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Kenneth Muir

FOUR NOTES ON *HAMLET*

I

The extracts from the Dido play in the second act of *Hamlet* derive ultimately from the *Æneid* II; but some critics think that Shakespeare may have used only Marlowe's *Dido* for the passages concerned. Certainly he did use Marlowe, as there is one close parallel. Marlowe describes how Pyrrhus

> whiskt his word about,
> And with the wind thereof the King fell downe.

So Shakespeare described how

> Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide,
> But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
> Th'unnerved father falls.

Virgil's description of Priam's murder begins with Hecuba urging him to take sanctuary, goes on to speak of his son Polites being slain before his parents' eyes, and of how Priam contrasts the merciful behaviour of Achilles (in allowing him to claim Hector's body) with the ruthless deeds of his son, Pyrrhus. Marlowe adds some additional horrors—Pyrrhus carrying the head of Priam's youngest son spitted on his spear; Priam at Jupiter's altar, with Hecuba clinging to him; Priam begging for mercy and Pyrrhus cutting off his hands as he kneels. Like Marlowe, Shakespeare omits Priam's mention of his visit to Achilles to beg for Hector's body; he omits Pyrrhus' words to Priam and his dragging him by the hair; and he omits Marlowe's picture of Hecuba trying to scratch out Pyrrhus' eyes and the amputation of Priam's hands.

Those who doubt whether Shakespeare had a first-hand knowledge of Virgil argue that the references to Dido in *The Tempest* prove nothing, and they contrast Virgil's account of Dido's meeting with Æneas in the underworld with Shakespeare's (in *Antony and Cleopatra*). Dido in the former version refuses to forgive the desertion of her lover—

> Illa solo fixos oculous aversa tenebat

Antony in the play boasts that when he and Cleopatra arrive in the underworld:

> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze.
> Dido and her Æneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours.

Could anyone who had read the account given in Virgil's sixth book, it is asked, have made the mistake of thinking that Dido and Æneas were there together ? There are several possible explanations of the disparity. Shakespeare may have read the passage years before, perhaps at school, and failed to remember it accurately; or he may have realised that when Antony was supposed to be speaking, Virgil had not yet written his epic, and Antony (or Shakespeare) could be forgiven for altering the end of the Dido story; or, thirdly, Shakespeare may have distinguished between the first meeting in the underworld, while Æneas was still living, and the second meeting, not recorded by Virgil, after Æneas had died and was able to obtain Dido's forgiveness.

The probability that Shakespeare had read at least parts of the *Æneid* may be supported by another echo in *Antony and Cleopatra*. In Virgil's propagandist account of the Battle of Actium (Book VIII) there is a description of the shield presented by Venus[1] :

> Haec inter tumuli late maris ibat imago
> aurea, sed fluctu spumabant caerula cano;
> et circum argento clari delphines in orbem
> aequora verrebant caudis, aestumque secabant
> in medio classes aeratas, Actia bella.

The dolphins are associated with Augustus Caesar; but it is difficult to doubt that Shakespeare knew this passage and transferred the dolphins to Antony in Cleopatra's re-creation of his magnificence :

> His delights
> Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
> The element they liv'd in.

II

It is universally agreed that the bad quarto of *Hamlet* (Q1) is a reported text. The broad discrepancies between it and Q2 may be due to the fact that it represents an earlier version of Shakespeare's play, but it is more likely that the report was contaminated with memories of the earlier play—the order of the scenes, for example, or the substitution of Corambis for Polonius. The matter is complicated by the fact that the printers of Q2 made use of a copy of Q1, so that mistakes were carried over into the superior text. Dover Wilson lists some 150 readings in which Q1 and F1 agree against Q2. Many misprints in Q2 may thus be corrected by reference to F1; but it is reasonable to assume that some were missed by F1. There is at least one Q1 reading, although ignored by editors, which is worth considering. This is in one of the Dido speeches. The three texts read as follows :

> The rugged *Pirrus*, he whose sable armes,
> Blacke as his purpose did the night resemble,
> When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
> Hath now his blacke and grimme complexion smeered
> With Heraldry more dismall, (Q 1)

> the rugged *Pirrhus*, he whose
> sable Armes,
> Black as his purpose did the night resemble,
> When he lay couched in th omynous horse,
> Hath now this dread and black complection smeard,
> With heraldy more dismall (Q 2)

> The rugged *Pyrrhus*, he whose Sable Armes

Blacke as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay couched in the Ominous Horse,
Hath now this dread and blacke Complexion smear'd
With Heraldry more dismall : (F 1)

Clearly Q2 has three mistakes in these five lines : the uncertainty whether the first line is prose or verse, the elision in *th'omynous* and the spelling of *heraldy*. On all these points Q1 is correct and its readings are confirmed by F1. The Folio, however, agrees with Q2 in reading 'this dread and black' instead of 'his black and grim'. It would be impossible to prove the superiority of *dread* to *grim* or of *grim* to *dread*; but there is good reason to believe that Shakespeare wrote *his* rather than *this*. Pyrrhus' arms and purpose are black as night; he becomes 'total gules', smeared in blood from head to foot. It seems more natural to read *his* than *this*; and the letter *h* was frequently misread as *th*. There is an example in the same scene, where Q2 reads 'Seeming to feele this blowe' and F misprints 'his blow'.

III

In the most famous speech in the play Hemlet declares:

Thus conscience dooes make cowards, (Q2)
cowardes of vs all (Q1. F1)

Nearly all editors assume that *conscience* means reflection; and Bradley complains that the Oxford Dictionary 'unfortunately lends its authority to the misinterpretation' that the word in this context means 'the sense of right and wrong as regards things for which one is responsible'. Now the word *conscience* is used eight times in *Hamlet* and in the remaining seven it clearly means a sense of right and wrong ('They are not near my conscience', 'the conscience of the King', 'almost against my conscience'). Indeed, in the very scene under discussion Claudius confesses to his bad conscience :

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience !

I think there can be no doubt that this is also the meaning in

Hamlet's soliloquy. He is saying that we hesitate to commit suicide, partly because it is a sin so to do, and partly because we are aware of our own sinfulness and afraid of the Last Judgement.

But Shakespeare is a wily bird. As Hamlet says, he is not so easily played upon as a pipe. Although the primary meaning of conscience seems incontrovertible, it is quite possible that Shakespeare was aware of the other meaning; and the two meanings are both implied in the lines in the last soliloquy in which for the last time Hamlet wonders why he has not yet killed his uncle :

> whether it be
> Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on the event;
> A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom,
> And ever three parts coward, I do not know
> Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do' . . .

Here we have conscience related both to reflection and to moral scruples, and, as in the earlier soliloquy, conscience (in both senses) is the apparent cause of cowardice.

IV

More than fifty years ago, it was possible to see a performance of a Shakespeare play at the Old Vic for 5d (about 2p of the present currency); and as I lived in London I was able to see every production more than once. In the late 'twenties and early 'thirties I saw there three productions of *Hamlet* with Ion Swinley, John Gielgud and Ernest Milton in the title-role. All were remarkable performances and Gielgud's became the classic interpretation for a whole generation. I shared the general admiration for Gielgud's performance, but I regarded it as closely rivalled by that of Swinley, who suffered from first-night nerves and never impressed the critics as warmly as he impressed Old Vic audiences.

These three performances, however different in detail, shared certain assumptions, literary and historical. They were

all roughly Bradleian; that is to say they all stressed the effect of his father's death and his mother's remarriage on the Prince; they all, consciously or unconsciously, believed with Eliot that Shakespeare's theme was the effect of a mother's guilt on a son. Noel Coward had written of the same topic in *The Vortex*, with a neurotic son and an adulterous mother. An equally important influence was the anti-war sentiment of the period. It may be significant that in 1933 Gielgud appeared in the pacifist play, *Richard of Bordeaux*. About the same time there were performances of *Le Tombeau sous l'arc de triomphe* and of *Miracle at Verdun*, while a few years before there had been a long run of *Journey's End*. The three Hamlets mentioned all had scruples about the killing of Claudius.

Laurence Olivier's film (1948)—he had played the part on the stage in 1937—was misleadingly prefaced by Hamlet's words on the 'dram of eale' and a statement that the film was about a man who could not make up his mind. In fact the hero was more heroic than those of the 'thirties, less poetic, and less self-critical—the soliloquy at the end of Act 2 was cut. It was also more overtly Freudian than any previous production, Gertrude being young enough, it was said, to be Hamlet's mistress.

During the next twenty years the English theatre was influenced by the political theatre of Brecht, by the Theatre of Cruelty and the Theatre of the Absurd, by Jan Kott, by the phenomenon of the Angry Young Men, and by unrest among students. So when David Warner played Hamlet at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1965, he looked and spoke like a disaffected student, like 'a suitable case for treatment', the title of a film in which he afterwards acted brilliantly. He did not seem to be a prince either in gesture or speech, his one positive characteristic being his love for his father. I pass over other Hamlets, such as the one who climbed into a property-basket, and just refer to a production which ran for twelve years in Moscow. In place of a curtain, there was a huge

iron door and inside were numerous small rooms which looked like cells. The set was based on Hamlet's statement that Denmark was a prison. Although the director was a high-ranking official some critics thought that the idea of the production was suggested by the pains and tribulations of the artist in Stalin's Russia. In Kozintsev's impressive film (1964) there was great emphasis on the power struggle between Hamlet and Claudius, and no psychological complexity in the hero.

Michael Pennington in the 1980 Stratford production was more princely than any recent Hamlet but he was placed in what seemed like a rehearsal room. The idea behind this was that the central theme of the play is acting, not merely because of the play within the play and Hamlet's advice to the players, but because all the characters, and especially the Prince, are role-playing. This is certainly one theme of the play but in practice it had the effect of alienating the audience. One doubts whether the Brechtian method is appropriate to Shakespearian tragedy.

I have tried to show that stage interpretations are influenced by the writing of literary critics—one is tempted to say the more eccentric the greater the influence—by theatrical fashions which are apt to change rapidly, and by the social and political ideas of the period. Such influences are inevitable; but one cannot help feeling that directors sometimes sacrifice the deeper significances of Shakespearian tragedies by pretending that he is our contemporary.

NOTE

1 'Among these subjects extended a wide and swelling sea;
It was done in gold, yet it looked like the blue sea foaming with white caps:
Dolphins, picked out in silver, were cart-wheeling all around,
Lashing the face of the deep with their tails and cleaving the water.
Centrally were displayed two fleets of bronze, engaged in
The battle of actium'. (tr. C. Day Lewis)

Giorgio Melchiori

HAMLET'S QUEST*

Dialectic Plays

Hamlet and the Problem Play : It was E. M. W. Tillyard who in 1950 transferred *Hamlet* from its traditional Bradleian grouping with the great tragedies to that peculiar threesome of Shakesperean works produced between 1601 and 1604—*Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*—which had always disconcerted the critics. The first of them had been catalogued in the Folio among the tragedies and the other two among the comedies, but neither definition seemed to fit them. 'Tragicomedies' was no longer a fashionable term and 'dark comedies' appeared rather inadequate; W. W. Lawrence had hit in 1931 on the label 'problem comedies', and Tillyard had to be content with that, substituting of course 'plays' for 'comedies'. This kind of classification was more intuitive than rational : *Hamlet* and the other three plays were 'problems' mainly for the critics, who saw in them anomalous features in comparison with the codified dramatic models, and therefore found them full of questions, suggestions and stimuli for a discussion that remained open well beyond the limits of the single texts. Problem plays, therefore, in that they were in some way 'open works', not concluded within the two hours' traffic of our stage; nobody can believe that the problems of Hamlet and of the state of Denmark could be solved with the sudden takeover by Fortinbras, or that the cowardly killing of Hector could compensate for Cressida's unfaithfulness or Troilus's

* Adapted and translated by the author from his Introduction to *Hamlet* (trans Eugenio Montale) in W. Shakespeare. *I drammi dialettici* a cura di Giorgio Melchiori (Milan, 1977).

disenchantment; in the other two comedies marriages consummated through bed-tricks or imposed by the authorities do not solve the moral questions posed by such characters as Bertram or Angelo or the ambiguous Duke in *Measure for Measure*. What is missing in these plays is the cathartic element : their vitality does not consist in the presentment of a series of conflicts which have tragic or happy endings, giving them a final solution on the ethical or logical or aesthetic level; if there are solutions, they are valid only on a pragmatic level; their vitality consists exclusively in the debate within the play, independently from the quality of the ending, it consists in a continuous dialectic confrontation which acquires the absolute quality of a quest for truth—a truth that, in order to be true, cannot be one and univocal. It is this consciousness of dialectic values, the supremacy of debate over conclusions, that is shared by *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure* making of them the prototypes of a new drama : they are no longer tragedies or comedies according to the classical or the Renaissance models, they are what Walter Benjamin has called *Lustspiele* or *Trauerspiele*, comic or mournful performances, reflecting that new sensibility that the historical convention has called baroque, but which is still with us today.

Drama as Dialectics : For these reasons I would like to call *Hamlet* and the other three tragicomedies 'dialectic plays' : it is a way of underlining the specific element which, at a formal and structural level, substantiates that vague 'problematic nature' that recent criticism has acknowledged as their common characteristic. It may be objected that, after all, a dialectic element is indispensable to any dramatic text : it is the natural expression of that conflict which is the very essence of dramatic form—communication through verbal confrontation—in respect of the other narrative forms. But there is a difference : in the first place, dramatic experience is not made only of words, the language of the stage is much more complex, including gestural and visual elements, while

the written text, with its stage directions, is but the music score of a work which comes to life and is realized only in the performance; the dialectic element is only one of the several components of the theatrical event, and not always or necessarily the most relevant.

Quest Conquest or Inquest : There is another and more important consideration : in the classical and Renaissance theatre, drama is representation of a conflict in dialectic forms, but the conflict has a very precise motive : the conquest of power; protagonist and antagonist contend for the conquest of each other and frequently of a third object or person—the state, the loved one, wealth, or even virtue, the supreme moral good. And this is true not only of tragedy but also of comedy, where the verbal battle aims at an amorous conquest. But *Hamlet* and the other dialectic plays do not conform to this model. Much of the importance of *Hamlet* in theatre history resides in the fact that it offers, perhaps for the first time, a new dramatic model that presupposes new structures. In *Hamlet* conflict aimed at a certain type of conquest is replaced by a dialectic process aimed at exploring the motives of the actions presented on stage. In both cases the conflict is a quest; but while in the classical theatre the model proposed was that of a conquest, in *Hamlet* and in the baroque theatre the model is that of an inquest. It is the same fundamental distinction existing between the *Iliad* (conquest) and the *Odyssey* (inquest), a distinction which in more recent times marked the transition from the so-called realistic novel (conquest) to the so-called psychological novel (inquest).

The Play of *Hamlet*

The Play and its Sources : *Hamlet* is the longest of Shakespeare's plays : one quarter longer than *Othello* and *King Lear* and nearly double *Macbeth*. It could be asked how an expert man of the theat e like Shakespeare came to supply his company with a script that he could realistically never hope to see staged in its entirety. Perhaps we could

find a reply to this question in the evolution of the text and in a consideration of its sources, the story in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (derived from Saxo Grammaticus) and, no doubt, the lost play which we now call the *Ur-Hamlet*. When, at the end of the sixteenth century, Shakespeare undertook (or was asked by his fellow players) to rewrite this popular revenge tragedy, he must have been familiar with it for years, perhaps he had even acted in it : it was a text he knew from inside knowledge, the potentialities of which he had fully realized. The length of *his* version of the play is the product of the long and rich ripening process that the text had in the conscience of the author. In our attempt to reconstruct this ripening process we can only take into account the transformation that Belleforest's story, and what little is known of the *Ur-Hamlet*, underwent in the version of *Hamlet* published in 1604-5. We know that the author of the *Ur-Hamlet* had introduced into the story the ghost of the murdered king as the unavoidable starting device of the mechanism of the revenge tragedy. Saxo's narrative re-told by Belleforest had an episodic ambience, unsuitable for dramatic treatment : the dramatist must establish links and relationships between characters who in the story were only shadows. So the girl used in the story as a decoy to discover if Amleth is actually the idiot that he pretends to be, and the foolish councillor who had volunteered to eavesdrop in the queen's closet become in the play daughter and father, Ophelia and Polonius, and to them is added Laertes, brother and son, so as to create a triangle of family relationships also among those characters which had been initially conceived simply as instruments of an evil monarch. The inclusion of these characters dramatically linked with each other and with the two protagonists-antagonists (Hamlet and the King) creates new dialectic contexts and a series of interpersonal dramatic situations that completely redirect the narrative functions of the original story. The Hamlet-Ophelia relationship cannot be simply that between a pretended idiot

and a temptress, but becomes much more complex and ambiguous, to the point that the girl must be completely involved in the tragic ending, while the faked madness of Hamlet receives from this new relationship a very different colouring from the simple one in Saxo Grammaticus. Already Belleforest, using a terminology that was becoming fashionable in the late sixteenth century, had spoken of 'melancholy'; this word, for Shakespeare's contemporaries, had a much more precise connotation, fully explored in the *Treatise of Melancholie* by Timothy Bright (1586) and amply exploited by the dramatist. Finally, the revenge tragedy pattern requires not only the final massacre (rudely foreshadowed in the source story), but also the destruction of the hero in the tragic catastrophe since revenge, even if its motivations are right, entails the damnation of the revenger. It is actuated through such a sequence of deceptions and counterdeceptions that whoever is involved in it is destroyed. All the departures from the sources in the final scene of the play are conditioned by rules governing the revenge tragedy, and may well have been introduced by the anonymous author of the lost *Ur-Hamlet*.

Enquiring into the Mechanics of Revenge: Shakespeare had already employed the mechanism of the revenge tragedy, with an extra dose of horrors, in his *Titus Andronicus*, where all the rules of the game are applied with punctilious efficiency. *Hamlet*, conceived along the same lines, gives him the opportunity to examine anew this well-tested mechanism, no longer from the point of view of its spectacular effectiveness, but from that of its internal logic. He is not interested in ascertaining its proper working, but in seeing how it operates and why. The operation performed in *Hamlet* is practically a taking to pieces of that mechanism in order to study the origin and nature of each component part: such an enquiry utterly subverts the traditional structural organization of the dramatic work. It is no longer a conflict between opposed forces trying by deceit or violence to destroy each other, but a search in depth, an in-quest into the nature of such forces,

and of their motives, and therefore an enquiry into the motives of human actions. From the enquiry into the revenge mechanism we move on to that into the inner mechanics of that mysterious and complex machine which is man, his psychological motivations, his social and cultural conditioning. At the beginning of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, the ghost of Andrea came forward, explained his situation, asked for revenge, and then remained on the stage in view of the audience to watch and comment upon the revenging action that he had advocated. Instead *Hamlet* opens on a question: why the ghost ? And the whole of the first act has an expositive and informative function meant to provide, in the form of an open debate, the essential data required to formulate a reply—but the reply remains in its turn open, indeterminate. For centuries we have heard of hamletic doubts and indecisions, of his temporising tactics, of his inability to act. In fact the whole play is a perfect demonstration of the dramatic necessity of this apparently hesitant way of proceeding.

The Politics of 'Hamlet' : To start with, there is a political situation lucidly stated with its historical reasons in the first scene: the protracted conflict between Denmark and Norway, going back to the previous generation, to the combat in which old Hamlet slew old Fortinbras; this gives rise to a situation of inverted parallelism that remains muted throughout the play to re-emerge only at the end: both young Hamlet and young Fortinbras have not succeeded to the thrones of their fathers; their respective uncles reign in their stead; but the two uncles (and the case of the good king of Norway makes this plain) are not necessarily usurpers: both countries are ruled by elected, not hereditary, sovereigns. So, the first theme emerging in *Hamlet* is the political theme, shown at the beginning through an analogical process that allows us, by successive stages, to identify the ever-present Hamlet with the absent Fortinbras, justifying at the end the takeover of the second from the first, so that he can undertake the task of restoring order in the state. In the meantime

the political debate keeps re-emerging, in the comments of Hamlet on Claudius' rule, in those of such dubious or negative characters as Claudius himself and Rosencrantz on the representativeness and the sacredness of the king's person or again of Hamlet on the responsibilities that the prince cannot shirk from the very fact of having been *born* of royal blood: his statement at the close of the first act is a basic key to a correct reading of the text: 'the time is out of joint. O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right'. From a strictly legal point of view, Claudius is not an usurper, and the second scene of the first act is intended to make this point clear; at the same time in this very scene another and much more serious type of usurpation is suggested, connected with the ethical and sexual level: an incestuous relationship, a behaviour that brings corruption to the persons involved and to the state itself—this is the true usurpation of Claudius, even before the ghost brands him as a fratricide as well as a regicide.

Inverted Parallelisms : This opens up another thematic vein in ***Hamlet***, which has given rise to psychoanalytic interpretations, specially in terms of the Oedipus complex. Also in this case Shakespeare created a whole series of inverted parallelisms in his exploration of interpersonal and blood relationships: Hamlet-Ghost, Hamlet-Gertrude, Hamlet-Claudius on the one hand, Polonius-Ophelia, Polonius-Laertes, Ophelia-Laertes on the other; and, the most evasive of all, the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia, connecting the two groups. (There are of course other cross-parallelisms, connected with the father-son opposition: Hamlet-Polonius in the first part of the play and Claudius-Laertes in the second). But the basic Hamlet-Ophelia connection can be transferred from the psychological to the objective theatrical context in which Shakespeare worked: if he decided to write for the character of Hamlet the longest 'part' that had ever been conceived for an actor, it was due to the fact that in those years Richard Burbage, the leading actor of the Cham-

berlain's Men, had reached his full artistic maturity and was therefore able to sustain a role of nearly 1500 lines; Ophelia was instead a real problem: the part had to be entrusted to a boy in the company, an apprentice that would change in a few years, as soon as his voice broke. Shakespeare turned to advantage this very drawback, writing for Ophelia an extremely ambiguous part, that lends itself to a whole gamut of contrasting interpretations, as boy followed boy in the role. He has transformed a technical necessity into psychological subtlety, creating a contradictory link-figure, a personification of the basic ambiguity and polivalence of the play, in its entirety and in each of its speeches.

Oxymoron vs Linguistic Structure : This ambiguity and polivalence, emphasising the dialectic element even in the many soliloquies of the play—soliloquies which are not intended, like, for instance, Iago's, to convey information or self-revelation, but rather to carry on an open debate within the character or between character and audience—is reflected on the stylistic level in the repeated use of the figure of oxymoron. In the second scene Claudius uses it shamelessly in order to hide his secret guilt (the killing of his brother in order to marry his sister-in-law), but on the lips of Hamlet and of the other characters oxymorons become the linguistic mirrors of an existential situation. It is indeed at the level of language that *Hamlet* marks a decisive advance on the previous plays: the verbal expressiveness and complexity that all critics have underlined, noticing a close affinity between the language of *Hamlet* and that of the major metaphysical poets, is the clearest evidence of the real nature of the play: an enquiry into the inextricable knot of contradictions represented by the motives of human action. The figure of oxymoron, that Doctor Johnson, speaking of the metaphysical poets, had called *discordia concors*, is the emblematic expression of this 'subtile knot' at the level of verbal communication; it expresses the situation of conflict which is essential to dramatic form, intensifying the scenic vitality of the play.

The Inquest Pattern: All this is grafted onto the pattern of the revenge tragedy, which undergoes a transformation from the inside through the adoption of the new narrative-dramatic model: no longer, as we have seen, a conflict aimed at the conquest or the preservation of some sort of power, but a quest into the motives of actions. In-quest becomes dramatic technique and narrative method. If it is true that the first act opens with the question 'why the ghost?', the same act does not end, in conformity with the model of the revenge tragedy, with the acceptance of the ghost's demand for revenge, but with another and more complex question: what is the ghost? what credit can be given it? To this basic inquest, that lasts till the third appearance of the ghost in the queen's closet (when, significantly, Hamlet sees and hears it, but Gertrude doesn't), many others are added, as if to underline the dramatic necessity for this procedure; they are concerned not with the behaviour of the ghost but with that of the other characters, Hamlet in the first place. Hamlet himself, in order to reply to the basic question on the nature of the ghost must start an enquiry into the truth of its accusations against king Claudius, that is to say, into Claudius's guilt; Hamlet's antic disposition becomes a means of enquiry, not, as in the original story, a way of avoiding the homicidal fury of his uncle. In order to underline the inquest motif, which becomes the supporting structure of the play, there are not only in the first act the close questionings of Horatio by Hamlet on the apparition of the ghost and of Ophelia by Polonius on Hamlet's behaviour, but, right at the beginning of the second act, a brief scene is introduced which at first sight seems superfluous to the development of the story: Polonius asks his servant Reynaldo (a character that is not to appear again in the play) to conduct a private enquiry into the behaviour of Laertes in Paris; the point of the scene, its function, is exclusively methodological: if the method is that of the inquest (a method imposed by the ambiguous nature of the ghost, whose authenticity and credibility are to be

ascertained in the first place), the same procedure must be used for all the other characters: the first to be enquired into is Laertes, the character that least requires such treatment – the choice of Laertes is meant to assert the principle that nobody can be exempted from such inquisition. Each character takes on in turn also the roles of inquisitor and informer, though with marked differences: Claudius, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern assume these roles as evidence of the methods of a police state (Denmark *is* a prison); the others instead use the same methods as part of their quest for human truth, so that the whole play loses its character of cruel game of cunning serving the mechanism of revenge, and becomes a passionate and desperate exploration of the human condition; an exploration the more poetic the more it turns inside the character, as in the great soliloquies which mark the different movements of the play. They translate it to a new dimension of its own, independent of its actual duration and of its acting space, so that they are no longer the time and the space of the character and of the dramatic action, but the time and the space of the spectator, utterly involved as a man in the highest expression of the theatre: the presentation of his humanity.

The Dramaturgic Structures

Time and Dramatic Sequence : More than any play of Shakespeare, *Hamlet* has suffered—in respect of a correct 'reading' of its structural organization – from an artificial division into acts and scenes superimposed on it in strict observance of the classical rules. The division between III. iv and IV. i, right in the middle of the closet scene, is notorious: it originated from the naturalistic view according to which, between the moment Hamlet walks out of the closet dragging along Polonius' carcass and that in which Claudius joins the queen there, the time lapse must be not just a few seconds but several minutes. This attitude is due to a lack of understanding of the treatment of time functions in the Elizabethan

theatre, that is to say, of the constant process of compression of the 'real' times in the scenic duration, a process amply documented from the very first scene of Hamlet: at the beginning we are informed that it is exactly midnight, but after no more than ten minutes of acting time, with no break or location change, Horatio spies the dawn: 'But look, the morn in russet mantle clad Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill'. In fact the time element is at the basis of the structural organization of *Hamlet*, extended over five 'days', the last four of which form two groups of two each. The play on the basis of its time sequence lends itself both to a three-part and a five-part division (though radically different from that suggested by the early editors who introduced the act division), with one major break, an ambivalent time-gap filled in by a short scene, that would allow the performance of the play in just two extended parts, the first being more than double the second. Such a wide gamut of possibilities shows Shakespeare's achievement of full mastery in structuring the scenic action: the alternative organizations are functional to the contents of the action, conceived in thematically interrelated but differently characterized blocks.

