

Autumn Lectures, "Shakespeare Monogatari", for the Angel Foundation,
by Peter Milward, at SJ House, Parlor No.5, Saturday 2.0 – 4.0 pm.

General theme, "Meta-drama in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Tragi-comedies",

Based on e-books, published by BookWay (Himeji)

Opening lecture on Saturday October 3, devoted to "Hamlet",

the only Elizabethan of these plays, at the end of Elizabeth's reign, c.1601,
often regarded as a tragedy or revenge play, but rather a problem play.

Among scholars, four such plays mentioned, with two tragedies, H and TC,
and two comedies, MM and AW, but the comedies already Jacobean after 1603,
while TC is quite different from H – "Hamlet" is unique, or uniquely unique.

The problems represented by the Ghost, as a question-mark hovering overhead.

One such problem concerning the heroines, all ideal in the Elizabethan comedies,

but less than ideal in H, especially in Gertrude his mother, Ophelia his lover.
especially concerning Gertrude, "Frailty, thy name is Woman!"

Another seen in contrast between old Denmark under father and new Denmark
under uncle and mother, expressed in his opening soliloquy (i.2)

"O that this too, too, solid flesh would melt/ Thaw and resolve itself into a dew/

Or that the everlasting had not fixed/ His canon gainst self-slaughter!/"

O God, God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable/ Seem to me all the uses of
this world!... But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!"

Hold it there! Why must H hold his tongue?

Yet he speaks more than almost any other character in Shakespeare's plays!

This is where "meta-drama" comes in = what lies beyond the dramatic action,

= what is implied in what we see and hear on the stage

= what TS Eliot calls "the objective correlative" in the play

= what is hidden in the heart of Sh's mystery, his essential enigma.

Seemingly, H is a prince of 11th cent. Denmark, when England tributary to D.

but really, the play is set in the 16th cent. Elizabethan England, a student play

with Hamlet and Horatio, R and G from Wittenberg, Luther's 16th cent. university
and Laertes (H's opponent) from Paris (Cath univ) but Calvin's university

leading revolt against king, "As the world were not but to begin..."

The contrast between England up till 1558, a predominantly Catholic country,

as recalled by the ghost, from Purgatory, killed without last 3 sacraments –

"unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd" = without communion, confession, unction
and England under Elizabeth after 1558, more secular than religious (Protestant)

largely effected by secretary, William Cecil, later Lord Burghley (Polonius)

Action of the play consisting in mutual espionage, from either side

Polonius with Claudius spying on Hamlet with Ophelia, for cause of distemper,
Hamlet with Horatio spying on Claudius, for conscience of murder.

Reflection of situation of Elizabethan Catholics (recusants), regarded as traitors,
always being spied upon by government agents, Burghley and Walsingham,
while in turn spying on them, using "intelligence".

Significance of H's famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be, that is the question/.

Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer/ The slings and arrows of outrageous
Fortune,/ Or to take arms against a sea of troubles/ And by opposing end them?"

Strangely irrelevant to the play, easily omitted by an impatient producer,
yet strangely relevant to the meaning of the playwright, as referring to the
dilemma faced by Catholics, to continue enduring the unendurable persecution,
or to do something drastic, though ending in death (as in rebellion)

Further contrast between H's soliloquy held in lobby, where Claudius is waiting,
and the other soliloquy of Claudius, as his conscience is caught by H's play
between H's words, reflecting on life after death, inspired by Book of Job,
and the more religious speech of Claudius, tending to repentance.

"O my offence is rank, it smells to heaven..."

Note how both speeches are deeply Biblical, in a play full of such Biblical echoes,
while pointing at a deeper level to the historical situation of Eliz. Catholics,

How such plays need to be interpreted at three levels, not only on the surface,
but also in the light of Biblical echoes (common to Catholic and Protestant)
and in view of the contemporary religious problem (of Catholics)

How I am following my successive interests a) in Shakespeare's Religious
Background, b) in Religious Controversies of Eliz. and Jacobean Ages, c)
in Shakespeare as Papist.

Also more recently in *The Pattern in Sh's Carpet* (again according to TS Eliot)
looking directly from Eliz. Comedies, through Jac. Tragedies (no histories),
to final Tragi-comedies or Romances – opposed to order in First Folio

Lastly, returning to H, as leading onwards beyond mutual espionage to
bloody outcome, as Hamlet sent to England but returning to Denmark,
then challenged to a duel by Laertes – killing each other, etc.

but appealing to idea of divine providence,

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will."

Yet everything remains confused, problematic, enigmatic,

only to be resolved in the three Jacobean tragedies, from O, M, to KL.