

generated during my short stay in the lab were useful for my young coworkers. Since then we have been communicating almost every day. This seems to me as an extension of my Fulbright period.

3.1. Publications related to my Fulbright Research Award

Nagy K, Kis B, Rajapakse NC, Bari F, Busija DW (2004) Diazoxide preconditioning protects against neuronal cell death by attenuation of oxidative stress upon glutamate stimulation J Neurosci Res 76:697-704

Busija DW, Katakam P, Rajapakse NC, Kis B, Grover G, Domoki F, Bari F (2005) Effects of ATP-Sensitive Potassium Channel Activators Diazoxide and BMS-191095 on Membrane Potential and Reactive Oxygen Species Production in Isolated Piglet Mitochondria Brain Res Bull (in press)

Simandle S, Kerr BA, Lacza Zs, Eckman D, Busija DW, Bari F (2005) Lack of direct dilator effects of N-methyl-D-aspartate on piglet pial arterioles Microvasc Res (in press)

Lenzser G, Kis B, Bari F, Busija DW (2005) Diazoxide preconditioning attenuates global cerebral ischemia-induced blood-brain barrier permeability Brain Res (in press)

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 Shakespearean 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. (4,3,19-25¹) (it.mine)

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.”² 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 critic³.

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”. (LW⁴ 22,340) 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, forsaken, nauseating, abominable, rotten stench, scandal, offensive or, simply, rotting worm”⁵

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 balsam, 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”⁶ (*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.⁷

Indeed, Luther seems to have radically appropriated and even enacted St. Paul's paradox about wisdom and foolishness especially in his *theologia 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”.⁸ 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 authorities: „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.”⁹

God hides himself beneath human worldly 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 vengeance he, as Luther says, plays a “very pleasant delightful game” by hiding a cup in his younger brother Benja-

min’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.” (LW 7, 237)

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 weary 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.¹⁰

He says that „it is so radical and deep for its time that it is still vital for our time”,¹¹ this is a story that „claims us”¹² and wants us to become theologians of the cross¹³, it teaches us „to say what the thing is”, „to call a spade a spade”¹⁴.

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 conspiciat.*)

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 visibilia et posteriora Dei per passiones et crucem conspexerit intelligit.*)

21 The theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. The theologian of the cross says what a thing is.¹⁵

The theology of glory wishes, with human achievement and free will, „to see through” the cross in order to find, by speculation, a „transcendent 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

He first becomes a devil. All that God speaks and does the devil has to speak and do first.”¹⁹

Alistair MacGrath mentions five marks²⁰ of the theology of the cross: 1) *theologia crucis* a theology of revelation rather than a theology of speculation.; 2) This revelation must be regarded as indirect and concealed; 3) This revelation is to be recognized in the sufferings of the cross of Christ; 4) This knowledge of God who is hidden in his revelation is a matter of faith; 5) God is particularly known through sufferings, he makes himself known through sufferings: God is the source of *Anfechtung*, he assaults man in order to break him down and thus to save him. It is significant that God is hidden and the *Deus absconditus* hides his mercy under his wrath.

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

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.

3.1. 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 wife 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*)²²

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 madman²³ 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.²⁴

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.”²⁵

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”²⁶ where he proposed a speculative possibility that „Shakespeare used Martin Luther as a prototype in constructing the character of the prince.”²⁷

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 psychobiography²⁸ 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”²⁹.

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’”.³⁰

Moreover, both Luther and Hamlet are associated with Hercules, who is also an emblem of heroic melancholy after the pseudo-Aristotelean *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.”³¹ Hamlet's burden to carry out the revenge is as heavy as Hercules' „load” and in recognizing his fate he has to fight with Nemeon's lion's nerve (1,5,83) as Hercules thus is both the fighter and the victim (5,1,286).³²

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 peccator 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 Aristotelean philosophy especially in approaching God (*coram deo*). Hamlet encountering the Supernatural gives the same „Lutheran” „anti-Aristotelean” 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

and thus behaves as a priest in the biblical and Protestant sense of the word.³³ My point is that Hamlet is not cruel but rather generous to his mother when he passionately upholds her a looking-glass and tries to make confess her sins. Roland Mushat Frye in an article "Hamlet and the Protestant Confessional"³⁴ 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.³⁵

Richard Marius in an interesting article³⁶ 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 doctrine 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.³⁷ Luther even avoided talking about hell and he saw death (just as Tyndale did) as sleep until the day of doom.³⁸

Marius is right in emphasizing that Hamlet never repents, never feels Prot-

estant guilt and that the play reflects faith and doubt just as the Elisabethan 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.³⁹ 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"⁴⁰ Marius emphatically says: „*Hamlet* seems to build on this Lutheran insight."⁴¹ 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."⁴²

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
Wherein 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".⁴³ 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 theological 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 revelation 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 never 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 retrospect, 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 orientations, 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

53,2) or from whom we „hid our faces” but only from a Ghost who revealed the truth but called for revenge. Hamlet has only confronted the *opus alienum* of God, never the *opus proprium*.

Let me end with a typical provocative and radical insight of Luther. Concerning the identity of the theologian Luther said: „living, or rather dying and being damned make a theologian, not understanding, reading or speculating” (*vivendo immo moriendo et damnando fit theologus, non intelligendo, legendo aut speculando*)⁴⁴.

With Luther’s theology of the cross and Shakespeare’s tragedy on our minds we may continue our meditations upon the Prince of Denmark and Student of Wittenberg who lived, died and was probably damned. But being damned, says Luther, makes us theologians. While Hamlet lived God did „happen to” him but he hid his real face under a mask and Hamlet thus experienced only the „strange acts” of God, only his back or „rearward part” (*posteriora*) just as Joseph and Luther first experienced God⁴⁵. This is perhaps the reason why Luther’s name is looming so enigmatically over the text of the play.