Sequences and Macrosequences : *Hamlet* is organized in five scenic sequences (each of them formed of a series of consecutive scenes constituting a time *continuum*, though with possible changes of location), which can be grouped into three macrosequences. The first sequence, corresponding to about 22% of the total length of the play, coincides with the first macrosequence. The other two macrosequences correspond respectively to 48% and 30% of the length of the play and are parallel to each other insomuch as each of them is formed of two shorter sequences proportional to each other: within each macrosequence the first of the two component shorter sequences is in the relation of 2 to 3 to the second. Each of the macrosequences covers two consecutive days (one day for each smaller sequence) while between the different macrosequences there are much wider time gaps.

The First Macrosequence (Sequence 1) The first macrosequence (or sequence) coincides with the first act in the traditional division and constitutes the protasis of the action. The 'real' time covered goes from one midnight to the next continuing to the very early dawn. It is constructed with perfect symmetry: the first and last scenes (I. i and I. iv-v) are the only two in the play taking place on the castle battlements and they are both dominated by the presence of the ghost; within this night frame which emphasizes not so much the supernatural element as the father-son relationship, two court scenes are included, one hingeing on the Hamlet-Claudius-Gertrude relationship, the other on the Polonius Ophelia-Laertes relationship (the interpersonal relations are superimposed on the representation of a political situation reflected in the moral world), and between the two, at the centre of the sequence, is the meeting between Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus—the two latter, the hero's confidants, are the characters that, after Hamlet, have the longest presence on stage in this part of the play.

The Second Macrosequence : The second macrosequence (from II.i to IV.iii or IV.iv), equivalent in length to very nearly half the play, is the main body of the play, the epitasis or central knot. The leading figures in it, apart from Hamlet, are no longer his confidants or his father's ghost : the characters that stay longest on the stage are characters that didn't appear at all in the first macrosequence and are not to appear again in the third – they are the mercenary informants, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, replacing Horatio and Marcellus. It is here that Polonius hides behind doors and arrases to spy on Hamlet, (but the spying will be his death), that he sets an informer on his son Laertes in France, that he submits his daughter Ophelia to close questioning and uses her as *agent provocateur* and informer; but it is also here that Hamlet undertakes and completes his enquiry into the truth of the ghost and the guilt of Claudius.

Sequence 2 : The first and the shortest of the two sequen-

ces forming this part of the tragedy (corresponding to act II of the play, 19% of the length) revisits in reversed order the locations of the central scenes of sequence 1 : first Polonius's apartment, then the king's presence chamber; the internal parallelisms in the two scenes are particularly marked: in the same way as Polonius first charges Reynaldo to enquire about Laertes and then listens to Ophelia's information about Hamlet's behaviour, so Claudius at the beginning of the second scene first charges Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to enquire about Hamlet and then listens to Polonius's information about the prince and plans with him the trap, with Ophelia as bait, into which Hamlet should fall. When Hamelt comes finally on stage, the mechanism of the inquest begins to function in full : first Polonius, then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exercise the role of inquirers, but with the arrival of the players the situation is reversed: with their help Hamlet lays out the final mousetrap for Claudius; the soliloquy at the close of the sequence (Hamlet's meditation on the passionate emotional participation of the player in the narrative of the mythical sorrow of Hecuba) bears witness to Shakespeare's conception of the dramatist's art as a way of achieving the truth in the expression of feelings through a deliberate fiction consciously used as a vehicle of communication.

Sequence 3 : The other sequence (from III.i to IV.iii, or about 27.5% of the total length of the play, corresponding in terms of 'real' time to the next day, from the evening to the following morning) is the central block of the dramatic action, the conclusion of the different inquests, the conquest of truth. The unifying element of the closely connected scenes is not only the time *continuum* but also the spacial dimension : everything happens inside the royal palace, even if, especially in the second half of the sequence, the palace becomes a labyrinth in which the characters chase each other, often unseeingly brushing past each other; the king's oratory, the queen's closet, the gallery where Hamlet drags Polonius's body, the rooms and corridors through which Rosencrantz

and Guildenstern look for Hamlet, are all places skilfully evoked by Shakespeare's art within a scenic space that, being unchangeable and just because it is unchangeable, is rendered extremely varied by the dramatic discourse—so that the spectator is lost in it in the same way as the conciences of the characters are lost when faced with so manifest a state of corruption. In the central point of this sequence, coinciding with the mathematical centre of the whole tragedy, stands the revelation of the truth and of the meaning of the entire dramatic action. The revelation takes place in terms that could not have been more strictly theatrical, using to the utmost its chosen means of communication: it takes place during a dramatic performance within the dramatic performance, during the play that the strolling players act at the court of Denmark.

The Centre : the Play within the Play : We must assess the function of the play within the play. It is not a device invented by Shakespeare : the model was provided in the first place by Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, whose protagonists set up a court performance in which they took the roles of imaginary characters, but then transformed the new scenic fiction into dramatic reality: the fictional killings are true murders and the play within the play is the means of completing the chain of revenges. Kyd's invention was suggested by his preoccupation to produce in an audience still imperfectly familiar with theatrical experiences a 'suspension of disbelief': the moment when the fictional characters of a play disguise themselves as actors in order to perform another dramatic fiction, they acquire in the eyes of the audience a new credibility as 'real' persons – no longer characters in an invented story, but participants in an authentic action that is taking place in front of the spectators; in this way the tragedy called *The Spanish Tragedy* becomes real as compared with the stage fiction which, within it, its characters set up and perform before an audience which is partly formed by other characters in the play. Such a use of the play within the play had been made

by other playwrights before Shakespeare. But in *Hamlet* the reasons for introducing this well-tested device are different and subtler; Shakespeare dose not need to produce a suspension of disbelief in his audience : *Hamlet* is in itself an authentic and autonomous universe. The court performance does not serve to render more true characters who, after all, don't take part in it (like those in *The Spanish Tragedy*) but are only spectators in their turn; the performance is entrusted to professional players, not involved in the affairs of the state of Denmark. The performance (twice repeated, at first as a dumb show to inform the audience of its basic narrative line, then introducing the words, so as to point out the complex mechanism of dramatic communication) can be taken as Shakespeare's manifesto of what theatre is: like poetry or any other means of aesthetic communication (but perhaps for him more than any other means in that it involves at the same time poetry itself, gestures, visual and tridimensional elements) drama is fiction which communicates truth: the truth of Claudius's fratricide unconsciously revealed by the players performing *The Murder of Gonzago* is the metonymic projection of that truth of the human conscience that it is the task of the theatre and of each single play to enquire into, to discover and to reveal. Here is the reason for the absolute centrality of the play within the play in *Hamlet*: it is the pivot on which the entire structure of the play turns. In spite of, or better, because of its elaborate three or five-part distribution, *Hamlet's* structure is strongly centralized, with a centripetal phase completed in the play within the play, while from that moment on the centrifugal phase begins, a sequence of catastrophic events starting with the casual killing of Polonius.

The Ambivalent Segment : The second macrosequence, in the Quarto version of the play of 1604-5, finds a kind of epilogue in the one scene in this whole section taking place outside the closed walls of the palace : it is scene IV. iv (about 1.5% of the total length) in which, on his way to the

harbour, Hamlet meets Fortinbras's army crossing Denmark to wage war in Poland. Hamlet's monologue at the end of the scene is perfectly symmetrical with that at the end of the first of the two sequences forming the solid central block of the play.

But in the Folio version of 1623 the scene is reduced to a mere seven lines exchanged between Fortinbras and one of his captains; Hamlet does not at all figure in it. In this form, IV. iv is no longer the epilogue to the second macrosequence, linked to it by time continuity, but is instead a brief prologue to the third macrosequence : it accounts for the presence of Fortinbras in Denmark at the moment of the final catastrophe and is exactly symmetrical with the very last segment of the play, the one other passage where Fortinbras is present in person; in this way it establishes the perfect circularity and self-containment of the last great dramatic block of the tragedy, the third macrosequence.

It would be worth inquiring into the presence, in some of Shakespeare's tragedies, of such scenes, functioning either as pauses, summarizing and commenting on what has gone before and preparing for what is still to come, or as pivots to the total action of the play; the mourning banquet scene in *Titus Andronicus* (III. ii) and perhaps the Senate in *Timon of Athens* (III. v) fulfil the first function, while the triumvirs scenes in both *Julius Caesar* (IV. i) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (III. vi) act as pivotal points to the action of their respective plays. Scene IV. iv of *Hamlet*, in its more extended form in the Quarto, aims at combining both functions, while in the Folio version it concentrates rather on the second.

The Third Macrosequence : The third and final macrosequence, extending from IV. v to the end of the play, includes, as the previous one, two shorter sequences of unequal length, representing two consecutive days separated by a very short time interval.

Sequence 4 : The first and shorter of the two final sequences (from IV. v to IV. vii, about 11.5% of the total length of

the play) is characterized by the absence of Hamlet and takes place in a perfect time and place *continuum* in the enclosed space of the court, underlining its claustrophobic character. The real madness of Ophelia in this sequence balances Hamlet's pretended madness in sequence 2, while Laertes, absent in the second macrosequence, replaces at this stage Polonius as the associate of Claudius—but this time his purpose is not to enquire into the behaviour of Hamlet but to plan his death.

Sequence 5 : The last sequence (corresponding to act V and equal in length to 18.5% of the total play), though once again a time *continuum*, is clearly divided into two sections by its separate locations : the churchyard and the court. The churchyard, an open space like the battlements of the castle haunted by the ghost, recalls the function of those early scenes : churchyard and battlements are both the domain of the spirits of the dead, but now with an earthlier and more human quality, suggested by the speeches of the clown-gravedigger—instead of the armed spirit of Hamlet's father, the toothless grinning skull of Yorick, the court fool, reigns here. It is a clear reflection on court life. The court itself takes over in the last scene : the political theme reaffirms itself and the court becomes the place of betrayal, actually of a chain of betrayals that lead to the final massacre; it is the place, in Horatio's words, 'Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts; Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters, Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause' not a churchyard, but a loathsome shambles. There is no catharsis. The mournful performance is over, but the quest, the in-quest, has just begun in the consciousness of each single spectator.

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WILSON KNIGHT ON HAMLET AND CLAUDIUS

—*A Discussion**

STONE : Professor Wilson Knight, your views on Hamlet have naturally changed over the years. For example, in your early essay, 'The Rose of May' [in *The Inperial Theme*, 1931], you appeared to see Hamlet, as the harmful element in a normal society, not the good element in a society which is evil and needs reforming. But in '*Hamlet* Reconsidered' [in *The Wheel of Fire*, 1930], you state : 'Hamlet suffers for his profundity, for the advance . . . beyond normality,' and 'is on the way to superman status' [pp. 300-301]. What are your views now of his positive qualities ?

KNIGHT : I think that Hamlet was near a very high state of being, but to be near such a state and not quite bring it off, may lead one into a considerable amount of trouble; I wouldn't say that Hamlet is to be blamed. We're judging him by a very high standard. But a man whose thoughts are so bitter, so generally concentrated on death, cannot be held out as a model. He is not the kind of man who could reform any society, except perhaps at the end. He does touch something different at the end, just touches it.

STONE : I should have thought that, by his description of Horatio, his recommendation to the Players in the field of Art, his view of his father, Hamlet does keep consistently before the audience an ideal which he is somehow prevented from fulfilling.

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*Unpublished transcript of a B. B. C. discussion on *Hamlet*, recorded 26 September 1970. Speakers Professor Wilson Knight and Mr Brian Stone.

KNIGHT : I agree. In his address to the Players and to Horatio he does put the ideal before us—the poise, the balance, the harmony —which he is presumably striving for himself. But whoever may be to blame, himself or society, he does not easily attain it.

STONE : But society's main representative is Claudius—a criminal and the formal antagonist in the play.

KNIGHT : I've always maintained that if you follow the text closely, Claudius is not drawn as a despicable villain. He and Hamlet are called—the phrase is Hamlet's—'mighty opposites'. Claudius has, we know, a crime behind him. But so has society always, a host of crimes, and as its members we are all guilty on a number of counts. In drama the guilt is clearer when shown as personal and extreme, but it's the same problem. Claudius is a man of reason, commonsense, normality, and a good governor. He is not a genius, but he is effective, and he sets about solving international problems by peace rather than by war. We today can surely approve of that. Most important of all, when Hamlet first becomes an open threat we are reminded, by a crucial speech, of Claudius' importance within the play's society as King. It is spoken by Rosencrantz, acting as a choric figure, not just as a flatterer. The words are:

> The cease of majesty
> Dies not alone, but, like a gulf, doth draw
> What's near it with it; it is a massy wheel,
> Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
> To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
> Are mortis'd and adjoin'd. [III. iii. 15]

Now however much we sympathise with Hamlet, we're surely meant to recognize a public danger in a man who behaves as Hamlet is behaving. Besides, Claudius is more than a figurehead. He is, as a man, kingly. When later on Laertes enters at the head of a revolutionary and raging crowd, Claudius speaks lines that stand out from all Shakespeare in their dignity and assurance, spoken by a king as

a king :

> What is the cause, Laertes,
> That thy rebellion looks so giant-like ?
> Let him go, Gertrude; do not fear our person.
> There's such divinity doth hedge a king
> That treason can but peep to what it would,
> Acts little of his will. Tell me, Laertes,
> Why thou art thus incens'd. Let him go, Gertrude,
> —Speak man. [IV. v. 120]

Shakespeare knows perfectly well what he is doing. He is building up before us a man of innate royalty, one, as it were, born to govern and govern well. Against him is Hamlet, who has seen the fearful evil upon which this great good has been built. *There's* a problem for him—and for us.

STONE : About those words of 'dignity and assurance' as you call them. Of course there's a real threat from Laertes and his Danes, but Claudius believes that he's won his big battle: Hamlet has gone away by sea to be murdered. The audience see Claudius' behaviour as that of a man in a fool's paradise, because Hamlet will return. Claudius' nobility when threatened with assassination has to be contrasted with his ignobility at the moment of his death. 'Yet defend me, friends, I am but hurt'. That's absurd, because he knows he's been wounded by a poisoned rapier. Do you think a noble character could have such an ignoble death ?

KNIGHT : I wouldn't deny that our sympathies are with Hamlet, the 'sweet prince' and so on, and that at the end of the play we are satisfied that Claudius, who is a criminal, by very reason of his past crime and subsequent plots, must not be given a grand tragic end, like say Richard II or Othello. But I don't see Claudius' end as so ignoble. I think I could use his dying words, 'O I yet defend me, friends', for my own argument. He is a man of conviviality and a devoted husband. He is respected, and it seems liked,

by those around him; and he has, I think, every right to call them 'friends'. Hamlet appears to have no real friends except Horatio: he is shown as isolated within a community that fears him.

STONE : But what about the rest of Claudius' character ? What the ghost says of the murder and incest and so forth ?

KNIGHT : I was recently talking on *Hamlet* at the City of London School, and one of the boys remarked that according to the play, it did certainly seem that Claudius was guilty of a sexual crime. My answer was that, though the Ghost and Hamlet call Claudius' marriage incest, Claudius himself, and the court, show no signs of regarding it as a sin. In sexual matters much may depend on convention, and conventions change. This marriage is, within the play's many transitional valuations, clearly a borderline case. Today it would not be considered incest at all.

STONE : But isn't there a very important convention here? There are lots of ghosts in the old Elizabethan drama, and what a good ghost says is understood to be true. This one refers to Claudius as, 'That incestuous, and that adulterous beast'. And Hamlet's first expressed reaction is, 'It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you'. Now how can you get round that ?

KNIGHT : The ghost is certainly an impressive ghost, and it does, we presume, tell the truth about the murder. Bradley calls it 'so majestical a phantom'; and that is what it is, at least on its first entry—'majestical'. Bradley regards it as authoritative, almost as the voice of providence, or destiny. I have always tended to question that. Like so much else in the play, the ghost is enigmatic. The dead King has not gone to heaven, he is suffering from what he calls his 'crimes', (though 'crimes' need not mean more than sins). He is in some sort of purgatory. So he is not purely 'good', and certainly not divinely authoritative. He is a minor spirit. Hamlet calls him 'poor ghost'. More - Hamlet sometimes even wonders whether it's an *evil* spirit:

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be the devil, and the devil hath power
> T'assume a pleasing shape. [II, ii, 635]

Hamlet is quite seriously, at this point, wondering 'Is this a good, or an evil, spirit ?'. Elsewhere, I know, he accepts the ghost's account as true. For us, the ghost must be morally indecisive.

STONE : Wouldn't you say the dead King is generally praised in the play, which makes the fact that he is now a poor ghost more pathetic, more tragic ?

KNIGHT : The old King *is* praised as a warrior. He was a man of war as Claudius is a man of peace. But not many people do speak of him at all. Horatio calls him just 'a goodly king'.

STONE : So Hamlet had a 'goodly king' for a father. Do you think he chose his girl-friend so well ?

KNIGHT : Ophelia seems to be mainly passive, until the mad scene. An exquisitely drawn study of a sweet-natured girl quite helpless within the circumstances, who only attains dramatic status when the richer underthrusts of her personality are liberated in the harmonies of madness. There only she comes into her own. It's a marvellous scene.

STONE : But when she's sane she speaks wonderful praise of Hamlet :

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
> Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> Th' observed of all observers— [III. i. 160]

Oughtn't such a person as she describes be able to do a fundamental thing like avenging a father's death ? You seem to think that, after the challenge has been brought by Osric in the last act, Hamlet is really set to accomplish his revenge. Towards the end of '*Hamlet* Reconsidered' [p. 321] you say, 'Now, as never before, he calmly and confidently means to execute the ghost's command: "The

interim is mine'" [v. ii. 73]. At this point Hamlet's words seem to me to be in direct contrast to his actions, although I agree with you that in the end his revenge is perfect. But do you think he deserved it ?

KNIGHT : You mean he was rather lucky ?

STONE : Yes.

KNIGHT : In my essay I did face that. What I said was, once he is in the right state of being, things go right. You must remember that the central speech in the whole play, as I called it somewhere, 'the central speech in the most discussed work of the world's literature, begins, 'To be, or not to be'. I think 'To be' means exactly what it says. To attain a state of being. It doesn't mean to die or not to die; it doesn't mean to kill the King or not to kill the King. It means to achieve true being—the state defined in Hamlet's address to the Players, and in talking to Horatio. I believe that he comes back from his sea adventure in a changed mood, and does almost achieve that state at the end. He has for the first time, good manners. He addresses the King respectfully as 'your Grace' and the Queen as 'good Madam'. I suggest that when he gets into this state, a state, we may call it, of humility, then he becomes lucky. It all now falls into his hands. There is no plan or plot of his own that we can attribute his success to. He has himself told us that 'The readiness is all'. That is the point. When the chance offers, he is ready. Perhaps noone can do more.

STONE : A kind of personal harmony then, in which both readiness and good manners figure ?

KNIGHT : Yes. It involves an acceptance, near to love. He is a different man. He even has a long speech to Laertes apologising for his past madness.

STONE : It's a word he uses of himself, though his closer definitions give a slightly different emphasis : 'You must needs have heard how I am punishs'd With sore distraction'. [v. ii. 143]. And quite early in the play, he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern : 'I am but mad north-north-west; when

the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw. [II. ii. 405]. Do you think at any time in the play that Hamlet is mad?

KNIGHT : Perhaps in his grim dialogue with the King in Act IV about decaying bodies. And yet that might be better called a macabre humour. And it is not at all irrational. Hamlet has by now become so at home with horrors and the unearthly. Besides, in this scene he claims to be in touch with a cherub or guardian spirit. What most shakes his mind is love. Perhaps because it is dragging him back to earthly life, especially Ophelia. His visit to Ophelia in disarray suggested dementia. His prose in the nunnery scene is near breakdown :

> I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you made your-selves another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp; you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. I say we will have no more marriages. Those that are married already—all but one—shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery go. [III. i. 150]

When Hamlet confesses madness to Laertes, Ophelia is again involved. Our problem was beautifully expressed by Robert Bridges in *The Testament of Beauty :*

> wherefore
> Hamlet himself would never have been aught to us, or we
> to Hamlet wer't not for the artful balance whereby
> Shakespeare so gingerly put his sanity in doubt
> without the while confounding his Reason. [I, 576]

We shall not easily improve on that.

STONE : May we turn now to something else, Professor Wilson Kinght ? I know from your book *Shakespearian Production* [London,1936] that you are a practical theatre man as well as a scholar. I am sure we agree that a good Shakespearian should be both. How old do you think Hamlet should appear on the stage ?

KNIGHT : In the text Hamlet seems to be recognized as young and yet, on perhaps the dubious evidence of the

graveyard scene, he seems to be about thirty.

STONE : Do you think that might have been because the chief actor, Burbage, couldn't look young ?

KNIGHT : Perhaps I can answer that best by talking of an excellent recent production of *Hamlet* at the Northcott Theatre in Exeter. It was produccd by Tony Church and Hamlet was Derek Fowlds, of 'Basil Brush' fame.

STONE : I love him.

KNIGHT : There was no specious originality for its own sake. And it was good to have a really young Hamlet, played *as* young. It was also good to see a significant change of Hamlet's costume after the ghost scenes. So often this is completely missed, despite Ophelia's lines.

Hitherto I myself have tended to see Hamlet in his 'inky cloak', either tidy or disarranged, until the final scenes, when something less gloomy might be used, such as a soft red, or purple. The other people would be bright and gay, giving an impression of life, normal surfaces, perhaps superficiality, in contrast to Hamlet's death-shadowed profundities. This clearly suits my own interpretation.

The Northcott production had a different angle, attuned to its youthful and attractive hero. On his first entrance Hamlet was in black. After the ghost scenes he wore a grey, or grey-blue dress, disarranged, but pleasing; as though to hint some not too definite, spiritual, *advance*. In contrast, the King and Queen were associated, in drapes and costumes, with bold reds and black, suggesting earthly life in all its richness and blood, its crimes and death.

When Ophelia was mad she wore similar colours to Hamlet, almost the same dress. These two young people together seemed, in their wild disarray, on the edge at least of some spiritual attaimnment.

STONE : Something of a supplement then to your published view ?

KNIGHT : Yes, as I've always seen Hamlet as *approaching* a high state. But there *was* a difference, which I found

illuminating. And in a way convincing. It was particularly helpful when Hamlet was at his most obnoxious, joking about Polonius' dead body and appearing dangerously nihilistic in thought and act. One could see it all as a kind of youthful, Puckish, fun, as from a state *above* all mortal problems. Above morality. We needn't develop the thought too far : it was a glimpse, the kind of glimpse the stage alone can give, evanescent perhaps, but genuine.

STONE : Can one really be above morality and yet achieve transcendence ?

KNIGHT : I'm not sure. We can sometimes learn from humour, from fun, what can't be stated rationally. And we can often learn from youth insights that are closed to maturity. We today are surely aware of this in the riotous idealism of our own many young Hamlets:

> **Let us impart what we have seen tonight**
> **Unto young Hamlet—for, upon my life,**
> **This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.** **[I. i. 169]**

These are lines which we might all, with *due caution*—for such spirits are not always to be trusted—ponder.

STONE : Which gives Hamlet a very lofty fulfilment indeed. Isn't that a change in your view of the play ?

KNIGHT : I think our central thought must remain the play's ambivalence. In all deepest issues of life on earth, we are continually being driven back on the enigmatic, on mystery. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy' [I. v. 166] which applies on every level, moral, social and metaphysical.

Robert Carl Johnson

PATRICK STEWART'S CLAUDIUS

When Hamlet refers to Claudius as his 'mighty opposite', he recognizes the strength of the man he has disparaged as a satyr and moor in the previous four acts. Our opinion of Claudius as we read the play is profoundly influenced by what Hamlet says of him[1]. But when we see the play, Claudius makes his own impression, and the Claudius of Patrick Stewart in the recent BBC-Time-Life production makes a distinct and dominant impression. Stewart's performance is, in my opinion, a brilliant one, and it offers a standard by which other actors can be judged. But more important it can give us an understanding of Claudius and of his role against which our readings of the play can be measured[2].

I have always felt that it is important that Hamlet's descriptions of Claudius be undercut, even contradicted, by the appearance of Claudius. And in the opening court scene Shakespeare appears to have given the controlled, calm, and steady Claudius every advantage. The handsome Patrick Stewart establishes his claim to his position as king by his statesmanlike demeanor and by his concern for his country; and then he carefully demonstrates a personal concern for both his subjects, particularly Laertes and Polonius, and for his step-son, Hamlet. And Rodney Bennet, the director, emphasizes the acceptance of Claudius by his court by the applause which greets several of Claudius's pronouncements, including his statement that Hamlet is the 'most immediate to our throne' (I. ii. 109)[3].

In his first soliloquy Hamlet berates his mother for her too hasty marriage, and makes unflattering comparisons between his hyperion-like dead father and his satyr-like uncle. But

the man the audience has seen looks nothing like a satyr, and Hamlet's description of the elder Hamlet's protective attitude towards his wife is not irrelevant to Claudius's concern for Gertrude which we have just witnessed. Morriss Partee summarizes Claudius's actions throughout the play and concludes that he is 'every inch the king'[4]. Patrick Stewart portrays Claudius as Partee has described him, emphasizing his personal courage and his desire for a tranquil and successful rule[5].

The next time we see Claudius we know of the ghost's story, but the impression that Claudius gives is consistent with his initial appearance in I. ii. The pattern is reversed here. In the first court scene Claudius moved from the concerns of state to his personal concern. But his greeting of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern emphasizes his continued and pressing concern over the state of mind of his cousin-son Hamlet. The question of what afflicts Hamlet is a legitimate one and is seemingly asked by one who would and will remedy the matter if he can. But the affairs of state press upon him, and news comes to the king from the ambassadors to Norway. Again Claudius manifests his stature as king; the threat from Norway has passed because Claudius has confronted it in a masterful way.

