 
That ever I was born to set it right. 
(1,5, 196-198)

To conclude, we can say that Hamlet is 
not a “Christian” play as we hear nothing 
about Christ or the necessity of the cross 
in it. Marius is entirely right that Hamlet 
ever repents. Yet, I think, we can find 
more in it than Senecan fate as suggested 
by Marius. Patterns of the theology of the cross: 
knowledge by revelation rather than 
speculation; the dialectics of concealment 
and revelation; the paradoxical way of 
thinking, indirect revelation; suffering 
(melancholy or Anfechtungen); reversal of 
seeing and so on. Hamlet is probably an 
unconscious, literary echoing of some of 
the schemes of Luther’s theology of the 
cross - without the cross. Only in retro-
spect, after understanding the theology 
of the cross, can we understand that some 
of its motifs can be discerned in Hamlet. 
Hamlet does not take us to the cross but 
aims at twisting us out of our wrong orien-
tations, by challenging the direction of 
our gaze, by reversing our seeing. Within 
the play a radical reversal was taking place 
but not after the encounter with the one 
“who had no form or comeliness...no 
beauty that we should desire him” (Is
25 Steve Marx, Shakespeare and the Bible, Oxford University Press, 1992, p.121-4
26 Raymond B.Waddington, “Lutheran Hamlet”, In, English Language Notes, December 1989, pp.27-42
27 Waddington, p.32
29 Quoted by Grinch, Court Jester, p.147
30 See Sohmer’s, “Certain Speculations…” point 21: “After returning to Denmark, Hamlet declares he was led by a ‘divinity that shapes our ends’ to discover the perfidious commission of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet writes to Claudius that he has returned to Denmark ‘naked’ (4.7.50). In this word which so puzzles the king and Laertes, Lutherans of the Elizabethan era and our own recognize an allusion to the keyword Luther employs to describe his concession through humble surrender to God: ‘nackt’.
31 Grinch, Court Jester p.20.
40 Luther’s De servo arctinis, quoted by Marius, p.46
41 Marius, p.46
42 ibid
43 ibid
44 Quoted in McGrath, Luther’s Theology of the Cross, p.152
45 Joseph in Genesis, Duke Vincenzo and Hamlet in Shakespeare began to “play this God”: Measure for Measure and Hamlet are in a sense the comic and the tragic versions of Luther’s strangely acting God. There is no sign in Shakespeare’s tragedy that Hamlet ever understood who was really hiding behind the mask whether it was the Ghost’s or his own ‘antic disposition’. Therefore, he was ready but perhaps not ripe enough to die.