(Endnotes)

- 1 If no other indication is given I quote the second Arden edition-series. Jenkins Harold (ed.) Hamlet, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, Methuen, London and New York, 1984.
- 2 *op.cit.*, p.340
- 3 Jennifer Rust, „Wittenberg and Melancholic Allegory: The Reformation and Its Discontents in Hamlet” In, Dennis Taylor and David N. Beauregard, (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2003, p.261
- 4 LW=American Edition of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia-St.Louis, 1955-)
- 5 Kenneth Hagen, „The Testament of a Worm: Luther on Testament and Covenant”, *Consensus* 8 (1982) p.19
- 6 Eric W. Gritsch, *Martin – God’s Court Jester. Luther in Retrospect*, Ramsey, NJ, Sigler Press, 1991 p.33
- 7 *ibid* p.viii
- 8 Quoted by Eric W. Gritsch, „Luther’s Humor as a Tool for Interpreting Scripture” in, Mark S.Burrows and Paul Rorem (eds.) *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective Studies in Honor of Karlfried Froeblich on His Sixtieth Birthday* Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1991, p.188
- 9 Gritsch, *Court Jester*, p.191 and p.258, cf. LW 26,95
- 10 Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross. Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1997, p.xii
- 11 *ibid*
- 12 *ibid* p.9
- 13 *ibid* p.4
- 14 *ibid* p.13
- 15 The English translation of theses 19-20 is given on the basis of McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985, p.148. and the thesis 21 on the basis of Forde’s *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, p.71. The translation of „posteriora” has caused the same conflict in the English translation as in the Hungarian one (Magyar Luther Füzetek 8. p.28)
- 16 Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, p.77
- 17 *ibid* p.31
- 18 Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, p.90
- 19 *ibid* p.90 cf. LW 14,31
- 20 Alister McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985. p.149-151
- 21 „This story is told of Duke Charles of Burgundy. A certain nobleman took an enemy prisoner. The prisoner’s

wife came to ransom her husband. The nobleman promised to give back the husband on condition that she would lie with him. The woman was virtuous, yet wished to set her husband free; so she goes and asks her husband whether she should do this thing in order to set him free. The husband wished to be set free and to save his life, so he gives his wife permission. After the nobleman had lain with the wife, he had the husband beheaded the next day and gave him to her as a corpse. She laid the whole case before Duke Charles. He summoned the nobleman and commanded him to marry the woman. When the wedding day was over he had the nobleman beheaded, gave the woman possession of his property, and restored her to honor. Thus he punished the crime in a princely way.

Observe: No pope, no jurist, no lawbook could have given him such a decision. It sprang from untrammelled reason, above the law in all the books, and is so excellent that everyone must approve of it and find the justice of it written in his own heart. St. Augustine relates a similar story in *The Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*. Therefore, we should keep written laws subject to reason, from which they originally welled forth as from the spring of justice. We should not make the spring dependent on its rivulets, or make reason a captive of letters.” (LW 45, 128-129)

22 See Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, II. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958, pp.418-9.

23 Géher István, *Shakespeare olvasókönyve. Tükörképünk 37 darabban*. Budapest, Cserépfalvi Könyvkiadó, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1991, 327.old.

24 Tibor Fabiny, *The Lion and the Lamb. Figurism and Fulfilment in the Bible, Art and Literature*. London, Macmillan Press, 1992, p.123-4

25 Steve Marx, *Shakespeare and the Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p.80

26 Raymond B.Waddington, „Lutheran Hamlet”, In, *English Language Notes*, December 1989, pp.27-42

27 Waddington, p.32

28 Eric Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, New York, 1958.

29 Quoted by Gritsch, *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 conversion through humble surrender to God: *nackt*”.

31 Gritsch, *Court Jester* p.207

32 Cf. Zsolt Almási, „Hercules alakváltozásai. Hecules-utalások Shakespeare *Hamlet*ében” (Transformations of Hercules. Allusions to Hercules in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) Manuscript.

33 See my article: “The Eye’ as a Metaphor in Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Cordelia and Edgar: Blinded Parents’ Seeing Children” in *Celebrating Comparativism Essays In Honour of György Mihály Vajda* eds. Katalin Kürtösi and József Pál, Szeged, 1994, pp.461-478

34 Roland Mushat Frye, “Prince Hamlet and the Protestant Confessional”, *Theology Today*, Vol.39, 1982, pp.27-38. Further studies on Hamlet and Protestantism (especially Lutheranism): Raymond B.Waddington, “Lutheran Hamlet”, *English Language Notes*, December, 1989, pp.27-42 and Richard Marius, “Fate and Providence: Hamlet’s Take on Martin Luther” *WICK. The Harvard Divinity School Student Journal of Literature and Religion*, Vol.1/1. 1997, pp.37-50.

35 R.M.Frye, *op.cit.* p.30 and p.32,

36 Richard Marius, „Fate and Providence: Hamlet’s take on Martin Luther”, In, *WICK. The Harvard Divinity School Student Journal of Literature and Religion*, Vol.1/1.1997, pp.37-50

37 Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001.

38 Cf. Gordon Isaac, „Some Reflections on Luther’s View of Death”, Manuscript. See esp. LW 25,310

39 Cf. Iván Nyusztyay, *Myth, Telos and Identity. The Tragic Schema in Greek and Shakespearean Drama*, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2002, pp.63-70

40 Luther’s *De servo arbitrio*, 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 Vincentio 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 is 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.