Polonius then introduces a new idea—Hamlet is mad for the love of his daughter Ophelia. Patrick Stewart rises when he hears of this possibility and carefully phrases the question, 'But how hath she/Received his love?' (II. ii. 128). The impression Claudius gives here is important. If Hamlet is indeed mad because of an unrequited love for Ophelia, the problems and obvious threats posed by Hamlet are over.

But as we find at the opening of Act III, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have not been able to find the cause of Hamlet's madness. They can only report that Hamlet is planning an entertainmnnt for the court, to which the king is especially invited. The king graciously accepts, emphasizing once again his appearance as the concerned father.

With all my heart and it doth much content me
To hear him so inclined.
Good gentlemen, give him a further edge
And drive his purpose into these delights. (III i. 24)

But before the play Claudius and Polonius will test Polonius' theory. When Polonius refers to Ophelia's feigned piety, we get our first glimpse of the inner torment of Claudius. Mr Stewart handled this momentary transition very well, effectively conveying through the brief aside that there is an inner side to his very public figure.

After Hamlet's attack on Ophelia in the nunnery scene, Claudius is convinced that love is not the cause of Hamlet's distraction, but he still has no reason to suspect that Hamlet knows of his guilt. He announces here his dicision to send Hamlet to England to collect the 'neglected tribute'; this decision is consistent with the role Claudius has designed for himself. As he had formerly asked Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to help him find out what bothers Hamlet, now he claims that his sending Hamlet to England is another attempt to aid Hamlet to recover his senses. And although he denies in his conversation with Polonius that Hamlet's actions suggest madness, his last line in the scene indicates that he recognizes that he must be always on his guard. 'Madness in great ones must not unwatched go' (III. i. 188).

If we assume, then, that no one in the court except Hamlet and Horatio suspects the king of murdering the elder Hamlet, we can see Claudius's confrontation with Hamlet evolving through several stages. First, Claudius feels that through the healing powers of time and his own efforts, Hamlet can be brought to accept Claudius's assumption of the throne and his marriage. But in the passage of time between acts one and two, Hamlet has changed for the worse, not for the better. Claudius summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to aid him in bringing Hamlet over to his side or finding out if there is some other way to change Hamlet's ways. It is obvious, then, at this point that Claudius does not guess that

Hamlet knows his secret, and his presence at the court is still desired. But as Hamlet remains unchanged his continued antics are a distraction, a blemish in an otherwise tranquil state and marriage. Another attempt to change Hamlet is found in Claudius's decision to send Hamlet to England. And at this point Hamlet is not yet a specific threat, but a present irritant and a possible future threat. His madness must be watched, since it does not seem that it can be cured. So Claudius will attend the play—it bodes well that Hamlet is interested in having the players perform—but he will ever so carefully watch Hamlet.

The most provocative scene in the Jacobi production is the play-within-the-play scene. The question of whether or not Claudius sees the dumb show, and if he does, why he does not react to the dumb show, has occupied the minds of critics for many years. W. W. Greg argued that the king was not affected by the dumb show because it does not reproduce his crime. His article, 'Hamlet's Hallucination,' in the October 1917 issue of the *Modern Language Review* prompted Dover Wilson's famous book, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge, 1935) and his influential theory that the king did not see the dumb show. Nigel Alexander, in his book, *Poison, Play and Duel : A Study in 'Hamlet'* (London, 1971), suggests that the actor playing Claudius should handle 'the double action as a demonstration of the art of memory. Actions alone are not enough to stir the King's conscience. It requires the words of the Players and Hamlet's ironic commentary upon them to cause an alarming awareness to seep from the unconscious to the conscious mind of the King' (p. 107).

More recently W. W. Robson has reviewed the problem once again. Robson concludes that there is 'no positive evidence that the King did not see the dumb-show, and we are bound to assume that he did, along with the rest of the Court'.[6] And Robson also argues that 'there is no sign that the King was publicly exposed, and much to indicate that he

was not."[7] In the Jacobi production, it is evident that Claudius is not exposed. Claudius learns the extent of Hamlet's knowledge, but Hamlet neither exposes Claudius, not does he confirm the story of the ghost.

The scene needs to be explored in some detail.[8] First, there is no doubt that Claudius sees the dumb show in the BBC production. In fact Patrtick Stewart's Claudius seems even to enjoy the exaggerated acting style of the players in the dumb show, applauding the initial actions of the king and queen, and laughing both as the murderer pours poison in the ear of the sleeping king and as he woos and wins the widowed queen.

One disadvantage of a T-V or movie production is that the camera determines what we will observe. As the player queen assures her husband that she will not wed again, we are not allowed to watch Gertrude until Hamlet mutters, 'wormwood, wormwood'. Both Gertrude and Claudius remain stoic here. Gertrude does stir uncomfortably at lines 218-19 : 'So think thou wilt no second husband wed,/But die thy thoughts when the first lord is dead.' And at line 232, she belatedly applauds heartily and self-consciously as the players exit. The strain on Claudius is obvious as he parries with Hamlet about the possible offence in the play, Patrick Stewart portrays a Claudius always on his guard. Quite aware that the play has already offended the queen, Claudius must also be aware that the play will offend him, but he must be careful not to reveal himself. When Hamlet talks of poisoning and reveals that the play is *The Mousetrap*, the battle is completely joined, and Claudius must attempt ro escape.

Hamlet introduces the next player, 'Lucianus, nephew to the king' (III. ii. 248). What is the reaction of the court to this piece of information ? Do they interpret it as a threat on the life of the king ? At a stage performance I find myself looking at Claudius and the rest of the court, but in this version the camera continues to focus on Hamlet. To

emphasize the struggle between Claudius and Hamlet, the director has chosen to cut the exchange between Hamlet and Ophelia (ll. 249-256), and Hamlet, standing immediately behind the player, commands the player to begin, and after a brief pause, he angrily shouts for him to 'leave thy damnable faces and begin' (III. ii. 257). During Lucianus' speech, Jacobi is always in the immediate background, staring through the performance at the king. Finally, after Jacobi shouts, 'You shall see anon how the murderer gets love of Gonzago's wife' (III, ii, 267), the king does rise, but in the startled, frightened way most productions insist upon. Stewart stands to stare directly at Jecobi; he calmly commands, 'Give me some light'. Stewart takes an offered torch and walks slowly towards Hamlet, shining the light in Hamlet's face. Hamlet places his hands over his eyes and then laughs in a peculiarly high-pitched manner, while Claudius slowly shakes his head at Hamlet. Claudius then turns, momentarily surveys a stunned court, and again calmly commands, 'Away'. The tension in the scene is tremendous, and it seems to me to work perfectly. The two mighty opposites have been joined in a serious battle, and Claudius has withstood the test in front of his court. He has not bolted from the play, but has stopped this display by Hamlet, an entertainment which has offended the queen and threatened the king. Hamlet's joy after the court retires seems ironic, and Horatio's restraint particularly appropriate.

If Claudius is not exposed, the opposite is true : Hamlet is exposed. And Claudius must now realize that Hamlet knows of the murder of the elder Hamlet. Claudius must act, and immediately after the play-within-the-play scene, he makes final preparations for Hamlet's trip to England. But there is a new purpose for Hamlet's trip. Hamlet is a very specific threat. What Hamlet has suggested to the court is a threat to the state and Rosenctantz and Gulidenstern echo this concern for the well-being of the sovereign in the first twenty-six lines of III. iii. Hamlet's killing of Polonius

allows Claudius to act with the full approval of his court. He tells Gertrude that he has been remiss in not acting sooner because of the threat which Hamlet poses 'to you yourself, to us, to every one' (IV. i. 15). When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern then seek Hamlet and the dead Polonius they do so as representatives of the king, the sovereign. Hamlet, of course, treats them with contempt, calls them sponges which soak up the king's countenance, but what is also important in this scene is the tone which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern adopt. They also treat Hamlet with cold, reasoned contempt. In the final court scene, Claudius continues his appearance of the king who must take action, even if he is reluctant to do so, against his son for the protection of the kingdom and also for the well-being of Hamlet himself.

With Hamlet on his way to his death in England, Claudius must continue to appear the proper king. But other threats are imminent. Ophelia has gone mad, and Laertes has returned, incensed at the death of his father. What Partick Stewart is able to do, however, is to suggest a man torn by the several misfortunes of Ophelia, Hamlet, Leartes, and Polonius. If the audience did not know better, Stewart's delivery of his lament for these misfortunes (IV. v. 75-97) would gain our sympathy for this tormented man, especially as he and Gerttude embrace in mutual support immediately before the messenger enters with the news that Leartes has arrived, demanding revenge.

But Claudius is again equal to the challenge. Ignoring the warning of the messenger for him to save his own life, Claudius confronts Laertes. The stage action is particularly interesting here since it is obvious from Claudius's comment that Gertrude is attempting to restrain physically the angered Laertes.

> **Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear our person.**
> **There's such divinity doth hedge a king**
> **That treason can but peep to what it would,**

> Acts little of his will. Tell me Laertes,
> Why thou art thus incensed. Let him go, Gertrude.
> (IV. v 123)

Mr Stewart again portrays Claudius as one who is every inch the king. And it is clear at the beginning of IV, vii, that Claudius's appearance has successfully convinced Laertes of his friendship. Again Partick Stewart conveys the confidence of one whose plans have reaped success. When Laertes claims that his revenge will come, Claudius's reply indicates his pride over his plot to rid himself of Hamlet. He will delay sharing the news with Laertes until the news from England is complete.

> You must think
> That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
> That we can let our beard be shook with danger.
> And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more
> I loved your father and we love ourself,
> And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine . . . (IV. vii. 30)

But Claudius's boasting is interrupted by the news that Hamlet has returned. Momentarily perplexed, Claudius quickly invents another plan—Laertes will kill Hamlet in a supposedly playful duel. And Claudius thinks furher ahead—'Therefore this project/Should have a back or second . . . .' (IV. vii. 152). He will have a poisoned cup at hand from which Hamlet should drink.

To the very end Claudius remains in control. The impression he conveys in the fight scene is that of reconciliation and friendship—an impression consistent with the first court scene. But he is anxious to rid himself of the threat of Hamlet, and when Hamlet makes the first hit Claudius asks him to drink from the poisoned cup. Claudius's complete self-control remains evident even when Gertrude starts to drink. He tries to stop her, but when she insists, he says in a resigned manner : 'It is the poisoned cup. It is too late' (V. ii. 294).

And even at the last moment, before Hamlet plunges his

sword into Claudius, Partick Stewart moves with his hands outstretched to embrace Hamlet, to make another attempt to save himself and his kingdom. And as the sword enters his body, it is Stewart who both yells treason and asks his friends to help.

In watching Patrick Stewart's performance as Claudius, I found myself thinking of another usurping, murderous king, Macbeth. In his soliloquy at the beginning of Act I, Scene vii, Macbeth says he would risk the life to come if the act of murdering Duncan did not have consequences in the present life.

> But in these cases
> We still have judgment here; that we but teach
> Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
> To plague th'inventor: this even handed justice
> Commends th' ingredients of our poisoned chalice
> To our own lips. (I. vii. 7)

Macbeth and Claudius both must face the consequences of their deeds. In *Macbeth* Shakespeare initially focuses on the inner turmoil of the usurper. In *Hamlet*, the usurper is a supporting actor, and Shakespeare gives us only two glimpses of the inner struggle (III. i. 49-54 and III. iii. 36-72). The rest of the play shows us the usurper attempting to control the consequences of his murderous deed. In Patrick Stewart's performance we watch a Claudius attempt brilliantly, but finally unsucessfully, to put the act of murder behind him and to establish himself as a statesmanlike king and a loving and generous husband and father. And he struggles to survive in at least one of these roles until the very moment of his death.

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NOTES

[1] Lee Sheridan Cox, *Figurative Design in 'Hamlet': The Significance of the Dumb Show* (Columbus, 1973) p. 103, discusses the problems that arise from emphasizing one aspect or side of the Claudius character.

[2] In his review of the Jacobi *Hamlet* ('The Shakespeare Plays on TV: *Hamlet*.' *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter* 5, No 2 (May 1981), pp. 5, 8 H R Coursen praised the 'public Claudius,' but said that the "inner" Claudius confused' him. *Hamlet* BBC-TV Time-Life, Inc. Production. Producer : Cedric Mesina; Director : . Rodney Bennet. Cast : Derek Jacobi (Hamlet), Claire Bloome (Gertrude) Lalla Ward (Ophelia). Eric Porter (Polonius). Patrick Stewart (Claudius), Patrick Allen (Ghost), Emrys James (First Player), David Robb (Laertes). Jonathan Hyde (Rosencrantz), Geoffrey Bateman (Guildenstern) Col. (3 hours 45 minutes).

[3] All quotations are from *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, edited by Sylvan Barnet (New York, 1972).

[4] Morriss Henry Partee, 'Claudius and the Political Background of *Hamlet*,' *English Miscellany*, 21 (1970), p. 45.

[5] See Partee, especially p. 47.

[6] W W. Robson, 'Did the King See the Dumbshow ?' *Cambridge Quarterly*, 6 (1975), p. 312.

[7] Robson p 320.

[8] The following lines are omitted in the Jacobi version of the play-within-the-play scene : 135-8, 146-51; 170-6; 194-217 249-56

[9] H. R. Coursen is disturbed by this final scene : 'I could not tell what was happening at the end, when Claudius turned to Hamlet with a smile. Was Claudius accepting his execution cheerfully ?'. Coursen Is also bothered by Stewart's handling of the Prayer soliloquy : 'Stewart, however raced through the Prayer scene as if in the process of final memorization of his lines.' I disagree; although at times Stewart does speak too rapidly (especially lines 40-43), he conveys well an inner tu moil and distinguishes his mental anguish from that of Hamlet by the marked difference in the delivery of their soliloquies.

J. J. M. Tobin

HAMLET AND CHRIST'S TEARS OVER JERUSALEM

It was Belleforest who first introduced the principle of mysogyny into the story of Hamlet, but it was Shakespeare who chose, for reasons of his own, to develop this theme which reveals so much of the psychology of the Prince in his tragedy. Professor Bullough and others have pointed out that whatever the availability of the English *Ur-Hamlet* Shakespeare probably read Belleforest in his original *Histoires Tragiques*; but he also read Thomas Nashe, and it is from Nashe that much of the psycho-sexual nature of Hamlet (as well as that of others) is derived.

We know that Shakespeare read or recalled Nashe's work during the composition of *Hamlet*, for there are elements of *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592),[1] *Pierce Penilesse* (1592),[2] *Strange Newes* (1592), *The Terrors of the Night* (1594), *Have with You to Saffron-walden* (1596), and *Lenten Stufle* (1599)[3] which have become part of the texture of the tragedy. However, it is in yet another of Nashe's pamphlets, *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593) that Shakespeare found special material for use in the Prince's moralizing upon the sexual appetites and moral duplicity of women.

Chrsit's Tears is the longest and most sober of Nashe's works. It is marked by a singular oration by Christ as He laments the moral turpitude of sinners, by a series of vignettes from the life of first century A. D. Jerusalem at the time of its destruction, and by the anatomizing of the parallel sinfulness of Elizabethan London. Chief among the

sins is Pride, personified by Nashe and given a large family of sons and daughters who represent various types of Pride itself. Of this family 'the last daughter of Pride is delicacie, under which is contained Gluttony, Luxury, Sloth & Security. But properly, Delicacie is the sinne of our London Dames' (144).[4] And it is in the midst of Nashe's anatomizing of 'Delicacie' that Shakespeare found for Hamlet much of the diction in his assaults upon the sensibilities of Ophelia and Gertrude.

But Shakespeare did not limit himself to the issue of female weakness as he borrowed from *Christ's Tears* for a number of passages elsewhere in the play with themes unrelated to the female will and man's response to it For example, both scenes of the last act of the tragedy, scenes influenced by still other work of Nashe, show elements from *Christ's Tears* in a number of passages, elements which increase our understanding of the psychology of the Prince and his circle.

When the First Gravedigger tells how long it is that he has been a Sexton and the Prince dwells too curiously upon mortality as he asks how long a man will lie in the earth, they are both using diction provided by Nashe. We may compare the gravedigger's 'I have been sexton here, man and boy, *thirty years*' and Hamlet's '*How long* will a man lie i' *th' earth* ere he rot' (V. i. 161-4)[5] with Nashe's description of the ambition of Julius Caesar, which ambition included the measuring of the whole world: 'Julius *Caesar* . . . *howe long* he should be over-running it . . . *the earth* . . . In this discovery *30 years* were Spent' (82). As Nashe continues the theme that 'Let the ambitious man stretch out hys lmybes never so, he taketh up no more ground (being dead) than the Begger' (82), the theme of the levelling force of death which is also articulated by Prince Hamlet, he points out that Caesar 'had the *dust* of his bones . . . *barreld* up' (82), and that '*Alexander* was but a lyttle man' whose heart would swell as big as the whole world, forgetful that

'the dust was (his) great Grand-mother' (83). We recall that Hamlet asks, 'Dost thou think Alexander look' d a' this fashion in *th' earth*' (V. i. 197-8), and speaks of 'the noble *dust* of *Alexander*' (V i. 203-4) and of *'Alexander'* returning to 'dust' (v i 209,210) and ultimately as dust turned loam stopping 'a beer-*barrel*' (V. i. 212), with 'Imperious *Caesar*' (V. i. 213) having an analogous fate.[6]

In addition, Hamlet's moral application of Yorick's skull 'Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her *paint an inch thick*, to this favour she must come' (V. i. 192-4) derives from the second epistle (1594) to *Christ's Tears* where Nashe in attacking Gabriel Harvey refers to Harvey's 'vaineglorie (which some take to be his gentlewoman) he hath new *painted* over *an inch thick*' (180). Finally, in this scene Hamlet's declamation 'I am not *splenitive* and *rash*, (V i. 261) echos terms in the original preface to *Christ's Tears* where Nashe apologizes for his earlier attack upon Gabriel Harvey whom he had *'rashly* assailed' (12) when he had relapsed into some *'spleanative* vaines of wantonnesse, (13). Both the phrase *'an inch thick'* and the word *splenitive'* are unique in the canon here in *Hamlet.*

In the last scene of the play Hamlet in his scrupulous integrity expresses to Horatio sorrow over his fight with Laertes, a struggle which derived from his *'tow'ring passion'* (v. ii. 79) Nashe writes of offering no joy, but the tears that come from *'passion'* (12). And just before the fencing-match itself Hamlet apologizes directly to Laertes, saying that 'I have *shot* my *arrow* o'er the house/And hurt my brother' (V ii 243-4), using an image which seems to have been derived from Nashe's 'Jonathan *shotte* five *Arrowes* beyond the mark, in describing thys hie-*towring* sinne' (80). Not only has Shakespeare here borrowed from Nashe but seems also to have corrected him, for in I Samuel 'there were not five arrows; Jonathan promised to shoot three, but seems actually to have shot only one.'[7]

These Nashean elements in the last act of the play are

but the conclusion to the series of extended borrowings from Nashe's *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* which Shakespeare had begun as early as the first scene of the second act, increased in the second scene of that act, and brought to a peak of intensity in the confrontations between the Prince and Ophelia, and the Prince and his mother.

When Horatio describes the ghost's proximity to the watchers, 'thrice he walk'd/By their oppress'd and fear-surpris'd *eyes*/Within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distill'd/Almost to *jelly*' (I. ii. 202-05) he is Nashean in his diction. '*Jelly*' is used in the canon for the first time here, and Shakespeare may well have found it in the midst of Nashe's analysis of the corruption which comes 'of the *jelly* of your decayed *eyes*' (139).

When Hamlet talks with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and then with Polonius just before the arrival of the players, some of his words clearly derive from a single page of Nashe's *Christ's Tears*. The Prince craftily assures Guildenstern that he knows 'a hawk from *a hand-saw*' (II. ii. 379). This celebrated reference is frequently thought to involve a play on the names for cutting-tool and bird, as Professor Kermode has pointed out in his gloss on the line in the Riverside edition. However, '*handsaw*' seems primarily '*hernshaw*' a bird, as a look at an influential page from *Christ's Tears* shows.

Nashe writes of *a Hearnshaw* (a whole afternoone together) sate on the top of S. Peters Church in Cornehill' (172), then mentions an ox transformed into '*an old man*, and from *an old man* to *an infant*' (172), and finally cites 'strange *prophetical!* reports' in the next sentence (172). With this may be compared Rosencrantz' description of Polonius, 'they say *an old man* is twice *a child*' (II. ii. 385), and Hamlet's statement in the very next line following that of Rosencrantz, 'I will *prophesy*' (II. ii. 386). Later Polonius and Hamlet exchanged comments about the former's acting experience, 'I did enact Julius Caesar. I was kill'd i' th'

Capitol; *Brutus* kill'd me' (III. ii. 103-04), and 'It was a *brute* part of him to kill so *capital* a calf there' (III. ii 105-06). Nashe on the same page that refers to the metamorphosd ox, not calf, writes of 'divinations' that have been '*bruted*' (172), and of the Romans who took 'it for an ill signe, when their *Capitol* was strooken with lightning' (172).

The collocation of these terms in the two scenes in *Hamlet* involving Polonius and the Prince as the players arrive and prepare to perform, and all present on a single page of *Christ's Tears*, a work otherwise influential upon *Hamlet*, is suggestive of direct Shakespearean recollection, a recollection that gives us a bird rather than a cutting-tool—*hernshaw* first and *hand-saw*, only secondarily.

Some of the syntax and diction of the critical Hamlet in his advice to the aesthetically undisciplined players echos Nashe's words in his advice to the morally licentious London women: 'O *reform it* altogether. And *let* those . . . speak *no* more . . .' (III. ii. 37-8), and 'I woulde those that shoulde *reform it* . . . *Let not* . . .' (153), a page which also seems to have affected the exchange between Gertrude ane Hamlet, as we note below.

In the exchange between the vitriolic Hamlet and the vulnerable Ophelia (III. i. 101ff.) a number of terms in the midst of the Prince's indictment of Ophelia's immorality come from the vocabulary which Nashe uses in his indictment of the morality (or immorality) of London women. Hamlet's notorious 'Get thee to a *nunny'ry*' (III. i. 120) recalls Nashe's use of the term in his description of licentious women who allow some men their favours without cost, 'in theyr *nunnery*' (152). Here the context is clear : Nashe is writing of 'whores' and 'Baudes' who live in 'houses' with 'slyding windowes' and 'trappe-boardes in floars' (152) The Nashe parallel corrects the most recent editorial observation that 'after Shakespeare's time, "nunnery" was used facetiously to mean "brothel", but in this context ("Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners") that meaning seems impossible.'[8] Hardly.

Hamlet continues his berating of Ophelia in terms which derive from the page following that which contains *'nunnery'* and the three pages immediately preceding it. The censorious and emotionally scarred Prince has distilled the essence of Nashe's extended attack upon women's moral and physical duplicity, rank licentiousness, and deceptive cosmetics. His *'monsters* you *make* of *them'* (III. i. 138-9), in direct address, echoes Nashe's words in direct address to the London wantons : *'monstrous creatures'* (153) and 'can *make them'* (153), as do such words of the Prince as, *'paintings . . . enough'* (III i 142), *'God . . . given . . . face'* (III i 143), *'You'* (III. i. 144), *'creatures . . .* wantonesse' (III. i. 145)—compare Nashe's *'painting* on their *faces'* (151), *'ehough* for *God'* (151), *'creatures'* (153), 'to whom much is *given . . . God'* (150), and *'you . . . wantonesse'* (150).

The sexual contexts of nunnery, painting, and the deforming of God's image clearly are common to both Hamlet's attack upon Ophelia and Nashe's diatribe aganst the immoral women of London. However, Nashe's attack upon Delicacie, 'the last Daughter of Pride' (144) is so intense that when Hamlet turned his verbal abuse against his mother Queen Gertrude, he found the vocabulary and prose rhythms from this same section of *Christ's Tears* equally malleable.

Hamlet, perpetual punster that he is, may have been drawn to Nashe's reference to the fact that in London, 'every *queane* vaunts herself' (148), and every whore is the *'wife* of two *husbands'* (148), each with a bragging nature so extreme that with 'the speech-shunning sores and sight-ircking *botches* of theyr unsatiate intemperance, they will un*blush*ingly lay foorth' (148). Certain it is that in his address to Gertrude. 'the *Queen* your *husband's* brother's *wife'* (III. iv. 15), Hamlet as passionate and graphically descriptive moralizer speaks of the *'blush* of modesty' (III. iv. 41) and of the *'blister'* on the forehead of love (III. iv. 44). He adds another *'blush'* (III. iv. 81) and speaks of *'no shame'* in matters sexual if matrons engage in similar acts. Nashe writes of the clients

of the whores as being *'not ashamed'* (148). Gertrude is granted some sense, else she could 'not have *motion*' (III. iv. 72), in her choice of Claudius over Hamlet Senior, but Hamlet asks, 'what *devil* was't' (III. iv. 76) that led her so blindly. Nashe expresses the same amazement at women's sexual behavior : 'I am halfe of beliefe it is not a reasonable soule which effecteth *motion* and speech in them, but a soule-imitating *devill*' (149).

When the Prince with his too graphic imagination speaks of Gertrude's being *'Stew'd* in *corruption'* (III. iv. 93), the pun on 'stew' as 'brothel' is clear, for Nashe writes, 'London, what are thy Suburbes but licensed *Stewes*... I accuse none, but certainly justice somewhere is *'corrupted'* (148). Further, Hamlet's description of Claudius as a *'cutpurse'* (III. iv. 99) who has put the precious diadem 'in his *pocket*' (III. iv. 101) seems to have been affected by Nashe's reference to the whores 'meeting with their *cut-purse*' (150) lovers after a day spent encouraging servants to rob their masters' *'pockets'* (148).

The Queen herself in her description of Hamlet's fright at the appearance of his father's ghost, 'Your bedded hair, like life in *excrements*/Start up' (III iv. 121-2) echoes Nashe's term in the sentence, 'in a damnable state are you, o yee *excrementall* vessels of lust' (149). But it is Hamlet who concludes this borrowing from Nashe's indictment of London women with the words *'skin'* (III. iv. 149), *'corruption'* (III. iv. 148), *'Confess'* (III. iv. 149), *'Repent'* (III. iv. 150, 173), *'pursy'* (III. iv. 153), *'part'* (III. iv. 157), *'half'* (III. iv. 158), *'monster'* (III. iv. 161), *'devil'* (III. iv. 162), *'Refrain'* (III. iv. 165), *'shall lend'* (III. iv. 166), *'scourge'* (III. iv. 175), *'Not'* (III. iv. 181), *'Let'* (III. iv. 182), *'wanton'* (III. iv. 183), and *'cheek'* (III. iv. 183). With them may be compared Nashe's words (some of which have been used by Claudius, as we see *infra*), *'skin*-playstring' (149), *'corrupted'* (148), *'corrupt'* (154), *'confesse'* (148), *'Repent, repent'* (153), *'purse'* (148), *'purses'* (148), *'purse'* (152), *'partes'* (153),

'halfe' (153), *'monstrous'* (153), *'devils'* (153), *'refraine'* (151), *'should lende'* (153), *'scourges'* (150), *'Let not'* (153) and *'cheekes'* (150).

Other parallel phrases of interest include Hamlet's *'What is a man/If...'* (IV. vi. 33-4) and Nashe's *'What is a man if'* (29), where Hamlet is speaking of his dulness and Nashe of the need for corporal unity. Further, we have the echo of Nashe's words in Laertes' expression of his willingness *'To cut* his *throat* in the church' (IV. vii. 126), as well as in Claudius' idea for the fencing match and its *'wager'* (IV. vii. 134, and elsewhere). Nashe gives a description of the sinners of Jerusalem who 'make no conscience *to cut* your *throats* for your treasure and give a hundred of *you together* to theyr Fencers and Executioners to try theyr weapons on for a *wager*, and winne maisteries with deep wounding of you' (27). Here we have the word *'wager'* the fencing match, the wounding and the execution, all the essential elements in the Claudius-Laertes plot against Hamlet. One recalls also Claudius' desire to 'bring *you* in fine *together*' (IV. vii. 133). The absence of *conscience* in the plot against Hamlet is clear. Further, Claudius instructs Laertes to requite his father 'in a pass of *practice*' (IV. vii 138). Hamlet will later use *'practice'* in a different sense (V. ii. 211). Nashe writes of having not *'practisd* a thousand waies' (27).

While most of the Nashean diction reveals more about Hamlet's sexual fixation and the concomitant exposure of woman's duplicity, real and imagined, some significant part of it shows us a section of the heart of Claudius. There are at least two passages in the play, not counting the references to Cain and Abel in the play reflecting similar allusions in the pamphlet, which involve Claudius and his conscience, and are what they are because of *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem*.

The first of these is the king's conscience-stricken aside following the observation by Polonius that with pious action (such as that of having Ophelia read on a prayer book) 'we do sugar o'er/The devil himself' III. i. 47-8) :

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. (III. i. 48-53)

seems to have been affected by diction from two consecutive pages (149-50) of *Christ's Tears* which contain 'a guilty *conscience,*' skin-*playstring Painters*' (and *'plast'ring'* is unique in the canon in *Hamlet*), 'by artificiall over-*beautifying* theyr bodies . . their lively *colour* is lost' (note Polonius' 'such an exercise may *colour*/Your loneliness—III. i. 44-5) and *'cheeks . . . harlots.'*

The second instance occurs as Claudius realizes the impossibility of his prayer. He contrasts the successful corruption of this world with the justice which obtains in heaven. He speaks of the facts that 'In the *corrupted* currents of this world/Offense's gilded hand may shove by *justice'* (III. iii. 52-3), that 'the wicked prize itself/*Buys* out the law' (III. iii. 59-60), i. e. by bribery, and that in heaven, unlike on earth we must all *'give* in *evidence'* (III. iii. 64). Much of this diction comes from those pages in *Christ's Tears* where Nashe wonders how it is that illegal brothels can exist next door to the houses of the very magistrates whose duty it is to stamp out prostitution : 'I accuse none, but certainly *justice* somewhere is corrupted' (148), '. . . he *buyes* them' (149), '. . . (sinners) at the latter day, shall stand up and *give evidence* against them' (150).

We shall not pluck out the heart of Hamlet's mystery any better than did Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The Prince's psychological nature, as well as that of the other members of the Danish court, is tantalizing before us at times only to be lost just as we seem about to grasp it. We do know his particular and profound concern with duplicity, especially female duplicity. Much of the most vitriolic diction in the entire play comes in his confrontations with Ophelia and Gertrude, and much of that vitriole is derived from those sec-

tions of *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* in wich Nashe attacks the immorality of the sixteenth century London women. The high moral stance adopted by Nashe in this pamphlet is that of the Prince, but he has added the special intensity which belongs only to one wounded in his heart's core.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] See my 'Nashe and *Hamlet*, Yet Again,' *Hamlet Studies* (Spring, 1980), pp 35-45.

[2] See Arnold Davenport, *Notes and Queries* (1953), pp. 371-4, and G. Blakemore Evans, ibid., pp. 377-8.

[3] See 'Nashe and *Hamlet*, Yet Again,' for all but *Lenten Stuffe*. For it, see my '*Hamlet* and Nashe's *Lenten Stuffe*,' *Archiv fur das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* (forthcoming).

[4] Page references are to *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, edited by R. B. Mckerrow (Oxford, 1904-1910, repr. 1958), Vol. II.

[5] Line numbering as in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston, 1974).

[6] Hamlet's earlier remark to the first Gravedigger about the social presumption of the age, that 'the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier' (V. i. 140-1) seems to derive from Nashe's similarly expressed theme the rich Cittizen swells against the pryde of *the* prodigall *Courtier*' (83).

[7] McKerrow, Vol. IV, p. 228.

[8] *Hamlet*, edited by T. J. B. Spencer, New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 272.

Leo Salingar

THE PLAYERS IN *HAMLET*

> Let not our looks put on our purposes,
> But bear it as our Roman actors do,
> With untir'd spirits and formal constancy.
> *(Julius Caesar)*

Why are the Players quite so prominent in *Hamlet*? In a long drama, crowded in any case with incidents and minor characters, they are conspicuous through a fifth of the acting time, although they are unnamed, unconcerned with and seemingly unaware of the fateful intrigue they impinge upon, little more than supernumeraries; among the 3800-odd lines of speech in a typical modern edition of the play[1] they are on-stage and taking part in the dialogue or are made the subjects of the dialogue while they are offstage through nearly 600 lines, or only fractionally less than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern but slightly more than twice as much as Fortinbras. Why is so much attention given to them? What does their presence contribute to the tragedy as a whole?

Much of the answer seems obvious: once Shakespeare had decided to make the play scene a crucial episode he needed another, earlier scene as well, introducing the Players, however briefly, and explaining Hamlet's determination to employ them. But that only shifts the ground of the question since Shakespeare could have used other means to confirm the King's guilt in Hamlet's mind just as Kyd had used different means in *The Spanish Tragedy*. And even if we rest satisfied with that answer provisionally, it leaves unexplained why quite so much Interest is given to the Players.

Again the answer, or an answer seems clear, but leads on to further questions about the play. It seems to be summed

up in Hamlet's words about the 'purpose' and 'end' of acting, which is 'to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature : to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.' Hamlet here uses the conventional terms, with unconventional implications. Acting not only serves the 'purpose' in his view of revealing unperceived or hidden truth to the public, reminding them of good as against evil; it upholds, even creates, a standard for 'virtue' (a stronger, more inclusive term here than, say, *righteousness*) and even when expressing 'scorn' for evil or folly (as in satire), rises above it; in its 'end,' its perfected accomplishment, it is not simply instrumental to something else but embodies a distinct ideal. The Player scenes in *Hamlet* bring this ideal forward, beyond any contribution they make directly to the plot. Many other Elizabethan plays had touched or dwelt on the idea of the stage and the business of playing, sometimes attacking 'the quality' or defending it, especially during the contemporary War of the Theatres to which *Hamlet* more than once alludes; and in *Julius Caesar* Shakespeare had taken an analogy from acting to define heroic firmness of conduct. But, as Anne Barton has pointed out, no other Elizabethan writing gives as much emphasis and high value to 'the play metaphor' as *Hamlet*.[3] Subsequent playwrights approach a similar view, for instance Webster with his defence of the actor's occupation and praise for his dominion over an audience in the character *Of an Excellent Actor* and Massinger in *The Roman Actor*, where Paris is not only a star performer but a model of fortitude and honour. But no other work of the period, I think, attributes the same distinctive value to the actor's professional skill.

The references to playing in *Hamlet* amount to a separate theme for a time as well as providing a continuous metaphor. One can also say that, for example, the many references to disease in the play set up a dramatic metaphor, and that they belong to a common theme. But as a rule we are not led to think of disease except as a metaphor in *Hamlet*, in spite

of the vivid local horror in the Ghost's narration; we are not led to think about disease as an aspect of general experience, as we are in such stories as *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *Cancer Ward* or in the sleepwalking scene in *Macbeth*; and in that sense to call disease a theme in *Hamlet* would be excessive. In contrast, thoughts about actors and acting are given salience for a while as an independent subject of interest, to the point where they verge on a digression, paradoxically straining against Hamlet's dislike of distractions from 'some necessary question of the play.' They fit in with the play's general tenor to the extent that Hamlet himself has an unusually discursive mind. But on the other hand they give at moments the impression that Shakespeare is using Hamlet for the sake of comments he wants to make about the theatre, and not other way around. And yet this quasi-digression about acting also unexpectedly reinforces the main drive of Hamlet's tragedy. The contradictions between these two tendencies in the Player scenes give rise to a series of minor puzzles for anyone considering the play as a whole.

In a modern edition, the exposition of *Hamlet*, Act I, takes about 850 lines. Then, after two months or so are supposed to have elapsed, during which the King has begun to take alarm over Hamlet's 'antic disposition' and has sent for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, there follows the main sequence of continuous episodes (from II. i. to IV. iv. 1800-odd lines) showing the camouflaged struggle between Hamlet and Claudius, down to Hamlet's dismissal to England. Claudius uses Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Ophelia and then Gertrude to probe Hamlet's mind and intentions while screening his own; Hamlet uses the Players in a similar way. So far, their place in the play's structure is clear. But the 'bad' First Quarto of 1603 seems to show that the timing of their introduction was a problem and that at some point early in the play's history either the company behind the 'bad' Quarto or Shakespeare himself had second thoughts about the arrangement of the scenes. In Q1 the passage representing the 'To

be' soliloquy and the nunnery scene (*lines* 815-901)[3] precedes the first mention of the Players (*l.* 966), whereas of course Q2, the Folio and modern editions reverse that order. The 'bad', rejected arrangement has the advantages of making Polonius's moves, including the 'fishmonger' dialogue, more sequential, showing Hamlet still brooding over suicide as in his first soliloquy and, in Hamlet's next dialogue, giving evident point to his remark that 'woman' delights him no more than 'man' (Q1, *l.* 961), the remark that provides Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with their cue to refer to the Players. This arrangement also means that by the time the Players are heard of the King's moves against Hamlet have come to a stop and it now seems time for Hamlet's turn. In the received, presumably final, arrangement, Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia, foreshadowed earlier, is postponed until after his first long meeting with the Players. This has the advantages of increasing suspense—first one side moves, then the other—and of giving to the nunnery scene more of the force of an emotional climax. But it makes the 'To be' soliloquy puzzling, since now it seems as if Hamlet has simply forgotten his resolution to use the Players. Almost by definition, the hero is a mystery, but with this bit of the puzzle the difficulty is to know whether it has to do with the heart of the matter, or with one of the dramatist's oversights.

On the other hand, the manner of introducing the Players is masterly. It throws a fresh light on Hamlet's temperament. He has just stalled his former friends' enquiries in his speech on 'man' by describing his state of mind, accurately though with a calculated reservation, as a state of division between perceiving the glory of life and failing to respond to it. And Rosencrantz brings in the first reference to the Players, either to excuse his sceptical laughter or to explain a genuine *arriere pensee*—'To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you. . .' (II. ii. 315). But, partly as if to bewilder his companions and yet as if in spontaneous interest, although

qualified by the bantering tone that belongs to their former intimacy. Hamlet reacts to the news with eagerness : 'He that plays the king shall be welcome' (unlike Claudius) 'his Majesty shall have tribute on me,. . . and the other stock parts will be played to the full, without cold reception or censorship : 'the lover shall not sigh gratis, the humorous man shall end his part in peace,. . . and the lady shall say her mind freely: or the blank verse shall halt for't.' As against the real or feigned opinion of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz that power and ambition are deceptive 'shadows', the actors—also 'shadows' in Elizabethan uses of the word[4]—present fictions which are self-evident and undesigning, besides promising Hamlet, in his melancholy, a sense of release. Yet very soon, when he has heard who the company are and that they are travelling because they have lost 'estimation,' he relates them to his own affairs and the 'more than natural' fame and fortune of his uncle; he cannot find a mental escape.

Secondly, this oblique introduction of the Players underscores the general movement of the play, which mixes 'mirth in funeral' and 'dirge in marriage' as if in defiance of academic or Senecan tragedy, and advances the plot through what Polonius has called 'indirections' and Horatio is to describe as accidents. And precisely because the Players are unconnected with the court and have no rank there, their coming contributes to the double perspective on high tragedy that runs through the play.

In Q2, Rosencrantz's information that the company have lost their following leads directly and naturally to 'It is not very strange,' Hamlet's wry comment on changes of fortune (II.ii. 336, 363) but the Folio text inserts the obtrusively topical passages of questions and answers about the rival boy players (II. ii. 337-62) between these two speeches.[5] This exchange about the 'little eyases' contains a noticeable proportion of rare words,[6] as if the speakers are holding themselves aloof from a vulgar squabble; and yet Hamlet's questions seem genui-

nely pressing: ('What, are they children ? . . . Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players. . ., their writers do them wrong, to make them exclaim against their own succession ?'). His tone here is out of keeping with the cynical tinge in his previous and his next speeches, and for the moment he sounds like the actor-dramatist's mouth-piece; though at the same time it can be said that his sense of the players as men or boys with a living to earn, as well as figures on a stage, gives an extra dimension to the theme of acting as it develops. Similarly, his greeting to the Players, with his awareness that time is passing for them as for himself, gives them a human reality, even though they are not named.

The long passage (II.ii.429-534) enclosing the set speech of Aeneas's narration raises some fresh questions. Those who regard the set speech as a parody need to account for Shakespeare's devoting so much space to it (58 lines) as well as for Hamlet's admiration. But on the other hand there is evidently a gap between Hamlet's terms of praise and the speech that we hear. Its strident emphasis hardly squares with his preface—'an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty as cunning.' Polonius has reason to say it is 'too long,' though Hamlet promptly silences him. And immediately after hearing it, it seems curious that Hamlet should recommend the actors as 'the abstract and brief chronicles of the time.' On the contrary, the speech calls up a remote, pagan world and appeals to reverence for the legendary past. In this sense, it strengthens the allusions earlier in the play to 'the most high and palmy state of Rome' and to Hamlet's father as a noble warrior, like Hercules; with the difference that the evocation of epic dignity in the speech is overlaid with a sense of horror.

Hamlet seems specially drawn to the subject because of its several analogies with his own position, just as, in Shakespeare's poem, the grief-stricken Lucrece is drawn to a picture, also showing the fall of Troy. Moreover, the

speech is insistently pictorial; in the lines Hamlet recites, Pyrrhus's 'sable arms' are 'smear'd/With heraldy more dismal,' 'total gules, horridly trick'd/With blood'—blood so 'Bak'd and impasted' on him in the glare of the fire that he is 'o,ersized with coagulate gore' : heraldic images, conveying the static physicality of paint rather than the lifelike qualities of the images in Lucrece's picture. And the lines delivered by the First Player also carry a pronounced static effect, dwelling on the moment of stilness when Pyrrhus stood like 'a painted tyrant,' and gathering rhetorical force at the end—'But who, ah woe, had seen the mobled queen'—for an impassioned outcry based on an imaginary or hypothetical picture. Hamlet had asked for 'a passionate speech' but the effect of the speech is to exhibit images of 'passion,' magnified but distant and static, as objects for contemplation. This not only has the consequence of distinguishing the inset speech in style from the main dialogue on the stage but it also seems to answer to something in Hamlet, who, as his next soliloquy shows, wants in part a theatrical display of passion, to

> drown the stage with tears,
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty, and appall the free,
> Confound the ignorant, and amaze Indeed
> The very faculties of eyes and ears.

To this extent, the theatricality of the set speech, which the prince so enthusiastically responds to, implies a comment on or a criticism of Hamlet.

Yet Hamlet, and Polonius too, has responded to something else in the speech—not the lines so much as the First Player's delivery : 'Look', says Polonius when the player comes to Hecuba, 'whe'er he has not turn'd his color and has tears in's eyes' ; and Hamlet wonders, 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,/That he should weep for her ?' It is the actor's self-command, his total commitment to a chosen purpose, that impresses Hamlet as distinct from the style of the writing

and as opposed to his own state of frustration :

> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all the visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, an' his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit ?

This implies a deep-reaching inward discipline (just as Macbeth, who is later to compare failure in life with a performance by a bad actor, feels the first onset of his tragic hubris as an inward condition where 'function is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is/But what is not'); the player's mental purpose and his psychological, even his physiological, state are both at one. What agitates Hamlet is much what Diderot calls the paradox of acting, that the actor's admired self-command is concentrated upon a 'fiction.' In contrast with his earlier contempt for 'actions that man might play' (I.ii.84), it gives him a measure of validity and purpose, but at the same time it stands for an unattainable ideal, as different from his own condition of involvement in passion as the imagined world of epic is different from Denmark. From now on, however, it is in the main just the difference between the player's acting and his own actions that will count for Hamlet, and not simply his success or failure in accomplishing revenge. Here, I think, lies the novelty of the set speech scene and its deeper contribution to the tragedy as a whole; in exhibiting an ideal which must be contrasted with the subjective experience of reality, but without which that experience cannot be fully portrayed on the stage.

Nevertheless Hamlet does not, perhaps cannot, hold on to his new insight. What he relies upon to 'catch the conscience of the King' is not so much the power of the acting in 'The Murther of Gonzago' or anything in the artistry of the play as a coincidence of circumstances. Again, there seems

no connection between the plan he has just confidently formed and Hamlet's thoughts in the following scene about '[taking] arms against a sea of troubles' and 'enterprises of great pitch and moment'—which seem far removed from any mere psychological trap. Unless we suppose that Hamlet's mind has already jumped ahead to his next step after the king has given himself away, an assumption for which there is no warrant in the text, we are left with the impression that he has forgotten all about the Players, possibly (as I have suggested) as a result of the dramatist's rearrangement of his scenes. Similarly his scathing words to Ophelia are far away from the emotional control he has been admiring in the First player, or any effort to secure it. Very soon, however, after an interval of less than 40 lines, he is pursuing his observation about the Player's self-control in his injunctions to the assembled company :

> Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently, for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say, whirlwind of your passion you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwing-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags; to split the ears of the groundlings. . . Be not too tame neither but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. (III. ii. 4, 16)

This conforms with traditional advice to orators, but there is a special edge of fresh insight in the concept of 'temperance' within 'a whirlwind of passion', a 'temperance' which 'begets' a like reaction in the audience and gives 'smoothness' of continuity to the whole performance. This concept evidently matters to Hamlet for his own sake, since he reverts to it a few moments later in his praise of Horatio as one of those rare men

> Whose blood and judgment are so well co-meddled,
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please.

Hamlet has come some distance from the detached, almost academic appreciation he had expressed for 'man' as 'a piece of work' in his declaration to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the change has to do with the feeling stirred in him by the Players. Yet even now he seems strangely forgetful. These are 'the tragedians of the city' he was 'wont to take such delight in,' and he has just been carried away by the First Player's skill. Why then does he take such pains to instruct them pillorying gross faults in acting as well as defining its subtlest points ? As with the exchange about the 'little 'eyases' it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that Shakespeare's own thoughts about his profession, extraneous to Hamlet's character, have determined some elements in the speech. These thoughts have been largely absorbed into Hamlet's mind and character as well, as appears from his eulogy of Horatio (which incidentally recalls Brutus's praise for 'our Roman actors' in *Julius Caesar*). But the two halves of his speech to Horatio are on different planes, as if the theme of an actor's self-command with all that it stands for remains somewhat apart from a 'necessary question of the play.' 'Something too much of this,' Hamlet says, breaking off his eulogy to tell Horatio the urgent details of his plot. (III.ii.74)

These speeches just before the play show Hamlet in his keenest, most collected frame of mind. They lend a tragic irony to his wildness and intemperance in what immediately follows. As soon as the court assembles and while the play is acting, he not merely reassumes his antic disposition but contradicts his own precepts and nearly thwarts his secret purpose by drawing attention to himself and especially by barbed attacks on his mother, both in his asides to Ophelia and in his more public interruptions of the performance.

In the light of Hamlet's behaviour, 'what happens' in the play scene seems entirely consistent, and much of the critical speculation about the purpose of the dumb-show and about the course of the King's reactions seems wide of the mark.[7] We have heard that Hamlet has chosen the Gonzago play

because it is 'something like' or, as he tells Horatio, 'comes near the circumstance' of the Ghost's story. In soliloquy, he does not specify which moment in the play will be crucial, though he has already decided to insert an extra speech (II. ii. 540-3, 594-8); in his instructions to Horatio, he pins his interest on 'one scene' and particularly on 'one speech,' presumably the one he has inserted (III. ii. 76, 81). But we do not know what that speech is or how the play will unfold. The dumb-show, puzzling to Ophelia because it takes the exceptional course of foreshadowing 'the argument of the play' satisfies our curiosity about 'Gonzago' enough to leave us free to attend to the stage audience and the main business of watching Hamlet watching the King. For his part, Claudius says nothing during the dumb show and, once it has started, he has every reason to keep silence. All his moves against Hamlet so far have been sufficiently (whether completely or not) explained and justified by the prince's hostile, erratic conduct. He has come to the play to please Hamlet; and it would be quite out of character for him to betray that the acted poisoning has at once touched his conscience or alerted any fear that Hamlet has somehow learned his secret; (Hamlet's vague reference to 'miching mallecho' (III. ii. 137) is hardly enough provocation). On the other hand, his 'o'erhasty marriage' with Gertrude is of course public knowledge, whatever members of the court may privately think of it, and Hamlet has publicly shown his resentment—which Gertrude believes is a main source of his 'distemper' (II. ii. 54-17). And it is that side of the 'Gonzago' play that Hamlet harps upon, disobeying the Ghost's order to leave his mother 'to heaven.' His stinging comments to Ophelia before the play opens and just after the prologue ("Tis brief, my lord'—'As woman's love') may be intended partly for her or meant for her alone to hear, or may be intended to be overheard and keep up his antic disposition; dramatically they are ambiguous. But he breaks in—'That's wormwood'—after only 25 lines of dialogue between the Player King and the Player

Queen (III. ii. 181), and soon forces attention on the resemblance between the Player Queen and Gertrude by his question, 'Madam, how like you this play ?' and his response to the Queen's diplomatic evasion ('The lady doth protest too much, methinks') in 'O but she'll keep her word.' It is only now (III. ii. 232) that the King speaks : 'Have you heard the argument ? is there no offence in't ?'; but this is no more than a veiled reference to what everyone in the court can see, that Hamlet is insulting the Queen. When Hamlet, who is too excited to allow the King's guilt to 'unkennel' itself of its own accord, tells him that the play is called 'The Mouse-trap,' Claudius evidently controls himself; he makes no overt response, although Hamlet's target must now be almost certain to him. For a moment, Hamlet contents himself with more sarcastic asides to Ophelia, but at the stage poisoning, he bursts out (III. ii. 261) with :

> 'A poisons him i' th' garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago, the story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. Ycu shall see anon how the murtherer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.

Here Claudius's reserve at last breaks; 'The King rises,' exclaims Ophelia, and he leaves, stopping the play. But even here, although Hamlet has an enigmatical aside in triumph ('What, frighted with false fire ?'), it is far from plain that the King has given away his guilty secret. On the contrary, to all appearances he has risen in anger over yet another thinly-concealed insult to the Queen. That is a sufficient reason for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to report to Hamlet that the King is 'marvellous distemp'red' and the Queen 'in most great affliction of spirit' when they return to the stage, without our being forced to suppose that they have inferred Claudius's guilt and stifled their consciences; and similarly, in the next scene, Claudius can say to them, 'I like him not, nor stands it safe with us/To let his madness range,' without any risk that they will question his motives for 'fear' of Hamlet more deeply when he orders them to see the prince off to England. To them, as to Polonius, Hamlet's conduct during

the play and not the content of the play itself has been a plausible explanation. Nor does Gertrude herself, in the closet scene, appear to guess or imagine that it is the stage murder that 'offended' Claudius.

But if Shakespeare's dramatic intentions with what can be called the events in the play scene are consistent and clear, the style of the inset play is another matter. There is no attempt to recapture the impressiveness of the First Player's display or to carry out the spirit of Hamlet's careful instructions; indeed, if his impatience with the villain's 'damnable faces' may be trusted, the actors have not understood them. But, even at a humbler level, the trite rhetoric leaves the Player King and the Player Queen with very little chance to show what they can do. The nursery-rhyme computation in the Player King's first speech—'And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen/About the world have times twelve thirties been'—must be in the running for the feeblest verse in mature Elizabethan drama, while his protracted ramblings over constancy—'But orderly to end where I begun'—would hardly do credit to Polonius. Something must be allowed, no doubt, for the stylisation, achieved here by the use of rhyme, necessary to distance the inset play and distinguish its dialogue from the dialogue in the main play; and drastic compression of the inset play is also necessary. It cannot be allowed to compete with the main play for interest. But it does not need to approach nullity. The speeches are so wordy that Claudius and, more especially, Gertrude cannot avoid seeing the show of an attack, but otherwise they are devoid of any sting of natural feeling. 'My operant powers their functions leave to do,' or 'Each opposite that blanks the face of joy/Meet what I would have well and it destroy!': Theseus and Hippolyta would have made short work of this stuff.

Hamlet has been counting on 'the very cunning of the scene' to test Claudius's guilt, on the alleged magic of stage illusion. In 'The Murther of Gonzago' the composition seems

artless and the illusion minimal; one can well imagine that without Hamlet's interference the production would have had no effect at all. Shakespeare is prepared to take short cuts in convincing his audience with a stage illusion, provided he can show the impact of his characters on one another and the workings of an illusion in a leading character's mind. Once he has shown what acting can mean for Hamlet, he seems to have lost interest in this illustrious company of Players, to the extent of skimping them of means to justify their reputation and carry off what has looked like becoming their vital function in the plot. But what Hamlet sees in good acting, the balance of human powers it represents for him, is more important than any consistent general illusion or how the Players, as players, appear to us. When they fade out after the play scene, nobody mentions them again.

One reflection from the longwinded Player King, however, does have some resonance in the main play :

> Purpose is but the slave to memory,
> Of violent birth, but poor validity... (III. ii. 188)

Whether these lines have come from Hamlet's pen or not—we are not told—they apply to Hamlet and to those with whom he is compared. We hear of the 'unimproved mettle hot and full' in Fortinbras (I. i. 96); Laertes warns Ophelia that hot-bloodedness in Hamlet and his settled intentions cannot come to the same thing (I. iii.); and Claudius weightedly echoes the Player King when he is manipulating Laertes :

> Not that I think you did not love your father,
> But that I know love is begun by time,
> And that I see, in passages of proof,
> Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
> There lives within the very flame of love,
> A kind of week or snuff that will abate it... (IV. vii. 110)

In a similar strain, in the last of his soliloquies, after meeting Fortinbras's soldiers, Hamlet has pondered the equivalence between motive and action (IV. iv.). Hot impulsiveness,

potentially self-destructive, stands out as a human problem for the characters in the play, just as much as the opposite quality of 'thinking too precisely on th' event.' This train of thought is linked by antithesis to Hamlet's view of an actor's self-command in the midst of passion and 'his whole function suiting/With forms to his conceit;' there is a continuous give-and-take in the play between the complexities of direct experience and the idea of an actor.

There is no clown in 'The Murther of Gonzago,' to heed or confirm Hamlet's generalised warnings. But the Clown who appears in the graveyard scene shows that the 'necessary questions' raised within the play will not be confined by the hero's 'purpose.'

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NOTES

[1] e.g. *The Riverside Shakespeare* edited by G. Blackmore Evans (Boston 1974), which I am following here.

[2] Anne Righter (Anne Barton), *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* [1962] Harmondsworth, 1967), pp. 138-47.

[3] The New Variorum *Hamlet*, edited by H. H. Furness (New York, 1967 edn), vol. Ii.

[4] Cf. *MND* v. i. 211, 423

[5] *Riverside* edn, Textual Notes; cf. W.J. Lawrence, *Shakespeare's Workshop* (Oxford, 1928), pp. 104-5.

[6] *Aery* (noun) and to *tarre* are each used in two Shakespeare plays besides *Hamlet*; *eyases*, *berattle*, *goose quills* and *escoted* appear only in this passage (Marvin Spevack. *The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* (Hildesheim [1969], 1973).

See the recent analysis of these questions by W.W. Robson in 'Did the King See the Dumb-Show ?' (*The Cambridge Quarterly* VI, 1975 pp. 303-26). I have found Professor Robson's article very helpful

here, though I cannot accept all his conclusions; (for instance, on p. 322 he suggests that there is a problem because neither the dumb-show nor the inset play implies 'that the Queen was party to the murder or involved in adultery,' in spite of the Ghost's story—so that we are left wondering whether 'she is guilty, but Hamlet is protecting her from exposure,' or whether the Ghost's story is unreliable. But the Ghost has not accused Gertude of complicity in murder, and to bring her adultery to light would be contrary to the Ghost's orders. The veracity of the Ghost is not in question in this way. Hamlet shows his feelings, his animus, plainly enough when through the role of the Player Queen and his own comments he accuses his mother of inconstancy).

Pierre Sahel

WAR IN *HAMLET*

War has never been considered as a major issue in *Hamlet*. It lurks, however, constantly in the background of the play. Denmark's past was as warlike in the reign of Claudius's predecessor as its future may be in the reign of Claudius's successor. At the beginning of the tragedy[1], officers and soldiers mention 'brazen cannon', 'implements of war', and 'impress of shipwrights' (I. i, 73-5). At the end, volleys are heard and a peal of ordnance is shot off (V. ii. stage directions). In Act IV, a Norwegian expeditionary force is marching through Denmark against Poland.

The military question in *Hamlet* can be summarized as follows:

1. Conflict between the two powers of the North, Denmark and Norway, was settled by a single combat opposing King Hamlet and King Fortinbras, after which the disputed lands were seized by the victorious Danish king (I. i. 80-95).

2. Norway and Denmark have henceforth been at peace, but the spirit of revenge drives young Fortinbras, nephew to the new Norwegian monarch, to recruit bands of mercenaries (I. i. 95-104) in order to reconquer the territories lost by his dead father.

3. Under diplomatic pressure—Danish ambassadors are dispatched in I. ii. and come back in II. ii—the king of Norway puts an end to his kinsman's unofficial preparations against Denmark but, to busy Fortinbras's giddy mind with foreign quarrels, gives him commission to employ his soldiers against Poland (II. ii. 69-75).

4. Fortinbras's progress is then somewhat obscure. We know that he crosses Denmark without stirring any fray there, even greeting the Danish king (IV. iv. 1) and being prepared to express his duty in his eye (IV. iv. 5). He carries out his expedition, (presumably) smiting the sledded Polacks on the ice. No reference is made to any unsettlement of the political order in Poland, but, on his way back, the conqueror passes pat by Elsinore to receive the unpossessed Danish crown, having then with no meagre benefits achieved what might be called his grand tour of Europe's elective monarchies.

Shakespeare, on the face of it, does not make much of what might have been the backbone of one of his history plays or of what might have led him, as in most of his other great tragedies, to stage a pitched battle[3]. The only direct comment of any length on Fortinbras's military manoeuvres may seem slightly disparaging:

> I see
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
> That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
> To hide the slain. (IV. iv. 59)

Here Hamlet is not analysing the motivations of the marching soldiers and their leader. He simply underlines their abnormally high energy vented for an objectively limited stake. Yet subjectively, the warlike display—since it is a display and a show[3]—is little short of an admirable enterprise : it is pregnant with examples to be envied (IV. iv. 46-7) if not followed; the thing quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom, and even three parts heroism. What if so many men go to their graves, since their graves are like beds ? Perhaps the nobleness of life is to do thus—to scorn, that is, the uncertainty of the dangers to come ('to make mouths at the invisible event', IV. iv. 50), provided those who are endaged in the struggle know that lives, and not only straws or eggshells, are at stake. And

they do, as is evidenced by the energetic and cynical statement of the captain which anticipates Hamlet's comment :

> We go to gain a little patch of ground
> That hath in it no profit but the name.
> To pay five ducats, five; I would not farm it;
> Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole
> A ranker rate, should it be sold in fee. (IV. iv. 18)

However, the prince's graver reflection,

> This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace,
> That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
> Why the man dies. (IV. iv. 27)

goes deeper than his, or the captain's, understanding of war as a costly game and a show of useless bravery. It makes a reference to a mortal ulcer, a surprisingly unhealthy excrescence of peace and wealth. The play, it is an acknowledged fact[4], is rich with images of sickness. Some of them allude to unseen abcesses preying upon a body's health, as when Hamlet warns his mother that her self-complacency would

> but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen. (III. iv. 147)

Later in the play, Claudius uses an aphorism which is not unlike Hamlet's metaphor of excess : 'goodness, growing to a pleurisy, / Dies in his own too much.' (IV. vii. 117) To the prince above as to the king here, affluence and welfare bring about their own destruction : progress leads to decadence, too far east is west. But Hamlet's suggestion that war is the antidote to excessive peace is unique in the play. For such is the meaning of the equation of Fortinbras's army with a purulent swelling; should the tumour have broken 'inward', it would have entailed the death of the sickly Norwegian body politic. Since, *a contrario*, it breaks *out* ('without', i.e in Denmark and later in Poland), as after a physician has bled a patient, the pus drains and recovery must ensue. A similar thesis, equally couched in image form, is propounded in

Shakespearian dramas written about the same date as *Hamlet*. In 2 *Henry IV*, for example, the Archbishop of York claims to have launched a 'fearful war'

> To diet rank minds sick of happiness
> And purge th' obstructions which begin to stop
> Our very veins of life. (IV. i. 64)

The image is not more limpid in the history than in the tragedy, and the archbishop deems it necessary to be more explicit. He adds : 'Hear me more plainly' (IV. i. 66) and goes on elucidating his meaning with references to the politico-military situation of his country (IV. i. 67 - 87). In our overtly and clamorously antimilitarist days, we are so little accustomed to what smacks of an outspoken vindication of war[5] that we may wish Hamlet too had added, if only for our benefit, 'Hear me more plainly'. Since he does not, commentary is perhaps not superfluous[6].

Fortinbras, in the eyes of Hamlet, is finding an outlet for the energies of Norway's 'lawless resolutes' (I. i. 98) and is thereby about to renew the strength which his country has been losing under the meek sway of his old, 'impotent and bed-rid' uncle (I. ii. 29). No such prospect exists for Denmark which, in the meantime, is dying in its own too much. The kingdom had, under King Hamlet, reached complete military hegemony, with Norway kept at bay and England, 'whose cicatrice looks raw and red/After the Danish sword' (IV. iii. 60), a 'faithful tributary' (V. ii. 39). But it is now an effete power. Its glory is past and buried its majesty. Some diagnose that, because of the death of the elder Hamlet, 'the State is disjoint and out of frame' (I. ii. 20); Horatio at one moment supposes that the dead monarch's spirit walks to avoid 'his country's fate' (I. i. 133). Drums, trumpets, and ordnance only 'bray out the triumph' of the present king's pledge while the Elsinore court 'keeps wassail' (I. iv. 8-12), which ruins the national reputation (I. iv 17-20). The absence of military adventures otherwise transforms the country into a prison-State (II. ii. 242) peopled with domestico-political spies.

threatened by a rebellious mob (IV.v.), and ruled by a murderer, whose mellifluous language and conscious similes[7] testify to his skill in achieving diplomatic triumphs only – all these being symptoms that Denmark's own imposthume is breaking 'inward'. The kingdom indeed has its strange eruptions (I. i. 69), and the sickness *leitmotif* of the play indicates (amongst other things) some of the characters' more or less vivid consciousness of their own, or other protagonists's, ulcers.

Several critics of the play regard its hero not as the subtle diagnostician of the values of war but as a soldier. Maynard Mack understands 'by the close of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* why it is that unlike the other tragic heroes, he is given a soldier's rites upon the stage'[8]. Patrick Cruttwell judges that 'what Hamlet really is, is a conscript in a war'.[9] Kenneth Muir mentions 'the martial qualities, sometimes not sufficiently recognized, of Prince Hamlet, which are underlined by the rites of war ordered by Fortinbras for his obsequies'.[0]

It is true that Hamlet is waging a war—of a sort. His initial aim of 'setting right' the world (I.v. 190) can be identified with the vow of leading some chimerical crusade. Throughout the play his outlook gradually narrows until the character has so contracted a world vision that he proclaims : 'My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth' ! (IV. iv. 66). From his wide and generous capacity for exalting purity and repudiating even the idea of the least human blemish (I. ii. 129-30), he moves towards the actue consciousness that the loftiest ideals are on the limited scale of man and that the common fate of the most uncommon figures is to end in dust: has not 'imperious Caesar', that 'kept the world in awe', 'turn'd to clay' (V.i. 207-10) ? This difficult understanding of painful realities is as much a conquest as a capitulation. On board the ship which should have borne him to England, the metamorphosis of the pure soul into a ruthless schemer is completed—a genuine conversion : There was, he says,

> A kind of fighting
> That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
> Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. (V. ii. 4)

Yet, when we speak of an inner fight, we consciously or otherwise, use a figurative language, as Hamlet often does. The figure of speech of the battle or fight, however banal, allows us to express what we feel of Hamlel's progress more easily than if we had to define his spiritual evolution in less vivid terms. A scholar's thought, like a scientist's or an orator's, may assuredly be stimulated when it is based on metaphorical or rhetorical premises. It may also take off from the firm ground of practical realities and reach heights where the atmosphere is so rarefied that scientific verification is impossible. Dictionaries of rhetoric acknowledge the essential vagueness of metaphor, and Sir Winston Churchill well knew 'the infinite debt owed to metaphors by politicians who want to speak strongly but are not sure what they are going to say.[11] Yeats' remarks, quoted by Maynard Mack with reference to Hamlet's asserted soldierly qualities—'Why should we honor those who die on the field of battle ? A Man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself'[12]—only hold because of the attractiveness of their rhetorical turn and their images. Should we perceive that such words as 'entering into' or 'abyss' are appealing metaphors and that their significance remains to be dug into, should we question the adjective 'reckless' or, even more, question the question; the whole force of the final apothegm might be utterly lost

Of course the legitimacy of Hamlet's own use of metaphors and in general, of rhetoric. could not but be taken for granted since it is one of Shakespeare's mediums for the very creation of his play. Hamlet, as he moves towards self-discovery and reasons with himself does so as if he were indulging in some debate or contention simply because he is a protagonist speaking from the stage and directing a verbal strategy at the audience. Hence the interplay of often violent questions and answers in his most 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 ? . . .
Who would bear the whips and scorns of time
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin ? (III. i. 56)

Here, as elsewhere, antipophora is perhaps the best tool to transform introspection into dramatic solo. But the monologue does not particularly attempt to reckon Hamlet's dilemma in terms of military success or defeat. At the end, it does not present 'resolutions', the 'hue' of which is 'native', as a victory over oneself; as Wolfgang Clemen rightly understands[13], to Hamlet, resolution is an innate human quality, not a virtue to be consciously striven after. Antipophora is also what the prince makes ample use of in his 'O what a rogue' soliloquy, which abounds in rhetorical questions (Is it not monstrous. . .?, II, ii., 544; 'what's Hecuba to him . . .?, 552; What would he do . . .?", 553). There the hero fiercely apostrophizes an imaginary opponent :

Who calls me villian, breaks my pate across,
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i th' throat
As deep as to the lungs ? Who does me this ? (II. ii. 566)

Yet all his bellicose interrogations do not, of course, bring him to resist actively the physical aggression he appears to resent so indignantly : he sets his mind a working ('About, my brains', 584). Significantly, in the case of most of the *personae*, mental faculties are related to war images. If Hamlet speaks of the pales and forts for reason' (I. iv. 28) and sees that his mother's heart is 'proof and bulwark against sense' (III. iv 38), the Ghost thinks of Gertrude's 'fighting soul' (III.iv. 113), Claudius blames his nephew for his 'heart unfortified' (I.ii. 96), and Rosencrantz refers to 'the armour of the mind' (III iii. 12) he may then infer that Hamlet's war with himself is but a metaphor.

The antagonism between Hamlet and Claudius can hardly be viewed as actual, though it may certainly be compared to 'a duel to the death'[14]. It is this conflict which precipitates the prince's evolution end leads him to follow a realistic, if not ruthless, line of conduct. When he unseals Claudius's letter and sends his two old school fellows to their deaths, this drives him two steps further away from his initial standpoint of purity and of horror at too sullied flesh—and maks Patrick Cruttwell write : 'He has done things as we do in wars, he would rather not have done ; but he believes it to be a just war. ?[15] To me Hamlet does not seem either soldierly or reluctant. On the one hand his qualities are never warlike, let alone Herculean (I.ii.153) ; on the other hand, the dead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern 'are not near (his) conscience' (V.ii. 58). Moreover he appears to relish the idea of living dangerously and of playing practical jokes on an adversary that will not uncover himself :

> 'Tis the sport to have the engineer
> Hoist with his own petar; and't shall go hard
> But I will delve one yard below their mines
> And blow them at the moon. O, 'tis most sweet
> When in one line two crafts directly meet. (IV. iv. 206)

But at the game of plots and domestic battles, Claudius is the better player. It is one of the ironies of action in this drama that the slower plotter fancies he has outrun his opponent. Claudius it is that takes most of the initiatives, as when he dispatches Hamlet to England. And when Hamlet returns, proclaiming 'the interim is mine' (V.ii. 73), the arrival of Osric, Claudius's instrument to open a new trap under Hamlet's feet, indicates (to us, not the prince) that if any interim exists, it is Claudius's. Hamlet furthermore does not act but reacts. The only instances when he actually behaves violently—stabbing Polonius, devising a scheme to lose Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or killing the king—are moments when he responds to direct aggression. At best, this is legitimate defence, not soldierly contest. Otherwise the prince's strug-

gles are combats of wits and rhetorical display, essentially war of words—in short, metaphorical fighting. Only when he finds himself 'too short of sail' (as when he was at sea) does he 'put on a compelled valour' (IV. vi. 17-18). Yet even the prospect of fighting an actual duel remains a metaphor to him. When Horatio voices his feeling that the prince will be defeated in the imminent encounter with Laertes ('you will lose this wager, my lord', V. ii. 201), Hamlet answers : I do not think so; since [Laertes] went into France,/I have been in continual practice.' (V. ii. 202). After Laertes' departure Hamlet spoke daggers but used none. Verbal combats he had with the king, the queen, Polonius, and (as I showed here above) himself. This was his sole (and, admittedly, continual) 'practice'. With Laertes himself, he was willing to to fight 'until [his] eyelids will no longer wag'—but only 'upon a theme' (V. i. 200). We must understand that, now that he is claiming to overcome Laertes, he means to do so much in the same way as he outwitted his previous adversaries. To a man who occassionally knows not 'seems', the coming passage of arms may simply be a metonymy, a mere aggravation of the conflict which he had already perceived metaphorically as 'the pass and fell incensed points of two mighty opposites' (V. ii. 61). To Claudius, meanwhile, the projected duel is a totally different metaphor—a euphemism for the plain assassination of one of the two duellists.

Those critics who use Hamlet's metaphors to describe Hamlet's situation perhaps behave like adults who fear their intrusion might destroy a child's playworld filled with imaginary Redskins, fanciful sodiers, and daggers of the mind. Attention, however, should be paid to the fact that Hamlet's images are far from being based always on illusory data. When he diagnoses that Fortinbras's military excursion will cure Norway's sickness, for example, the play explicitly states that old Norway *is* physically sick. The play, just as explicitly states that the universe of murders, plots, and counterplots in which Hamlet has been floundering has nothing to do with

the true world of war. Fortinbras, the genuine soldier, who knows what war, the real thing is—and, maybe, knows only that—refuses to assimilate the sorry sight he discovers in Claudius's court with the havoc of war. The imposthume of Denmark has broken inward, in Elsinore, and 'such a sight as this/Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.' (V.ii. 393). He it is that intrudes into Hamlet's tragic world of metaphors and rhetoric. He sees that Hamlet was never 'put on' and had no opportunity of proving 'most royal'. His simile barely admits that in death the prince of Denmark may be treated '*like* a soldier'—like the soldier he never was in life, however much he could appreciate the values of war. Of course, all this amounts to a soldierly compliment to the prince who, alive might have been his rival. To Fortinbras, in any case, Hamlet is good, being gone. He honours Hamlet in his muscular way, as Hamlet had honoured him in his own way, by calling him 'a delecate and tender prince' (IV. ii. 48). The man of history succeeds the man of tragedy. Soon, thanks to him, the stage will be not only empty but silent. The rest is silence indeed. Fortinbras has Hamlet's dying voice only. The living voice of tragedy is no longer heard. The world of speech has ended, and simile replaces metaphor.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] All references to Shakespeare are from *The Complete Works*, edited by Peter Alexander (London, 1951).

[2] Even less is made of it by producers. Since the eighteenth century, the speaking parts of Cornelius, Voltemand, the Norwegian captain and Fortinbras have been considerably abridged or entirely cut.

See Neil Graves, 'Even for an Eggshell' : *Hamlet* and the Problem of Fortinbras'. *The Upstart Crow* II (Fall 1979) pp. 51-63.

[5] Alvin B. Kernan, 'Politics and Theatre in *Hamlet*', *Hamlet Studies* I (1979), pp. 7-8.

[4] See Caroline E. Spurgeon *Shakespeare's Imagery and what it Tells us* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 133-4, 213, 316-19; Wolfgang H. Clemen *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London 1951), pp, 114-18); Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare the Professional* (London, 1973), pp. 105-115).

[5] In the days of Elizabeth and James, there was a fairly open debate on the respective values of war and peace. Witness Francis Bacon's reflection in his essay (XXXIX) on 'the true greatness of kingdoms and estates' in *Essays*, edited by Michael J.Hawkins (London, 1972), p. 95 : Nobody can be healthful without exercise, neither natural body nor politic; and certainly to a kingdom or estate, a just and honourable war is the true exercise. A foreign war is like the heat of exercise and serveth to keep the body in health; for in a slothful peace, both courages will effeminate and manners corrupt.' The vindication of foreign war is the main subject of Dudley Digges *Four Paradoxes or Politic Discourses* (London, 1604) where the worthiness of war and warriors is described in a style replete with imagery, as on pp. 103–104: God . . . hath left us a perfect remedy . . . ; to wit, foreign war, a sovereign medicine for domestical inconveniences. It may be some now will condemn this course, as changing for the worse : some that will much mislike a body breaking-out should take receipts of quicksilver or mercury, that may endanger life; yet they cannot but know even those poisons outwardly applied are sovereign medicines to purge and cleanse.'

[6] Commentary seems all the less superfluous as earlier criticism has overlooked or misunderstood the substance of Hamlet's words. Caroline S. Spurgeon (op., cit., p. 318), for example, only mentions them in an extrapolation : 'This corruption . . is as the foul tumour breaking inwardly and poisoning the whole body. while showing no cause without why the man dies.' This image pictures and reflects not only the outward condition which causes Hamlet's spiritual illness. but also his own state'. To G K. Hunter ' The Heroism of Hamlet', in *Hamlet*, Stratford-upon-Avon-Studies 5 [London, 1963], p. 95), they merely refer to the kind of expensive princely folly that Montaigne never tires axposing'.

[7] See Wolfgang H. Clemen, op. cit. p 106 n.

[8] The World of *Hamlet*', *Yale Review*, XLI (1952) ; reprinted in *Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'*, edited by John Jump, Casebook Series (London, 1968), p. 106.

9 'The Morality of Hamlet—"Sweet Prince" or Arrant Knave"?, in *Hamlet*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 5 p. 128.

10 *Shakespeare the Professional* p. 124.

11 Quoted in H.W. Fowler's *Dictonary of Modern English Usage* 1968 Oxford edn), p. 359. On the political use and abuse of metaphors in *Hamlet*, see Pierre Sahel. 'The Cease of Majesty in *Hamlet*', *Hamlet Studies* I (1979) pp. 113-14.

12 'The World of *Hamlet*' p. 107.

13 *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, p. 112.

14 Kenneth Muir, op cit., p. 124.

15 'The Morality of Hamlet', p. 128.

Z. A. Usmani

THE FLESH AND THE QUEST FOR RESOLUTION

Hamlet can be seen as an exploration into the disconcerting mystery of existence, of 'flesh' in its biblical and widest sense, and the possibility of its resolution. From the very beginning the sense of mystery is evoked ('Who's there ?'—spoken, not by the sentinel on duty, but by the sentinel coming to relieve him). The appearance of the Ghost suggests that the 'Known' world lies fearfully open along its very frontier (the Platform upon the battlements) to intrusions from the 'unknown'. It seems the 'unknown' will always permeate the 'known' and transform it in its mystery

As the 'unwholesome' night of the Opening Scene is ending Horatio draws attention to the coming 'morn' which is a mysterious image of wholesomeness radiating intimations of hope :

> But look the morn in russet mantle clad,
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.[1]

The image, which is not merely decorative, makes for the resolution of the tensions of the scene. But by pointing to the mysterious possibility of wholesomeness in the universe, of the honest day labour-like purity and harmony and beauty and grace ('in russet mantle clad/Walks o'er the dew . . .') associated with the coming reign of the sun-king (Hyperion), it also points to the possibility of the resolution of the disconcerting mystery of existence itself.

Although Shakespeare is discovering and creating his own meaning of reality and the existing senses of a word are his raw material we may keep it in mind that out of the various

possible senses around Shakespeare's time of the word 'resolution' (as given by *The Oxford English Dictionary*) those relevant to our purpose are : dissolution; reduction into components; conversion to a fluid state; relaxation or loosensing; answering of a question; an explanatory account of something (which is not only Hamlet's problem but the critic's problem too!); conviction—removal of doubt; fixed determination; and steadiness of purpose. In *Hamlet* all these senses, modified as they are by those discovered and created by our experience of the play itself, are related to the central problem of being, being in all its baffling complexity. Hamlet, so to say, is called upon to resolve himself to resolve the baffling problem of being, his own and of the society around him—to 'set right' the whole disjointed (existence in) time. One sense of the verb 'resolve' in use as early as in 1526 according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (which gives 24 senses, at least 22 of them being available as raw material to Shakespeare) is particularly significant for our purpose : it is 'to cause a discord to pass away'. In this sense, again modified as it is by the context of the play, Hamlet's is a quest to resolve the discord of existence within and without so as to achieve the harmony of being that may transcend Fortune.

Obviously, the question of resolution poses itself for the individual who is painfully conscious of disjointedness and corruption and meaninglessness in existence, for the values that would make it coherent and wholesome and meaningful have been undermined. This has happened in the case of Hamlet because of his mother's overhasty and incestuous marriage. He is painfully conscious that his mother's 'act' is 'such an act' that has made a mockery of the values of modesty, virtue, love and marriage vows (3. iv. 41-46) and that Claudius is a villain who has treacherously violated all the values distinctive of the humankind ('Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain'). In other words, the question of resolution poses itself for Hamlet because, caught up in the tangle of existence as he is, he has conscience—

from *Conscientia* both in the sense of consciousness and of moral sense. Hamlet's is the central consciousness in the play inasmuch as his is the central conciousness of existence in it, and one that is struggling for resolution. He cannot help it because he cannot be dull like the 'fat weed/That rots itself in ease on Lethe wharf'. We may remind ourselves that such a central consciousness implicating the judgment of various values and the possibility of choice between them is lacking in *Troilus and Cressida*, which is the main reason why this play only intrigues us but does not involve us most deeply. Which Hamlet certainly does.

The Council Chamber Scene with its gay show figures contrasted with the black and solitary figure of the Prince brings out the hypocrisy—the 'seeming' quality—of a life lived on the basis of expediency and the cult of success, which, in spite of all the 'wisdom' and 'art', is a beastly involvement with mere self-interest—no remembrance except 'remembrance of ourselves'. On this basis Claudius has built a 'solid' and 'painted' world—like 'the harlot's cheek beautied with plast'ring art' and he keeps it 'painted' in order to hide his beastly self-interest. The reality of this world, however agreeable its appearance may be, is grotesquely monstrous. It is visible in spite of the 'paint' in Claudius's very first speech—'our sometime sister, now our queen . . . With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage' It is reflected and evaluated in Hamlet's consciousness to evoke a violent sense of repugnance and self-disgust : 'A little more than kin and less than kind'. Claudius has turned to 'my cousin Hamlet, and my son', who himself has thus been turned into a monster by the abominable act of the uncle-father and aunt-mother (her 'husband's brother's wife'), and as the monstrous pair direct their 'rhetoric of oblivion' at him he is filled with an intense disgust with himself who has inherited corrupt flesh from his mother, and with the 'uses of this world', which breaks out in his first soliloquy. To him the gross reality of human existence underlying all 'seeming' and 'painting' and 'playing'

amounts to being a mass of 'solid' beastly flesh – which by implication is also 'sullied' flesh (Dover Wilson's reading) :

> O that this too too solid flesh would melt
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew !

Hamlet here thinks of 'resolution' in the sense of dissolution; but there are other possible senses of 'resolution' which will emerge after the Ghost's revelation and Hamlet's acceptance of the task laid upon him. But even here a very significant sense of the word that the play will develop is suggested in ironic undertones by the word 'dew'. This word, which occurred earlier in Horatio's description of the 'morn' suggests, in opposition to the 'solid sullied flesh' existing on the mere beastly—and even worse than beastly level, the possibility of its resolution into some kind of transcendental purity. But it may mean 'dews of blood' of which Horatio speaks in connexion with the ominous appearance of the Ghost (1.i. 117). Who Knows ?

Even at this stage Hamlet is tortured by a sense of being caught up in a grotesque thicket of tangled coils, which to him the 'unweeded garden' of fleshly existence is, and of violently struggling in it. Similar is the impression that Elizabethan grotesque designs often give; and Nicholas Ling printed such a design on the title pages of both the 1603 and the 1604-5 Quartos, which does not prove that it was a hint towards an understanding of the play simply because he printed the same design on the title pages of very different works[2].) On the one hand there is the desire, born of intense disgust to escape the heinous predicament through 'self-slaughter', on the other the religious sanction against such an attempt – contradictory forces in other words, neutralizing each other, as in a grotesque design. Even Claudius becomes aware of such a situation of grotesque entanglement : 'O limed soul, that struggling to be free,/Art more engag'd !' But what is characteristic of *Hamlet* is the impression that the tangle is

not only external—naked human kind struggling in the thicket of the tangled coils of the 'unweeded garden' of this world—but also internal' · the contradictory forces within 'this mortal coil' of existence in the flesh in which the 'limed' human soul is struggling. Thus there is contradiction not only between Hamlet and the world around him but also an inner contradiction between the various parts of his being and even within a particular part. The impression is that of contradiction within contradiction, of a grotesque tangle within tangle.

The paralysed situation of the first soliloquy is also shot through with an excruciatingly painful nostalgia for the lost golden age of the reign of the sun-king, Hyperion, which is contrasted with the satyr-like beastliness of lust ruling over the present disjointed time. Wishing the 'too too solid flesh' to 'resolve' would, in this sense, imply wishing its 'solid' tangle to loosen or untie itself (which is the basic sense of 'resolve' *re* + *solvere*) into the transcendental, dew-like purity associated with the coming of the sun-king Hyperion. But now there is the Satyr and the worse than beastly flesh of the mother has made with it an incestuous marriage in such haste (O wicked speed . . .). It may be pointed out that even in the case of the mother's love for her old husband, as Hamlet recalls it, ironic undertones of beastly lust are suggested by the imagery of 'appetite' and 'feeding'—'As if increase of appetite had grown/By what it fed on'. Hamlet speaks of her in similar, and more specific, terms in the Closet Scene where he sees her as a blind head of cattle :

> Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
> And batten on this moor ? Ha ! have you eyes ?

On account of his mother Hamlet is obsessed by the nauseating feeling that beastly lust is inherent in the flesh.

On this account Hamlet rejects love which contributes to Ophelia's tragedy. But Polonius, Laertes and Claudius, on the other hand, are ignorant of the true, transcendental nature of love, in as much as they would not see in it anything above

passion, and that too of a merely self-gratifying nature. Laertes regards love only as a 'toy in blood' against which his sister should guard her chastity. He says that youth in its purity and freshness is most susceptible to corruption—'in the morn and liquid dew of youth/Contagious blastments are most imminent'. Similarly, Polonius sees love as a mere 'burning of blood', and, what is worse, in cautioning his daughter against it he is cheaply cynical and even vulgar. Claudius also sees nothing but passion in love, and, therefore, he takes inconstancy for granted. He thinks that 'Time qualifies the spark and fire' of love, and that, 'There lies within the very flame of love./A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it.' In fact in the 'unweeded garden' of Elsinore society the flower of love cannot bloom (the contrasting imagery of 'weeds' and 'flowers' is significant in this context); the 'rose of the fair state' is 'quite quite down' and 'violets' can spring only from Ophelia's grave. Since this society is horribly lacking in sincerity, mutual trust and personal convictions regarding any value except self-interest only 'painted' words are bandied about here. Polonius is particularly fond of using precepts divorced from a personal sense of value. The dramatic irony of his advice to Laertes, 'to thine own self be true', is too obvious to need any comment. But it is actually Hamlet who is all the time trying to be true to himself, so as to do nothing that is not based on personal conviction. In a world of 'seeming' where external standards of value are doubtful he can fulfil his 'being' only in accordance with internal or personal standards. But this also involves him with the basic problem of knowledge—conscience in the wide sense—knowledge of the world around and, above all, knowledge of oneself. In fact the tangle of existence is a tangle of incoherence, perplexities and uncertainties, which Hamlet feels called upon to resolve for himself in his search for meanings and values. Before everything he is the symbol of man struggling for knowledge in a universe where relevant knowledge is not possible.[4]

For the Hamlet of the first soliloquy the basic values of love and faithfulness that would make life meaningful have been defeated by the inherent beastly lust of the 'solid-sullied flesh', and the only resolution that seems possible, that is, 'self-slaughter', is forbidden by religious canon. After this soliloquy occurs a 'meditation' on the mysterious birth of evil (1, iv. 8 ff), the 'vicious mole of nature' for which man is not responsible. (I use the term 'meditation' in the sense in which Nigel Alexander has designated certain speeches of Hamlet's as 'meditations'.[5] I find the pattern of soliloquies and 'meditations' he has discovered of immense help for understanding the development of Hamlet's conscious and unconscious mind. On the whole I am deeply indebted to his explication of the structure of the play.) Thus the awareness of the inherent corruption of the flesh (Cf. Hamlet's words to Ophelia in the Nunnery Scene) is supplemented in Hamlet's consciousness, by an awareness of the mysterious birth of evil, which is also visualized in terms of flesh—'some vicious mole of nature'. Then comes the Ghost's revelation which gives to the intuitions of Hamlet's 'Prophetic soul' such a harrowing shape that his own being is thrown into discord and he is left desperately struggling to hold on to 'the principal realities that he knows—the great assurances of body and soul'[6] ('O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else!/And shall I couple hell? . . .'). Horatio refers to his state of being when he says: 'These are but wild and whirling words, my lord'. Hamlet is staggered by the revelation that this world is not merely an 'unweeded garden' of inherently lustful flesh, as he thought, but a tangle (a 'mortal coil') infested with 'pernicious' (womanly) vice and 'smiling' serpentine villainy: and 'The serpent that did sting thy father's life/Now wears his crown'. The 'smiling villain' that rules the present time has poisoned the whole society with beastly lust and mere self-interest hiding behind the hypocritical shows or 'seemings' that Hamlet has already taken note of; it has indeed thrown the whole 'time out of joint'. In

committing himself to take revenge on this villain, whom he cannot call to a public account, Hamlet is committing himself to resolve, to 'set right', the whole tangle of disjointed time. 'O cursed spite', he exclaims, 'That ever I was born to set it right.' The emphasis is on *born*—born in 'this mortal coil', so to say, of his own existence in the flesh and of the existence in the flesh around him.

It must not be forgotten that the Ghost's command comes to a Hamlet whose faith in values has been shattered; to whom all love seems an illusion and humanity a disgusting mass of beastly flesh. The Ghost's command which seems to come from a saga-like world of absolute values, of family honour, military honour and chivalry, would impose a simplistic, traditional resolution of the problem of evil But in 'this mortal coil' the problem of evil is entangled with being, in all its paradoxes. Hence the irony of Hamlet's being, paralysed as it is with its inner contradictions in its attempt to contradict the being of Claudius not only on the level of fleshly existence but also on the level of existence beyond the flesh, so as to have his soul damned with his death. The Prayer Scence brings out the deepest irony of the situation. With Hamlet there is an inner contradiction in the operation of 'conscience', which in its original, inclusive sense means 'knowledge.' In this case conscience makes him accept the duty of revenge; but conscience, in the sense of 'moral knowledge', implies a value-system which has sunk deep into the unconscious from where it operates, as Nigel Alexander has pointed out,[7] as an unconscious revulsion against secret murder, in the manner of Claudius-Lucianus. In this way the urge to action deriving from knowledge in the present is contradicted by a deeper, unconscious urge derived from knowledge in the past. In the same way—and this has not been considered by Nigel Alexander – there is an inner contradiction in the case of the passion for revenge. The passion for revenge urging Hamlet to kill Claudius is internally contradicted by the dimension in this passion of extreme personal

hatred which would have Claudius not only killed but also damned and which, therefore, prevents Hamlet from killing him while he is praying. So, it is not merely that the passion for revenge is incompatible with conscience, as some critics have supposed but that both the passion for revenge and conscience are also cursed with their own inner contradictions ('O cursed spite!'). Once again there is the impression of a grotesque tangle within tangle. In the case of Hamlet's being such contradictions within contradictions disappear only after he has realized that 'the readiness is all'—only after the readiness 'to be' has also become the readiness 'not to be'. The final movement towards a possible resolution can be made only with such an attitude of 'readiness'. But for this, one must acquire faith in Providence and then pass through the Graveyard Vision.

Thus the problem of resolution grows to very formidable dimensions, so much so that it becomes the all-inclusive problem of 'being', one's own being and the being of others with which it is involved. 'Essential being' implies a wholeness of being—'blood and judgment. . . well comeddled' (3.ii 67)—out of which the right action that transcends Fortune proceeds. This sense of 'being' which equates being with goodness and 'freedom from the shackles of passion and ignorance' for 'rising superior to Fortune, so that suffering itself becomes a positive act' (Cf. Eliot's St Thomas in *Murder in the Cathedral*: 'action is suffering/And suffering is action') has been derived, as L.C. Knights has pointed out, from Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and 'Shakespeare and his educated contemporaries were likely to be familiar with it.[8] 'To be' means, not merely to live, according to mere self-interest, for a beast or a treacherous villain does it, but 'how to live'—and 'how to die', which comes to the same thing when 'the readiness is all'; to be fully human in one's responses, with 'perfect conscience' (5 ii.67) and tempered passions (3.ii.7.10); to have perfect conscience, that is, to know oneself and others, which to Hamlet seem equally

impossible (5 ii. 138-39), and to know good and evil; to have tempered passions, that is, not to be 'passion's slave' (3.ii.70); to be true to oneself and to others (which is, ironically, Polonius's advice : 1.iii. 78 80), which also means that if the other is a treacherous villain on whom one is prompted to revenge one must be true to oneself and to him in dealing with him as he should be dealt with (one must love even evil, in the way that evil ought to be loved, says Martin Buber); to be able to make the right, existentialistic, choice with the wholeness of one's being; to act out of this wholeness, which action alone is right action; to act in this way for the realization of possible harmony in the microcosm and macrocosm (witness Hamlet's 'meditations' on harmony in 3. ii : in his advice to the actors; in his praise of Horatio, who, with his 'blood and judgment. . .well comeddled' is 'not a pipe for Fortune's finger'; and in his speech to Rosencrentz and Guildenstern about potential harmony in the recorder and in himself); to transcend Fortune in fulfilling one's being (3. ii, 76-79); and to transcend death itself in making the readiness 'to be' also the readiness 'not to be' for the sake of a commitment beyond chance and fortune and death. 'To be' is to love, not in the popular, romantic, sense of enjoying any wonderful feelings, as feelings accompany love but do not constitute it, but in the sense of the attitude of responding to reality with the wholeness of one's being, in the sense in which, as Martin Buber observes, Jesus's different feelings for his followers and for his opponents, the 'generation of vipers', can both be called love. It is Hamlet's tragedy that he is doomed to love only evil, in the way that evil ought to be loved, and that he, misunderstanding her as another Gertrude, misunderstands and rejects the love of Ophelia who was the potential embodiment of the harmony of the three graces, beauty, chastity and pleasure[9]—he realizes this love only at her grave! In this sense *Hamlet* can be seen as an exploration of the possibility of love, and of harmony, therefore, in the tangle within tangle of

a mysterious and unappropriable universe, the main conflict in the play being between the attitude of self-love, which involves only a part of one's being, and that of genuine love, which involves the wholeness of being and for the realization of which the Prince keeps struggling, consciously and unconsciously. 'Being' is opposed to 'seeming' which the attitude of self-love practises. In combating with it Hamlet himself is forced to put on the 'seeming' of an 'antic disposition', to provoke with his weapons of words his opponents into violence. He has to play in his own way a composite role of lover, actor, politician, and soldier—and besides, let us not forget, the role of the wise fool or knowing fool who is seeking knowledge, in opposition to unknowing fools like Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Osric, the role of his own attendant fool, so to say.[10] In fact the role of revenger is assimilated to this composite role of Hamlet's; and transformed by it into the role of man struggling 'to be' in a mysteriously disconcerting universe, of man struggling to resolve the tangle within tangle of disjointed being within and without him into the transcendental, dew-like purity and harmony of essential being—

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

Towards the end of the play Hamlet realizes that 'to be' must involve the readiness 'not to be'—'the readiness is all'. Instead of the question: 'to be, or not to be', it is the readiness: 'to be' *and* 'not to be'. Only with such readiness the final movement towards a possible resolution can he made. But in making this movement Hamlet actually meets with death. In trying 'to be' he is forced 'not to be'—that is the tragedy, the tragedy of Hamlet, and the tragedy of man in a mysterious, unknown and unappropriable universe.

II

Hamlet is no ordinary revenger. He is a disillusioned and shattered man commanded by his father's Ghost to play

the role of revenger, and this in a world-theatre of confusion and uncertainty, political and metaphysical uncertainty, where everybody else is playing a role by 'seeming' what he or she is not—except Horatio, the Christian-Stoic, who is a passive sufferer and cannot move beyond the side-lines. In this world-theatre Hamlet has to be sure of the roles of others and of his own role, which problem is the basic problem of knowledge and identity. The identity of the Ghost is ambiguous, though for good dramatic reasons; and so are his injunctions about the revenging of the father's murder, about the saving of the royal bed of Denmark from incest, about not 'tainting' his mind, and about not 'contriving' anything against the mother. The dramatic irony of the last two injunctions is immediately realized by the audience. Hamlet cannot help 'tainting' his mind; nor can he help his obsessive, nearly hysterical, feelings against this 'most pernicious woman', his mother, of whom he thinks before thinking of Claudius in his soliloquy. What has disturbed him is her total lack of affection, which makes her worse than a beast. He is lost (we may think of the off-stage scene in Ophelia s closet), and as he gropes his way he seeks to be 'assured of certain certainties'. He must be sure of the identity of the Ghost and of his own identity and of the identities of others. He must appeal to Memory, Understanding and Will, the three powers of the soul according to St Augustine. This is how he can bring Claudius and Gertrude to a realization of their guilt. Hence he stages the inner play which occupies a central place not only in the plot but also in the thematic structure of *Hamlet*. Hamlet's soliloquies, as Nigel Alexander has rightly pointed out, evoke considerations of memory, understanding and will, one after the other[11]; for the soliloquies bring Hamlet face to face with himself and show that he does not understand his own motives. 'They create Hamlet's, responding, and searching mind. The quality of that consciousenss . . . that makes the intensity of *Hamlet*.' But with their drama of inner contradictions and inconclusive

arguments they also suggest unconscious processes at work. The seven soliloquies are punctuated with seven 'meditations' in which the themes of the soliloquies recur in the wider context of the general human condition. Together the soliloquies and the 'meditations' complete the dramatization of Hamlet's conscious and unconscious thoughts for the audience. But in addition to these there are various, what may be called, 'cubistic images'—the weeping Actor, Lucianus, Fortinbras—which are significant in respect of Hamlet's conscious and unconscious reactions and along with these are held up for our contemplation and evaluation.

The first two soliloquies are concerned with memory. The shift of focus from 'Must I remember ?' to 'Remember thee ?' marks the new dimensions which have been added to the problem of resolution; for now it is not merely the question of the 'solid-sullied flesh' but of the mysterious 'vicious mole of nature' on which occurs a 'meditation' between the first two soliloquies and because of which 'the time is out of joint'. The earlier question did not involve any self-recoil from suicide which appeared, but for the religious canon, a simple resolution of the problem of the inherently corrupt flesh and of its disturbing remembrance ('Must I remember ?') which one could hope to blot out with self-slaughter. But the later question is related to the remembrance of the Ghost and to one's commitment to resolve through revenge the disjointed time which is entangled with serpentine villainy, and, therefore, it is related to the metaphysical problem of the possibility of the extension of our being, and also of our consciousness, beyond flesh into the world of spirit, from where the Ghost comes (but from where 'no traveller returns' in flesh and blood). Suicide will only send one to that world and, instead of resolving them, may perpetuate the problems of being in the shape of ills 'we know not of'; for in 'that sleep of death we do not know 'what dreams may come' if here we fail to make the right choice 'to be'. Which means that the later question of remembrance involves an ethical

problem, too. All these problems lead to the central paradox of 'being', which emerges in all its intensity in the 'to be, or not to be' soliloquy. This is why in this soliloquy the question of suicide is subsumed under the question of 'being' or 'not being'.

Already, Hamlet is torn between the contradictory claims of conscience and passion, which he is struggling to reconcile but failing to do it again and again. In the first soliloquy, for example, the passion of disgust would drive him to a resolution by suicide but conscience, the knowledge of religious sanctions, would prevent it. But conscience and passion in themselves have their own paradoxes and inner contradictions, as pointed out above. The first two soliloquies (1.ii and 1.v) which are concerned with memory and the next two (2.ii and 3.i) which are concerned with understanding in the context of a more pressing demand for 'action' indicate the paradoxes and inner contradictions of conscience ('judgment'), operating on the conscious level, and the fifth (3.ii) and the sixth (3.iii) soliloquies which are concerned with will ('blood') indicate the paradoxes and inner contradictions of passion, operating on the unconscious level. The seventh soliloquy (4.iv) 'sums up, but deliberately fails to solve, the argument about memory, understanding, and will'

In the second soliloquy occasioned by the staggering revelation of the Ghost, which itself has an ambiguous identity ('Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd') conscience is paradoxically coupling hell ('And shall I couple hell ?') with the 'host of heaven'. It cannot help in willing the act of revenge, as the next two soliloquies discover; only, it can invoke remembrance—which becomes more important than revenge. For the conventional revenger the distinction between heaven and hell is blurred – witness Laertes who is ready to cut Hamlet's throat in the church. Not so for Hamlet who is a man of consience. It must be pointed out that he is 'prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, and yet con-

science would have him keep up the distinction between them, so that his considerations would be of heaven *or* hell, heaven in the case of his promptings and hell in the case of Claudius's destination after death. Critics have not considered this point. But it is this paradox of conscience in the service of revenge that the Prayer Scene brings out.

The 'meditation' on the 'vicious mole of nature' has already expanded the problem of resolution, even before the Ghost's revelation, by referring to the mysterious birth of evil and its unsuspected growth in the context of customs and facts of heredity to which a man is born. The second 'meditation' (2. ii) which occurs after the Ghost's revelation and the second soliloquy expands the problem further by the contemplation of a grotesque vision of the whole existence, a vision in which the sense of the possibility of beauty ('this goodly frame, the earth. . .this majestic roof fretted with golden fire') is contradicted by a sense of ugliness ('a sterile promonotory. . .a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours'), and the sense of the possibility of nobility ('What a piece of work is a man; How noble in reason;' etc.) by a sense of baseness ('what is this quintessence of dust ?'). The disillusion expressed in this 'meditation' looks back to Hamlet's 'melancholic' sense of contrast between the lost golden world of the sun-king Hyperion and the Satyr-like present and forward to the considerations of conscience which emerge in the third and fourth soliloquies.

In the third soliloquy ('O, what a rogue. . .') Hamlet considers that in contrast to the Actor's ability to express passion, by weeping for Hecuba 'but in a fiction, in a dream of passion'—and the ironic suggestion is that the passion of revenge can be expressed only by such a man, and perhaps only in the form of 'verbal art', dramatic art or just art of words—his own inability to express passion, in revengeful action, must be due to the fact that he is a coward; so much so that he would not be able to make an honourable answer even if someone insulted him in a fashion most provocative

of a duel. This consideration leads him, ironically, to an outburst, in words only, of passion against Claudius. The problem of suiting the words to the action remains. The third soliloquy occurs in relation to a 'cubistic image', that of the Actor weeping for the grief of Hecuba, though a moment earlier the same Actor has so vividly described Pyrrhus executing the revenge that causes Hecuba's grief. Such images may be called 'cubistic' in the sense that they embody more than one view-point in the vision of reality. Besides combining choric commentary with dramatic enactment the Actor is able to combine contradictory view-points related to the passion of revenge on the one hand and on the other of pity for the victims, particularly for the victim's wife, in epic narration—though it is significant that his speech tilts towards pity and that Pyrrhus has already been described as a considerably absurd and repugnant figure of blind revenge-fury. But these contradictory view-points and their passions cannot be combined by the same individual in real life. They are irreconcilable, which Hamlet does not understand. The Actor shows Pyrrhyus pausing in the enactment of revenge—and becoming in that pause an agent responsible for the destruction he brings about—and then, the Actor himself pauses for pity for Hecuba. Paradoxically, it is this aspect of the 'cubistic image' of the Actor, that of the expression of the humane passion of pity, that Hamlet pauses to examine in the third soliloquy in relation to his own 'cue for passion' which passion is that of revenge and is contradictory to pity in its nature and expression. Hamlet does not consider the contradiction between the two passions as he considers only the Actor's ability to express passion to reproach himself for his own inability to do it. These pauses of conscience, of Pyrrhus, of the Actor and of Hamlet considering the Actor, lead with mounting intensity to the all-important, existentialistic, pause of conscience in the face of the question : 'To be, or not to be.' No wonder that in the Prayer Scene we see Hamlet pausing to refrain from killing Claudius because of a similar humane

passion, we may infer, which operates as revulsion against secret murder at the level of his unconscious value-system which is derived from conscience. But as Hamlet has staged the inner play another 'cubistic image' has stimulated this unconscious process. It is the image of Lucianus super-imposed on the image of 'a Fellow' performing the act of secret murder in the Dumb Show. One aspect of this image looks back to what Claudius did in the past and another looks forward to what Hamlet, 'nephew to the King', might do in revenge—'the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge'. Both the aspects make it a 'cubistic image' of a secret murderer who with his 'damnable faces' provokes an unconscious repugnance in Hamlet. We may rightly infer, with Nigel Alexander at our back, that the resolution of the vicious tangle of disjointed time through revenge against Claudius is unconsciously repugnant to Hamlet in so far as it demands from him the role of a secret murderer, the role that Claudius himself played in killing Hamlet's father[12]—and will play in killing Hamlet himself. It is not 'to be', in any of the senses of the phrase considered above. This is Hamlet's unconscious conviction. At the conscious level he is not sure what the right choice in the face of the question : 'to be, or not to be' is. He is, however, awfully concerned about the possibility of making a wrong choice, for such a choice may involve us in after-life with ills 'that we know not of'—

> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
> Must give us pause

The 'to be, or not to be' soliloquy, which is the fourth soliloquy (3. i.,), expands and intensifies the problem of resolution to one involving an all-inclusive consideration by examining it in relation to 'being' which may extend into after-life in the form of some consciousness—'dreams'—that we know not of. It concludes that conscience—which makes us think 'too precisely on th' event', issue or consequence—

does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

Hamlet would remain the coward of conscience, though in the end he affirms with his 'readiness' 'to be' and 'not to be' that only the coward of conscience can be the brave soldier who takes 'arms against a sea of troubles' and fights for the resolution of the vicious tangle of disjointed time. But in the fourth soliloquy Hamlet is still thinking of making the choice : 'to be, or not to be'.

He does not as yet know that such an either/or choice is not possible for one caught up in the vicious tangle. But even in this soliloquy there are ironic undertones to suggest that 'to be' and 'not to be' may come to the same thing. For all the alternatives and sub-alternatives implicate 'not to be' which one cannot escape in any case. It is not merely that death is inevitable whether one chooses it or not. It is that the choice 'to be' itself, whether it is by way of choosing the sub-alternative of passive suffering (in the Stoic manner of Horatio), suffering 'The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' or by way of choosing that of heroic action, choosing to 'take arms against a sea of troubles,/And by opposing end them', would result in death, which result is implied by both the images. All the alternatives and sub-alternatives demand tremendous bravery on the part of one faced with them. 'Conscience does make cowards of us all' not merely because we are not brave enough to choose suicide or 'not to be', which is the usual interpretation of the soliloquy, but also because we are not brave enough to choose 'to be' either through the choice of passive suffering or of heroic action. Both our choice 'to be', in whatever way we may exercise it, and our choice' not to be' may be a wrong choice and may involve us in after-life with ills 'that we know not of.' Because of this 'dread of something after death' we cowardly evade the 'overwhelming question' of the choice 'to be' or 'not to be' and just live on, bearing 'the whips

and scorns of time' or die when death comes, without any choice involved in either case, but willy-nilly. Hence bearing 'the whips and scorns of time' etc. must be distinguished from choosing to 'suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', for that is 'to be' and is something 'noble in the mind'. To live willy-nilly is not something 'noble in the mind'. It is neither 'to be' nor 'not to be', in the real, existentialistic, sense. Merely to live, in the non-existentialistic sense, is to suffer—which suffering is enough to drive us to thinking of suicide—to suffer, not because we have chosen suffering, but because we are afraid of unknown suffering in after-life. We may come into this suffering whether we choose 'to be or not to be' or exercise no choice at all Thus the whole soliloquy is a vision of inescapable suffering in the context of which the problem of resolution is examined. The soliloquy, like other soliloquies, dramatizes the nature of the problem instead of leading to any solution, but it certainly points to the direction in which Hamlet's consciousness moves afterwards Since he has examined the problem of resolution in its ethical and metaphysical dimensions in relation to the all-inclusive problem of 'being' he stops thinking of resolution in terms of suicide. His quest for resolution is now in the direction of 'being'.

But for Hamlet's opponents too it is a quest, the quest for the resolution of the threatening problem posed by Hamlet. For them too the basic question is of knowledge or identity. The imagery of hunting and gaming is significant in this context. Claudius, who believes in using others in the service of self-love, sets Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find out the cause of Hamlet's 'turbulent and dangerous lunacy'. Ophelia lets herself be used as a decoy not simply out of obedience to her father but out of good will for Hamlet because she loves him and because she thinks he has gone mad. Claudius's agents fail badly in their quest. They are unknowing fools who are outwitted by Hamlet who remains comically undefeated in the role of the wise fool,

which makes his tragic defeat all the more moving. They are no match for him. Only the Gravedigger is a match for him; but he is his own alter-ego and Everyman digging the graves of others and his own grave in the Dance of Death. This clown has a tough reason; and yet he seems to take all mystery for granted when he quibbingly says that Hamlet went mad upon the 'ground' of Denmark, the ground of the world of paradox and perplexity.

Claudius fails in his quest for resolution because he knows the world only in the light of self-Love and has such a misplaced confidence in his knowledge of the known world he manipulates, by efficient government, diplomatic tact and policy, that he has no sense of the unknown that permeates the known world with mytsery. His range of knowledge is also narrowed down because of his crime about which he cannot tell his agents to make them understand why Hamlet is such a threat to the present regime and receive from them the right information. His agents are turned into foolish questers who never know what they are looking for. He does not know enough about his opponent's abilities and even underestimates him. For all these reasons he fails in his quest for the resolution of the Hamlet problem as he repeats his crime only to destroy himself. He is impelled to repeat his crime after the inner play has caught his conscience and brought him self-knowledge. For repent he cannot.

It is the inner play that triggers off the process by which Evil works out its own destruction. As an agent of this destruction Hamlet fulfils the demands of revenge as well as of justice. The inner play triggers off the self-destructive mechanism of Evil by evoking memory, understanding and will with its double device of the Dumb Show and the Spoken Play supplying interpretation combined with Hamlet's own comments. It holds 'a mirror up to nature', with its system of 'cubistic images' pointing to past, present and future and forming different reflections for different viewers

comprising the inner audience on the stage itself and still different, and more comprehensive, reflections for the outer audience. It reflects the main themes of the play, associated with the tangle of existence, and shows that 'our wills and fates do so contrary run', that though passion and intention (purpose) are uncertain guides to action they must not be rejected; that love is subject to chance, fortune and mutability; that there is no choice between wisdom, power and passion; and that they must be combined into the harmony of being engaging itself in a commitment beyond chance and fortune and mutability. The Player King accepts passion ('Tis deeply sworn' etc.) along with wisdom and power in being engaged in such a commitment. Though he believes that love may falter he does not believe in total self-regard, the cult of Claudius; he negates it with his attitude, on the other hand. Very significantly, the recognition of human limitations in a world dominated by chance and fortune and mutability becomes an argument for charity and understanding. But it is suggested that love falters when it is grounded only in passion (3. ii. 189-90) and that it must be transformed into the love that involves the commitment beyond chance and fortune and mutability (even when dealing with evil is the concern) by grounding it in the harmony of being that combines wisdom, power and passion, or contemplative life, active life and passionate life. The inner play also shows that revenge in so far as it demands the playing of the hateful role of Lucianus-Claudius—with its 'damnable faces'—is incompatible with memory and understanding.

But before the inner play there occurs the 'meditation' on temperance in Hamlet s advice to the actors (3. ii. 1-34) This indicates in Hamlet the beginning of an unconscious process in the direction of wholeness and harmony of being —that which is really 'to be'. In his quest for resolution he must resolve his own discordant being into a harmony that transcends Fortune. In his own 'tempest, and . . . whirlwind' of nearly hysterical passion arising out of the obsessions of

personal hatred against Claudius and disgust at his mother's act he 'must acquire and beget a temperance'. Two other 'meditations' related to the theme of wholeness and harmony occur in the same scene, one in Hamlet's praise of Horatio (3, ii. 61-72) in having 'blood and judgment' so well comeddled that he is 'not a pipe for Fortune's finger' and the other in Hamlet's talk about the recorder to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (3 ii. 336-62) about potential harmony in himself, in the microcosm, and also in the macrocosm. Hamlet consciously tries to control his passion against his mother by proposing to himself, in the fifth soliloquy, to be 'cruel, not unnatural'. But he fails to resolve his discordant being into harmony. He is carried away by his obsessive passions and comes very near to 'using daggers' against his mother when the Ghost intervenes. He has to admit that he is not able to carry out the Ghost's command because he is 'laps'd in time and passion'. In the Closet Scene he alternates between outbursts of violent rage and moods of tenderness which at one time extends even to the dead Polonius ('For this same lord I do repent' etc.). But the Closet Scene is a cathartic evocation of the obsessive passions of personal hatred and nausea (even to the extent of the evocation of the sweaty details of the mother's copulation with the 'adulterate beast'), and becomes an exercise in charity and understanding, the need of which was suggested by the argument of the inner play. In this scene Hamlet realizes that lust is not the whole truth about his mother. What is more basically wrong with her is her beastly imperceptiveness. Significantly, the scene ends on a note of tenderness. As for Polonius, he, in using his 'bait of falsehood' to catch 'the carp of truth', has become a prey to the worm itself. The grim comic vision of 'politic worms' for whom 'we fat ourselves' and for whom king and beggar are 'two dishes, but to one table' looks forward, with its grotesquely sardonic humour, to the Graveyard Vision, with out which the unconscious process towards personal harmony of being cannot effectively operate.

Hamlet whose unconscious reflexes make him recoil from secret murder would murder out of an instinctive impulse of self-defence (Cf. the argument for *se defedendo* in the Graveyard) as he does Polonius, mistaking him for the King, of course. By not killing the King (when Hamlet's conditions for revenge ironically existed) he brings about a reversal of roles and becomes the pursued-killer instead of the pursuer-killer. The vicious tangle around him now threatens him with extinction and he is forced to struggle for his life. But this is the irony of the human situation in a mysterious world, which the play is always bringing out. Ironically enough, in the seventh soliloquy 4. iv) Hamlet reminds himself of his cause on witnessing the army of Fortinbras and evokes again the whole argument about memory, understanding and will. He does not know why he cannot express his will in revengeful action. Is it because of 'bestial oblivion', the condition of mere living (like Gertrude), in the non-existential sense, without using 'godlike reason' to choose how to live (Cf. the fourth soliloquy) ? Or is it because of some wrong use of reason, 'some craven scruple/Of thinking too precisely on th' event' (issues and consequences), so that 'conscience does make cowards of us all' ? Hamlet reproaches himself by considering Fortinbras and his army going to imminent death' 'even for an egg-shell. . .when honour's at the stake'. And this reveals another contradiction within contradiction, this time in the higher faculty of 'godlike reason' itself. For reason is divided between divine ambition' or aspiration impelled by a sense of honour and critical reason—the capability of 'thinking too precisely on th' event'—which points to the absurdity of this aspiration.[13] Fortinbras has chosen honour-impelled aspiration. He is with 'divine ambition puff'd' as he dares all to vindicate his honour. He looks admirable from this point of view. But from another point of view, that of critical reason, he looks absurd in being so 'puff'd', he 'a delicate and tender prince'. Again, it is a 'cubistic image' which Hamlet considers only

in its admirable aspect, to reproach himself. But its absurd aspect is visible even through the irony of his own observations. Hamlet who was earlier confronted with the problem of choice between the lower and the higher nature of man is now confronted with the problem of choice between the higher and the higher, the godlike and the godlike. He thinks he is firmly deciding for 'bloody thoughts', that is, honour-impelled aspiration *without* critical reason. But it is impossible for him to do away with critical reason and therefore with judgment, understanding and conscience. This is moving in a closed circle. In fact no resolution is possible for him through mere reliance on his own efforts. In the final scene of the play we find him still engaged upon his old search for justification by means of reason : 'Is't not perfect conscience/To quit him with this arm ?' But this is spoken with detachment and is more of a rhetorical question. For by now the contradictions have disappeared and the soliloquies have ceased. Something has happened in between. It is the Graveyard.

Hamlet cannot resolve the problem of the disjointed time to which the problem of revenge has been assimilated without resolving the problem of his own disjointed being paralysed as it is by inner contradictions into the harmony which means 'to be' and 'not to be' Though his conscious efforts to control his passions fail an unconscious process in this direction sets in with his 'meditations' on temperance and harmony. In the Closet Scene the obsessive passions of personal hatred and nausea were evoked, cathartically, it seems, because there is no evidence of their outbreak after the Closet Scene. This is significant, I think. But Hamlet still relies merely on his personal capabilities and plans—'deep plots'—on his 'reason', his 'faculties', his 'action' and 'apprehension', not having consciously realized that he too is a 'quintessence of dust'. The Graveyard Scene brings about this realization, and purges what may be called his pride of life. Only after such purgation can the unconscious

processes towards harmony become effectively operative and the final movement towards possible resolution be made.

The Graveyard Scene with its system of 'cubistic images' is another inner play, in a sense, one staged by Death, holding the 'mirror' of the skull up to its inner and outer audience and assimilating them to its skeleton-players. The First Clown presents the most important 'cubistic image', that of the gravemaker-Everyman-Dance of Death figure, who digs another's grave and his own ('Mine, sir—'). He is leading the whole human race to their ultimate role of conversion into skeleton-players and then into dust. The old questions of the play regarding truth behind the 'shows', murder in self-defence or otherwise, salvation and damnation, responsibility, the true nature of action and justice (Cf. the Prayer Scene) are raised by the clowns at the very outset, but their humorous debate suggests that there are no answers to them except the academic ones. No knowledge is possible, and to one who seeks it the world is a tangle of confusion and perplexity.

Hamlet comes to the graveyard after he has acquired faith in Providence, as we gather afterwards (5. ii. 7-11), in consequence of what happens on his journey to England. He has learnt that 'Our indiscretion sometime serves us well,/When our deep plots do pall'. This shows 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends'. On entering the graveyard he is shocked to hear the clown singing while digging the grave. He sings of the apparant defeat of love in the face of mutability and death. In fact the Graveyard Scene re-examines the themes of the inner play in the light of the inevitable fact of death so as to evoke a re-examination of the main values with which *Hamlet* is concerned—love, honour, aspiration, responsible action, conscience and reason, and being. The gravedigger's song activates Hamlet's imagination and expands it beyond personal concerns, which activation and expansion is necessary for the process of reintegration. It makes him focus his attention on to the skull and think that it 'could sing once'.

In that 'mirror' of the skull he briefly reviews the whole human history, from Cain to the lawyer. But it is also a reflection of Elsinore society, with its Cain, Claudius, and its politicians and courtiers and lawyers. In fact the Graveyard Scene transforms in its tremendous backlash, Elsinore and the whole known world into a graveyard. When the world is a potential graveyard and all men potential skeletons why should Hamlet think of dying or not dying? He should accept his composite role without thinking of either/or choices and with a readiness 'to be' *and* 'not to be' because his ultimate role is 'not to be', because the ultimate end of all playing and painting and exercise of wit and reason is the grin of the skull, as the 'meditation' on Yorick's skull points out. Since man has ultimately to rot in the earth it is all important that ' 'a be not rotten before 'a die'. Since man has ultimately to die it is all important how he comes to die, which means how he lives so as to die in the way he does.

All human aspirations, all enterprises for the sake of honour, thrift or love end up in the putrefying skull ('Dost thou think Alexander look'd a this fashion i' th' earth ?... And smelt so ? Pah'). So does all exercise of conscience and 'godlike reason'. What is the significance of reason and of all human faculties when man is a 'quintessence of dust' ? The only use of reason should be to reconcile man to the 'resolution' (dissolution) of his 'solid flesh' into the putrefying skeleton. But a vivid realization of this inevitable fact itself may impel a man towards superimposing over the resolution of the flesh a resolution into 'dew', into some kind of transcendental purity and harmony of being, by dedicating himself to a commitment beyond fortune and mutability and death itself. Thus Hamlet's reconciliation to death results in a positive movement towards fulfilling such a commitment with a readiness 'to be' and 'not to be'. The play of *Hamlet* is *not* about a man who is unable to make up his mind, as the Laurence Olivier film shows, but about a man who does make up his mind in the end—after renouncing all either/or

choices and resolving all contradictions through a Graveyard Vision. After the Graveyard Scene the contradictions between conscience and passion and the subsidiary contradictions within them cease simply because they have been stilled by the grin of the skull. In the graveyard, Hamlet, who has unconsciously outgrown his obsessive passions of hatred and disgust, accepts passion in its true, self-trancending, nature by recognizing his love for Ophelia. That he recognizes this love over her dead body in the grave is tragic irony at its most intense. But the fact of death itself challenges Hamlet to rise to an affirmation of love which outlasts death; and provoked by the extravagant gesture of Laertes, he makes a powerful declaration of love for Ophelia. Ophelia was the potential embodiment of the harmony of the three graces, chastity, beauty and pleasure, and 'the union of Hamlet and Ophelia would have combined the sword of the active life, the book of the contemplative life, and the flower of the passionate life' (V. Raphael's paintings regarding the Three Graces and the Dream of Scipio). 'The resulting harmony would have allowed them to reach the sphere of the "burning zone" and re-create the rule of Hyperion the sun-king'.[14] But the mother's example tainted Hamlet's mind to make him misjudge Ophelia and reject her love. The Graveyard Scene however shows that his capacity for love has not been destroyed. In fact it has been operative at the unconscious level to prevent him from behaving like Pyrrhus, Lucianus, Claudius, or Laertes himself. Now that love is accepted at the conscious level all contradictions between passions and conscience are reconciled in it, for 'conscience is born of love' (Sonnet 151), the 'perfect conscience' which is in harmony with passions. It is about this 'perfect conscience' that Hamlet speaks in the last scene of the play (5. ii. 67-67).

But Hamlet's tragedy is that, caught up in the vicious tangle of disjointed time as he is, his love can take the form of no other commitment except that of resolving the tangle by fighting Evil, by taking 'up arms against a sea of troubles,/

And by opposing end them'. This commitment too calls for a transcendental wholeness of being which is necessary for responsible action and which makes action one with suffering. It calls for a readiness 'to be' which is also the readiness 'not to be'. Hamlet's last 'meditation' is on such 'readiness' :

> Not a whit, we defy augury : there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come, if it be not to come, it will be now, if it be not now, yet it will come—the readiness is all. Since no man owes of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

With this 'readiness' Hamlet makes the final movement towards the resolution of his own being into transcendental harmony so as to bring about the resolution of the problem of disjointed time by destroying Claudius and by not letting 'this canker of our nature come in further evil'.

Before the fencing begins Hamlet asks Laertes's pardon, proclaiming that it was his 'madness', by which he means his uncontrolled passion arising out of his 'sore distraction', that made him wrong Laertes. This is true, and in saying it he is true to himself and to Laertes. There is no insincerity about his speech, such as L. C. Knights sees.[15] Hamlet's attitude contrasts with that of Laertes which is really insincere and even treacherous. Laertes is not a villain. But as for Claudius the 'smiling villain', he, with the ignorance that self-love involves, assumes that he can manipulate things again in repeating his crime. But the universe is mysterious, and manipulatable only to a small extent. And so the unknown turns up and defeats his 'deep plots'. For one thing Hamlet turns out to be the better fencer. For another necessary knowledge regarding Hamlet's other abilities, which the audience have gathered, particularly from the story of his journey to England, is inaccessible to Claudius - the knowledge, for example, about Hamlet's ability to contrive about his cunning and cold intelligence, and about his aggressive drives and ruthless competence in hitting back at his

opponents. He underestimates Hamlet; and through his own 'deep plots' works out his own destruction.

In a sense Claudius works out his own destruction. But in another, and more important, sense it is Hamlet who acts as the agent of his destruction by showing him the inner play that brings him self-knowledge and makes him repeat his crime of secret murder, which results in his own destruction. After his first 'deep plot' to get Hamlet executed in England fails he lays another by staging his own inner play of poison and duel in answer to the one presented by Hamlet. But Hamlet makes this play too his own by forcing its script to a public exposure of Claudius—and that by Laertes himself who has been defeated and wounded with his own poisoned foil. With the same foil Hamlet strikes Claudius, which, as an act of natural retaliation, is justice, as well as revenge, for Claudius's immediate crime which is a sequel to his original crime, and therefore a revenge for it too. Then, Hamlet reinforces justice and revenge in a deeper sense by forcing Claudius's own poison down his throat, an act which seems superfluous from a physical point of view but is deeply significant from a spiritual point of view inasmuch as Claudius's original crime was that of poisoning resulting in the poisoning of the whole body-politic of Denmark. Horatio will tell the people about it. That Hamlet himself dies in his quest to resolve the whole vicious tangle of existence which is a tangle of poisonous weeds is what makes his action most tragic and heroic. His quest which is concerned with the most essential problems of the human situation involves us so deeply that it becomes our quest. It therefore continues after Hamlet's death in the minds of the audience. In the end the play turns its 'mirror' to the audience to make them see themselves as players and to expand its illusion into including, and becoming significant for, the whole world :

> **You that look pale and tremble at this chance,**
> **That are but mutes or audience to this act,**
> **Had I but time...**

The play which includes an inner play becomes in its turn an inner play within the larger play of world-theatre.

If Shakespeare had pushed his plot along the lines of mere revenge it would not have been the vehicle of such a powerful exploration into the nature of reality, into the mystery of the universe and the human situation. On the other hand if he had pushed it along the lines of mere justice by rejecting altogether the personal motive of revenge, it would have reduced the tragic effect. For this reason he harmonizes revenge with justice by making Hamlet see himself in an impersonal light from time to time, as 'scourge and minister' (4. i. 175) or as one engaged in a surgical or military operation, and by gradually toning down and controlling the personal element (in this light Hamlet's self-deflation, seeing himself as a fox, cat or dog, becomes meaningful; he continually sees himself in this fashion till his very last moments when he sees himself, by implication, as a gamecock whose spirit the 'potent poison quite o'er-crows'). A total acceptance of Providence, martyrdom and the Christian view of things would have reduced the tragic effect of the play just as well, whereas a total acceptance of chance would have damaged its metaphysical dimension and its affirmation of higher values—and this is why Hamlet's belief in Providence is balanced in the end by Horatio's reference to 'accidental judgement, casual slaughters' etc. So Shakespeare accomplishes the most wonderful feat of making Hamlet's final action ambiguous, of making it just 'pure' action proceeding out of the readiness 'to be' and 'not to be' and assimilating to itself the personal motive of revenge as well as the impersonal motive of justice, making it attributable to accident as well as to decision, and to Providence as well as to chance. His play thus creates the most intense tragic effect, and affirms, like all great tragedy, certain positive values for which man struggles in a fearfully mysterious world These positive values are associated with the resolution of disjointed time into the golden time of dew-like purity and transcendental

harmony of the reign of the sun-king Hyperion. They are held up as a perpetual possibility:

> But look, the morn, in russet mantle clad.
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] All quotations from *Hamlet* are from Peter Alexander's edition of the *Complete Works of Shakespeare* (London and Glasgow, 1964).

[2] See Willard Farnham, *The Shakespearean Grotesque* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 10-11.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[4] Cf. D. G. James's view of *Hamlet* as 'a tragedy of defeated thought'.

[5] Nigel Alexander, *Poison, Play, and Duel* (London, 1971).

[6] David William, 'Hamlet in the Theatre' in *Hamlet*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 5 (London 1973), p. 39.

[7] See Nigel Alexander, *Op. Cit.*

[8] L. C. Knights, *An Approach to Hamlet* (London, 1961). pp. 76-77.

[9] See Nigel Alexander, *Op. Cit.*, Chap. 5.

[10] See Willard Farnham, *Op. Cit.*, Chap. 4.

[11] See Nigel Alexander, *Op. Cit.*, pp.,62-63.

[12] On the conscious level it is possible for an individual to distinguish between secret murder committed by a villain and the secret murder of that villain in revenge. But, as Nigel Alexander rightly points out, Shakespeare has dramatized Hamlet's unconscious, which recoils from secret murder.

[13] See Willard Farnham, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 110-13.

[14] Nigel Alexander, *Op. Cit.*, p. 168.

[15] L. C. Knights, *Op. Cit.* p. 84.

A. A. Ansari

SHAKESPEARE'S EXISTENTIAL TRAGEDY

The peculiarly problematic character of *Hamlet* as a play derives as much from what the protagonist does or suffers in devious ways as from how he reacts to the *Dasein*—the concrete, ineluctable set of circumstances in which he finds himself oddly placed. This misplacedness makes him acutely aware of the radical duality between the in-itself and its nihilation in for-itself and therefore of the ontological necessity of making a choice, thereby undergoing the experience of the anguish of freedom. The dread command of wreaking vengeance against king Claudius, imposed upon him by his father's ghost (the authenticity of which and of Claudius's sin and treachery are validated through the protracted process of exploration) is what initiates the action of the play, and melancholy 'sits on brood' in Hamlet over its execution endlessly. The strong and sincere revulsion against his mother's hasty and incestuous re-marriage rankles him inwardly like an 'embossed' sore, it gets intensified and becomes projected into the whole objective world around him. Hamlet's gradually increasing contact with evil is concretized in the persons of Claudius and Gertrude, primarily, but seems to enmesh some of the subsidiary characters too in no small measure. Claudius and Hamlet's deceased father are juxtaposed more than once and largely to the former's disadvantage; the invidious contrast is drawn in terms of the opposition between a beast-like satyr and the Sun-god, Hyperion, between one who is a mere sensual interloper and one who is the image of dignity, military prowess and the self-sacrificial impulse of love. Hamlet comes to visualize

his father by evocation of the whole pantheon of Olympian gods (the element of literary artifice underlines this portraiture), embodying varying shades of perfection and eventually sums him up as

> A combination and a form indeed
> Where every god did seem to set his seal,
> To give the world assurance of a man; (III iv. 60-2)

And he caps it all by denigrating Claudius thus : 'Here is your husband; like a mildew'd ear,/Blasting his wholesome brother.' (III, iv, 64-5).

Since the moment of the seizure of crown by Claudius, Hamlet's mind is beclouded with cynicism, self-hatred and disgust. In the verbal combat with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he does confess that his 'wit's diseased', and it is all too evident that loathing and anxiety are the two inalienable attributes of his personality. Initially this loathing is aroused by and directed against Gertrude, subsequently and with shrewd callousness he causes it to enwrap Ophelia and ultimately the whole universe seems to be exposed to its corrosive power. Little by little it transforms itself into a sickness of the soul and comes to hover over the edges of Hamlet's mind. In fact he himself becomes the pure, transcendental field of consciousness in which the cosmic drama is supposed to be enacted. This is mediated through the soliloquy which follows quickly at the heels of his dialogue with Claudius : 'O ! that this too too solid flesh would melt,/Thaw and resolve itself into a dew !' (1, ii, 129-30). In this is exhibited the persistent and nauseating sense of *ennui* against the body which nevertheless forms a very stubborn part of the human personality. The 'too too solid (or sullied) flesh' is more or less equivalent to the condition of being-in-the-midst-of-the world, and hence the dew into which the flesh is to dissolve or evaporate is the state of transcendence or being in-itself. The body or the flesh is an irritant which ought to be swept away before the soul enters the region proper to it. This 'heavy chain' (the incubus of the flesh) which 'does freeze

our bones around' (Cf. Blake's *Earth's Answer*) is to be broken in order that man is able to carry through his project with life on which he is launched. His train of thought is given a further convolution in the succeeding lines to this effect :

> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world.
> Fie on't ! Ah fie ! 'tis an unweeded garden,
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. (1.ii.133-7)

The nausea betrayed earlier seeps into the structure of the *Dasein*, and words like 'weary', 'stale' flat and 'unprofitable'—all implying infructuousness—make us think of the transactions of the world as utterly futile and unrewarding. Whereas life set in time-space dimension of the contemporary Denmark is imaged as 'an unweeded garden' (with overtones of a wild and chaotic growth), 'growing to seed' is the metaphor of its incipient extinction. And since things 'rank and gross in nature' (suggestive of pell-mell corruption) run riot in this garden, they annul the possibilities of regeneration altogether. The Elsinorean court, in other words, is a mere sham; it is a false and hideous structure which rests upon espionage, manipulative power and command-obedience chain of personal conduct. It is a world in which tight-lipped calculation is the unspoken law and hence any show of uninhibited brauvra is frowned upon. Its vital core of culture smacks of a certain variety of philistinism; it is symbolic of Blake's 'Single Vision & Newton's Sleep'; it amounts to containment of psychic energy and implies a sense of limitation and constraint. Sooner or later this 'imposthume' of peace and haven of socialized living, festering within, is bound to burst open and plunge the whole body-politic into a maelstrom.

The Hamlet universe suffers from incredible dislocation : it is largely the product of Claudius's subtle manoeuvrings, his dubious and clandestine politics and his endeavour to set bounds to the volatilities of Hamlet. He gives the

impression of being suave, efficient and plausible, but the state he rules over and in which Hamlet is willy-nilly to live and breathe is a hot-bed of intrigues and stratagems : the latter finds himself 'be-netted round with villainies'. Behind the facade of meticulousness maintained by Claudius one may very well discern the attempt to play a role which is later on successfully countered by Hamlet s assumption of a grotesque ('antic') mask. On the political level Claudius tries his level best to hold intact the fabric of the state by the Machavellian rationalizing of his policies and by throwing the portentuous weight of his personality around them. Yet such are the uncertainities of the situation, so much is Denmark subject to disquietude and instability that the hot and young Fortinbras is lured to pursue his adventurist designs unashamedly. When at the end of Act I, after Hamlet has partially taken his friends into confidence regarding the revelation of the ghost and the ghost has made an exit he declares : 'The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right !' (I, v, 188-9) he may be putting up a clever piece of self-advertisement but there lurks in it a streak of genuineness in proposing to take the burden of purgation on his own shoulders. It is also possible to presume that the malaise from which the body-politic seems to suffer is a projection of Hamlet's own over powering sense of disgust and horror. This may be regarded as an empathetic approach which has nonetheless its own validity. When Hamlet engages himself in conversation with the two 'sponges'—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—who are no better than 'handsaws' or instruments of the King, and have been set on him to worm out his secret he relieves himself thus :

Hamlet. Denmark's a prison.
Rosencrantz. Then is the world one.
Hamlet. A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.
Rosencrantz. We think not so, my lord.
Hamlet. Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing good

or bad. but thinking makes it so : to me it is a prison.
(11. ii 244-51)

Besides being 'an unweeded garden', Denmark to Hamlet is also a prison, and, generally speaking, 'time is out of joint' : this complex of ideas is reiterated in varying contexts and constitutes the reality which is there for him to confront or subdue. His consciousness of the contingent world as suffering from a lack turns into an obsessive and passionate concern and to cleanse it of surrounding evil becomes therefore one of his chosen tasks. Since the simulacrum of reality depends on the eye of the beholder : 'there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so'; one is persuaded to perceive the symptoms of evil in Denmark society as an outgrowth of the nausea to which Hamlet is so prone to be sensitive. In the midst of the formal ostentation, attention to ceremony and crude animalism of the Court at Elsinore—all of which eventuate into a kind of hollowness—, he is bound to feel frustrated and thwarted. And the impact of the ever-widening area of evil around makes him feel life to be insecure and menacing as also leading towards psychic torpor.

Hamlet's hypersensitivity to bodily corruption and the irredeemable disgust it evokes in him is betrayed in the poignant verbal combat with his mother which takes place following the accidental killing of Polonius behind the arras. This act of unpremeditated murder maximizes his difficulties though he does not realize its exact import at the moment. His real concern here is to make Gertrude operate at a low moral depth, to jolt her into an awareness of her monstrosity and derive a perverse, sadistic enjoyment out of this calculated exercise. In this arraignment of her and while Hamlet plays the role of a moral cauterizer he betrays unconsciously his abhorrence of his mother's lasciviousness : for him she tends to become an embodiment of *Voluptas :*

Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,

That not your trespass but my madness speaks;
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. (III, iv, 144-49)

His reaction to Gertrude's fallenness is a traumatic experience, for this unrestrained indulgence in sex, symptomatic of utter corruption of the will, is downright nauseating. Hence piling one gruesome image upon another he proceeds with even greater ferocity to expose the rapacious nature of female sexuality thus :

Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed;
Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft. (III, iv. 182-88)

Hamlet's shrewd glancing at the sexual intimacy of Claudius and Gertrude, as a result of which she is most likely to betray her son, is managed with all the vehemence he can afford to muster. In this utterance are mixed up elements of cruelty and jeering, and it is provoked by his sense of outrage and indignation at his mother's insatiable sexual appetite. This registers an instinctive recoil of disgust and foreshadows, in a later context, the nausea aroused in Leontes by the imagined carnal relationship between Polixenes and Hermoine. With it may also be linked Hamlet's irritatingly ambiguous bit of advice to Ophelia, offered with devastatingly unnerving sarcasm, to go to a nunnery. In Hamlet's troubled imagination she ceases to be the symbol of radiant romantic love and of *Castitas* and is transformed into something which betokens both *verfallenheit* and inauthenticity. In allowing herself to be deployed, for purposes of surveillance, by Claudius and Polonius, she has suffered a moral descent and becomes, in Hamlet's view, tainted and smirched with the pervasive vice in blood. She is therefore swamped by the tidal wave of

obscenity which starts from Gertrude and has dehumanized her beyond all recognition. Hamlet's searing and caustic reactions, conveyed with an air of indirection, are aimed at the innocence of Ophelia thus :

> Get thee to a nunnery : why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners ? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mothet had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful ambitious; with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in. imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth ?
>
> (III, i. 121-9)

Sexual passion in the play is poisoned at its very source: it disintegrates and undermines the very foundations to which individual, emotional life at its deepest is anchored. Hamlet may have nursed an implicit, nebulous desire to provide Ophelia a niche of security in a benighted world—a world which is no better than a quagmire of corrupted and corruptible flesh—, but seems to be blinded by his sense of horror at the limitlessness of sexual promiscuity. Earlier he refers to her bitingly as the 'fishmonger's daughter' (the phrase being weighted with cryptic, bawdy connotations) and his mind has been obsessed with the conflict between beauty and honesty (in the sense of chastity). Small wonder then that in the word 'nunnery' its accepted implication coexists, and in a very incisive way, with the blasphemous euphemism for a brothel in the Elizabethan slang, and the latter is regarded as the proper habitat for her. Otherwise, the possibility, fraught with even greater disaster, is that the whole world may come to be peopled with the contaminated progeny of their sexual union. Such is the flurry of emotions in which he is entangled that Hamlet does not refrain from castigating himself either for the infinite vices that the human 'flesh is heir to'; his self-depreciation is couched in very vigorous and unequivocal terms. To him it seems as if the whole of existence has grown leprous because of the deep infection which is eating into its vitals One may also treat it as a case

of emotional displacement, for Ophelia tends to become in his myopic vision the surrogate for the sexual aberrations of Gertrude. Hence Hamlet's revulsion against sex and disillusionment with Ophelia, whom he regards as the sweet bait set by Claudius and Polonius for catching him, become fused in a complex reaction.

Reference was made earlier to the two major components, besides intensity of apprehension, in the psychological make-up of Hamlet: nausea and anxiety. The two seem to have a tennous nexus of relationship; for both spring out of the severance from the roots of Being or Existenz. Hamlet finds it abnormally difficult to bridge the gap between the incompatibles : his divided consciousness has its genesis in the conflict between the duty to revenge and his aversion to what is so obnoxious and yet so unavoidable. That he is no ordinary revenger poses an intractable problem to him : he cannot bring about the necessary synthesis of his contemplative bias and his heroic self-assertion. This generates both moral and metaphysical perplexities and an early inkling of these is offered us when he cogitates thus : 'this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmanent, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (II, ii, 298-303). Under the impact of negative emotions, the earth, the air, and the sky—magnificient in their complex organization and designed as a beautiful and harmonious whole by the Divine architect—somehow lose their aesthetic appeal for him : to visualize their co-existence with a 'sterile promontory' and 'foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' is to put the whole thing within the ambience of paradox. When he proceeds from the scrutiny of the macrocosm, the external world, to the microcosm of man's intelligence, his basic stance—the stance of an obstinately self-doubting mind—remains unaltered : 'What a piece of work is a man ! How noble in reason ! how infinite in

faculty ! in form, in moving, how express and admirable ! in action how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a god ! the beauty of the world ! the paragon of animals ! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust ? man delights not me; no, nor woman neither,' (II, ii, 303-9). Hamlet concedes to a point the centrality of the Medieval Christian cosmology which places man midway in the Chain of Being : higher than the brutes but less exalted than the hierarchy of the angels, and yet assimilating the paradigm of virtues, specific to both. But he springs a surprise when towards the end he deflates this idealized, exquisite and flattering picture of human potentialities and equates man, the miracle of creation, with 'this quintessence of dust'. This seems to be in conformity with the Biblical theory of creatureliness as well as the Quranic doctrine of the heights and depths within which man is destined to oscillate. Disregarding the traditional sanctities one may as well uphold that in this vision of man beauty and ugliness, comedy and pain are intertwined and this constitutes the distinctive feature of that grotesquery or absurdity which clings to the human condition. We are no less insistently aware, in this context and in the Shakespearian canon, of Macbeth's 'Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow' soliloquy which is uttered when the terrible news of Lady Macbeth's self-slaughter is anounced. Both are utterances of disgust and bitter disillusionment and underline the assumption that man hardly counts in the cosmic scheme ultimately, and his life is made up of no more than disorganized congeries of atoms.

The void in which Hamlet habitually lives is partly intimated by the fact that he seems to have lost faith in the efficacy of words which, instead of functioning as symbolizations of experience, have been reduced to mere cyphers. When in response to Polonius's query : 'What do you read,' my Lord?' he replies : 'Words, words, words' or when replying to Gertrude's pathetic interrogation : 'What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tongue/In noise so rude against me ?'

(III, iv. 38-9) he retorts :

O I such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul. and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody words; (III, iv, 45-8)

he seems to be implicated in a particular life-situation wherein a disjunction has taken place between words and the heart of truth which is their ultimate referent. Words for Hamlet stand divested of their evocative potency and are no longer valued as crystals of meaning. Far from being envelopes of any cognitive consonance they are merely possessed of denotative value. Not that Hamlet is inarticulate or incapable of expending words but they are not liable to signify much to their recipient and also prevent him from establishing any significant contact with the *Dasein*. One of the sources of the existentialist dilemma, besides lack of congruence between affectivity (passion) and understanding (discourse of reason or judgment) is the inadequacy of speech mainfest in the play all along. Hamlet acquires knowledge of other characters not so much from their deeds as through their reactions and even these reactions are not properly identified by the ordering of speech symbols. When Hamlet pretty early in the play declares : 'I have that within which passeth show' part of the ambiguity of this statement derives from the fact that in this context hardly any expressive means of communication are available. Not only passion as such stands contaminated but here words are also 'painted', and hence are more or less specious counters and serve as 'mere interpolators of unholy suits' between Ophelia and himself. She fails to respond to his quibblings and ironic puns, hedged in as they are by all shades of subtlety, and therefore they do not contribute to the growth of inter-personal relationships. Gertrude's sense of nothingness which is incommensurate with words is mediated thus :

Queen. To whom do you speak this ?
Hamlet. Do you see nothing there ?

Queen. Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.
Hamlet. Nor did you nothing hear ?
Queen No nothing but ourselves. (III iv 130-9)

Likewise, Horatio, vis-a-vis Hamlet, also cntinues to function more or less as a peripheral, shadowy figure for a long stretch of time—till Act V—after the latter had sworn his confidants to absolute secrecy regarding the revelation of the ghost. Neither Ophelia nor Horatio is able to penetrate the region where Hamlet is cocooned in his self-acquiescence and he is moved on to it by the breakdown of verbal communication. Both Ophelia and Horatio on the one hand, and Hamlet on the other, seem to live in isolated and discrete inner worlds which do not admit any point of intersection.

The famous soliloquy 'To be or not to be : that is the question', riddled as it is with all sorts of dubieties, has for its datum more than simplistic polarities like life and death or suffering and doing. In it the notion of suicide holds I should think only a marginal value. It is centred on what Dr Johnson has very judiciously put his finger on—'the contrariety of desires'—and a number of half-intuited but recurrent ideas are poised on the undercurrent of feeling which goes backwards and forwards. The question of all questions is the polarization of totality without fissure versus a 'detotalized totality'. Hamlet's main trouble, as the central consciousness of the play, is the excruciating sense of lack both in himself and in the *Dasein*, and he is therefore engaged in the ever-continuing search for totality or wholeness. One of the pre-requisites of this search is to activate his weak will and harmonize it with his strong passions as also to hold contemplation and energetic action in a mutual embrace. Hamlet's advice to the first Player to the effect : 'suit the action to the word, the word to the action' (III, ii, 18-9) may not be construed as entirely subsuming his insight into the intricacies of the mimetic art but also insinuates a norm of personality pattern. This is preceded by : 'for in the very torrent, tempest, and—as I may say—the whirlwind

of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance, that may give it smoothness' (III, ii, 5-8). Here 'temperance,' whose cultivation in the midst of turbulence' is recommended, implicates the Aristotelian category—one of the crucial concepts in the Medieval spectrum. This is one of the essentials of that equipoise which was no less prized by the Elizabethans. Later, Hamlet's words occurring in his colloquy with Horatio :

> and bless'd are those
> Whose blood and judgment are so well comingled
> That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
> To sound what stop she please (III. ii 68-71)

which constitutes the ideal he should bend all his energies to pursue and realize in his personal life also reflect back on the soliloquy. He holds Horatio up for fervent, spontaneous and unqualified admiration because of his equanimity of mind and stoical impassibility as one who 'in suffering all' 'suffers nothing' and takes 'fortune's buffets and rewards' (III. ii, 66-7) without whispering any complaint against its vagaries. What Hamlet is eager to strive for is not the complete subdual of passion by judgment but blending them together so as to achieve the necessary integration of personality. But despite all this youthful idealism he is not sure of discovering the man who is not 'passion's slave': were such a rare creature to be had he would wear him in his heart's core, make him the cynosure of his eye. He is not only outwardly anxious to develop this equipoise in his own self but is vaguely and unconsciously aware of possessing it as a potentiality. Hamlet is himself urged by irresistible feelings of nausea and disgust and his real dilemma in this soliloquy, contrary to the common, oft-repeated assumption, is not that, because of 'thinking too precisely on the event', that is, being over-speculative, his will has become paralyzed. He is in need of cultivating that attitude of 'maturity' in the absence of which he flounders or is stuck up in the realization of his objectives. It may be added that conscience

which 'makes cowards of us all' may not in this context be equated with moral discrimination or judgment of the internal lawgiver exclusively but connotes knowledge or consciousness as well. In *Hamlet* 'conscience' has been used consistently in the sense of 'conscientia' or 'in-wit' over and above the deliverances of the moral sense. Undoubtedly, towards the end, while taking Horatio into his confidence and *apropos* the deaths of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz when Hamlet says : 'Why, man, they did make love to this employment;/They are not near my conscience'; (V, ii, 57-8) he is referring to moral compunctions alone. But immediately afterwards, when cataloguing his specific reasons for the proposed killing of Claudius he adds :

> is't not perfect conscience
> To quit him with this arm ? and is't not to be damn'd
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil ? (V, ii 67-70)

he is trying to admit within the ambit of meaning both the connotations of 'conscience' : the consequences of sustained thinking plus the dictates of the inner sense which together supply the possible rationale of his action.

Further, Hamlet's diagnosis to the effect : 'And thus the native hue of resolution/Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought' (III, i, 84-5), though offered as a broad generalization, has nevertheless a close bearing on his own predicament. It has a specificity about it because it implies an oblique intimation of the conflicting impulses operative in his psyche, and each one is struggling to achieve supremacy over the other. The fact that Hamlet has been weighing the different alternatives to the execution of vengeance implies that he wishes to undergo the Sartrean anguish of freedom. The basic problem in the play is that of the existential choice : the double-edged anxiety felt by Hamlet is how best to reconcile the two seemingly irreconcibles : the primitive law of blood-feud and the code of forgiveness enjoined equally by the Catholic and the Protestant ethic, and thus have the

Gordian knot cut. He seems to be as much attracted to the notion of patient suffering as to the assertiveness of the will : 'to take arms against a sea of troubles;/And by opposing end them' (III, i, 59-60). But the intriguing point to notice is that the consummation implicit in the phrase 'end them' is neither achieved nor dramatically enacted : on the contrary, such is the dynamics of the play that the protagonist becomes involved in the labyrinth of contradictions and is pulled into contrary directions. Neither are 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' resisted nor are all the hazards and illogicalities that make 'calamity of so long life' averted nor the final 'quietus' achieved. When, speaking earlier to Guildenstren and mischievously trying to put him on the wrong track, Hamlet indulges in an agonized, rhetorical style : 'O God ! could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not I have bad dreams' (II, ii, 254-6), the obvious referent of 'bad dreams' is either the repugnance felt over the incubus of the flesh or the haunting, lacerating, unconscious memory of the discontents of the mundane world. In the present soliloquy, sleep which creates the illusion of death, is again broken and disturbed by dreams which allow glimpses of and therefore strike 'dread' in regard to 'the undiscovered country' or the circumambient Reality. This offers a striking parallel to the nervous rhythms of Claudio's 'Ay, but to die, and go we know not where' in *Measure for Measure*, and the succession of blood-curdling images relating to 'the pendent world' into which the soul may be hurled after death. This, according to James, brings 'Hamlet's fearful imagination of life after death'[2] into focus and is a source of the deepest disquietude in the play. It is worth stressing, though, that there is all the difference in the world between the terror of existential 'nothing' and the fear of vital 'non being'. In the case of Hamlet it is the former rather than the latter which impinges upon him the consciousness of his radical finitude.

Hamlet is highly egocentric and hypersensitive and the

dichotomies he encounters and the inner tensions he wishes to resolve prevent him from going straight to his task. What is really relevant or crucial is not so much the fact of his being thrown into metaphysical speculation every now and then as his awareness of a lack or fissuse in his inmost being and his persistent endeavour to clarify to himself the tangle of his motives and discriminations that has put him in a quandary. This is the main burden of his soliloquies or 'meditations' in which he tends to be occupied with the task of self-explication and which have also the status of choric commentaries on the interlocking chain of events and occurrences in the play. His will does become or seems to become 'mildew'd' or 'apoplex'd' for long stretches of time, and the resolution of ambiguities remains only a remote possibility. His delay in action would have gone unnoticed had he himself not drawn pointed attention to it at least twice. First, he castigates himself for 'being a rogue and peasant slave' and cannot help wondering, *apropos* the actor in the Play Scene : 'What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba/ That he should weep for her ?' (II,ii,552-3). The passion may be counterfeit but its enactment by him is overwhelmingly authentic : so complete is the identification in the Play Scene that we cannot possibly 'separate the dancer from the dance.' In other words he fully appreciates the perfect commitment of the actor, though in a 'dream of passion' and while 'the suspension of disbelief' lasts, to the requirements of the fictional mode. He feels an unexpressed emulation for the actor who can arouse in himself that degree of heightened sensitivity which can carry conviction with the ordinary theatre-goer or connoisseur of art And further, it is a question of so transforming and objectifying passion as to produce the true image of the dramatic fable. In his own case the 'cue for passion' is undoubtedly there but the necessary boldness of initiative required of an avenger of blood or the courage of making one's unquenchable fury issue out into outward action has all along been in abeyance.

Secondly, he is touched to the quick by the sight of the reckless and spirited Fortinbras, puffed up with 'divine ambition', leading his conscripted soldiers through Denmark to Poland, exposing everything to hazard, 'even for an egg-shell', and 'making mouths at the invisible event'. He is therefore all the more stung by the arrows of conscience to realize his own 'bestial oblivion' and is stimulated to making a crucial comment to this effect :

> 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. (IV iv, 53-6)

Here he feels sceptical about action which is unsupported by convincing motivation and which consequently becomes pretty trifling having nothing to enhance its value or even to vindicate it. But, paradoxically enough, action which is initiated when paltry ambition, camouflaged as 'honour' is involved in it, becomes commendable even though in the frame of contingency it may still look feeble and tawdry. This obviously entails a kind of doubleness of vision, for neither of the two varieties of action cancel each other out completely, and yet 'honour' is a specious category which is bandied about for covering up one's bloated sense of vainglory. And hence Hamlet's attitude to 'the delicate and tender prince' and to his preoccupations is rather ambivalent : he admires his courage as well as pooh-poohs his bravado, swaggering and foolhardiness. Simultaneously, he prides himself on his own possession of 'god-like reason' and yet feels amazed and dispirited at the imbalance created by 'A thought, which quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom,/And ever three parts coward' (IV, iv, 42-3). In both these soliloquies, however, though Hamlet may be seen to be palpably admonishing in order to whip himself into action yet in real fact he is trying as best he can to explore his own resources and get the right perspective for making thought and action cohere into a wished-for harmony.

Looking retrospectively, one cannot help noticing that Hamlet refrains from playing the role of the avenger of blood when he discovers Claudius, his 'mighty opposite', in the posture of repentance (which precedes the state of grace) and also does not chastise himself subsequently on that score. Many ingenious explanations have been offered for Hamlet's not finishing him there and then but the ones which remain unformulated are no less cogent though they seem to operate at the level of the 'unconscious'. Hamlet is held back partly because of his obsession with intense loathing and hatred for Claudius which in a way spills over and impedes overt action. Moreover, had he taken advantage of this fugitive moment his deed would have acquired the same odour of the sacrilege as that of Claudius's secret killing of Hamlet's father : nothing less than a piece of crooked knavery'. Itis this inchoate reasoning done in the womb of the undifferentiated psyche, which is dramatized by him in the soliloquy following the conclusion of the Prayer Scene. The Play Scene—one of Hamlet's own skilful construction—is a sort of mirror in which is reflected at once the image of Claudius's 'occulted guilt' as well as the foreshadowing of his eventual death, and it provides Hamlet the unique opportunity of making Claudius realize his own culpability by the sheer act of betrayal of his 'limed soul'. Besides, Hamlet's transference of his own identification with Pyrrhus to one with the terrible, shimmering Lucianus in the Dumb Show amounts to a prefiguring of the ultimate forcing of the poisoned chalice to Claudius's lips, as a ritualistic gesture, when he is at long last roused, as if surprised by occasion, to dealing the fatal death-blow to his adversary, on the spur of the moment. It looks, therefore, that despite the 'craven scruple, the continuous wrestlings of his soul, the unsettling of cerebral activity and the pressure of unconscious drives and impulses, Hamlet succeeds ultimately and with the wholeness of his being, in making the inescapable, free, personal, though sadly belated, choice.

Almost all the themes of the play finally converge on the point of death because violence and self-destructive passion, casting their ominous shadow over it, lead ultimately to utter annihilation. The secret and heinous murder of elder Hamlet by Claudius, the accidental killing of Polonius, Ophelia's death by water, Laeretes's blood-thirsty pursuit of vendetta against Hamlet, the cunning manipulation of the duel, the 'mediated' perception of murder in the Play Scene and Hamlet's unconscious bracing of himself for the climactic deed, all these are woven together into a single, inviolable whole. Our awareness of the spectre of death in the play is made recognizable through neutralized comments as well as perspicuous icons. Gertrude looks upon death as part of the biological cycle and as a 'boundary' situation which should be accepted unhesitatingly and without demur :

> Do not for ever with thy vailed lids
> Seek for thy noble father in the dust :
> Thou know'st 'tis common; all that live must die,
> Passing through nature to eternity. (1, ii. 70-3)

Claudius, likewise, underlines the element of sameness involved in the process of death and the vulgarity of lamenting over the dead one. For him death is not a concrete, particularized experience, with its ghastly fascination but more or less a phenomenology which should not be scrutinized either too closely or too long : his superficially persuasive speech betrays however both apathy and insensitiveness :

> and the survivor bound
> In filial obligation for some term
> To do obsequious sorrow; but to persever
> In obstinate condolement is a course
> Of impious stubbornness. . .
> Why should we in our peevish opposition
> Take it to heart ? (I, ii. 90-101)

Whereas Gertrude's utterance reflects the brutishness of a person herself wallowing in a pigsty, Claudius's approach,

though apparently commonsensical, is shot through with a deliberate crassness and is intended to make Hamlet gloss over this traumatic experience of his father's murder by applying to it 'the rhetoric of oblivion'[3] and thus forget the haunting cadence of the Ghost's reiterated 'Remember me !' Neither of them feels the necessity nor has the capability of obtaining from the consciousness of nothingness any assurance of true Existenz. On the contrary, a sense of brutality is blended with the nervy and brazen self-assurance of one's immunity to death and thus makes one regard it as unworthy of being pondered over.

Hamlet's attitude to death is more complex and charged with greater intricacy of feeling : it stands out in sharp contrast with the opaqueness (and self-complacency) of both the 'king of shreds and patches' and his no less abominable queen. It is brought out, in the first instance, when in response to the king's query about Polonius's whereabouts after his death : 'At supper ! Where ?' he replies tartly : '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'. (IV, iii, 20-25). This may be regarded as a fantastic inversion of the 'banquet of sense' notion: a kind of metaphysical conceit is woven around the ineluctable fact of human mortality and the process of putrefaction incumbent on death. 'We fat ourselves for maggots' is a phrase which links up with the central, terrifying image of the corruptible flesh and the ultimate, total annihilation accompanying it in the terrestrial world When later in the Graveyard Scene (in which is framed the Universal Form of death) the First Clown throws up a skull Hamlet makes a very scathing and disillusioning comment on it thus : 'That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once; how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jaw-bone, that did the first murder ! This

might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'er-reaches, that would circumvent God, might it not?' (V, i, 74-8). A little further on he expatiates thus: 'Why, e'en so, and now my Lady Worm's; chapless, and knocked about the mazzard with a sexton's spade. Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't'. (v,i,85-7). In these near-monologues is focused the teasing mystery of man's enigmatic existence and in them we perceive subtle variations made both on 'the quintessence of dust hypothesis and the 'convocation of politic worms' axiology. The skull which 'could sing once', which might be 'the pate of a politician' that 'would circumvent God' and that of 'Lady Worm's' - 'chapless' and 'knocked about the mazzard' all these are gruesome icons of that relentless law of mutability which is inherent in the very constitution of human existence. The allusion to Cain's jaw-bone puts the whole phenomenon across the stream of time which flows down into the desert of human achievement. The evocation of the sense of waste and futility, of the dissolution of the bodily framework and of the stark and bewildering contrast between mundane glory on the one hand and the ultimate nothingness to which it is reduced on the other is no less glaringly manifest. Hamlet takes up Yorick's skull—of the King's jester—and utters his self-communion in these mordant tones : 'Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? quite chapfallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this farvour she must come; make her laugh at that.' (V, i, 181-88). This contemplation of the skull is a dramatic device of exposing the brittleness of life on earth and helps the passage of human memory through the corridors of time which are distinguished variously. There is a wide and incomprehensible chasm which divides the present from the past and over both and the future hangs the impenetrable void. The element of

disenchantment is pervasive and the last half of the passage is aimed at unmasking humanity of all pretences, breaking all images of one's mirror-state and all chimeras of self-involvement. In pictorial representations, generally speaking, the skull has had the status of *memento mori* which reminds us that death brings about the termination of all action and all suffering, all responsility and all commitment, all bustle and all contentment. It becomes the icon of the bizarre dance of death by which not only the cemetry but the entire cosmos is overshadowed and human ambition is brought to naught.

The Grave-digger, a dialectician by temperament and an expert in quibbling, looks upon death with wry detachment and supreme unconcern: he remains untouched both by its immanence and its irreducibility. More than any one else he is convinced of the fact that death is the only and most authentic leveller of all distinctions: he is therefore engaged in digging graves with superb equanimity and chilly self-dedication. And so deep is his absorption in his chosen vocation that the Graveyard itself appears to be a form of his self-projection and death is emblematic of him. And yet his imperturbability and lucidity are amazing and breath-taking. Hamlet's meditation on death emerges out of his heightened awareness of the mystery of Existenz; in his case, the courage to die presupposes the courage to live. He formalizes his intuition of the ominous oncoming of death in the form of the ache he feels about his heart. And yet his invincible inner strength and self-renunciation before the Ultimate, not unmixed with a grain of fatalism, resounds in the utterance when Horatio volunteers himself to get the fencing-bout with Laeretes called off : 'Not a whit, we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all'. (V, ii, 211-14). In this conditional syllogism, so impeccably organized, so resonant of acceptance and impregnated with such a sense of ultimacy, both the past and the future seem to be

relegated to comparative insignificance and attention comes to be rivetted on the immediacy of the present moment and acquiescence in the divine order of things. To put it differently, the present moment, instead of being only an isolated unit of the larger continuum, has become a portion of Eternity. Moreover, would it be too idle to speculate that this kind of total and unswerving commitment—'the readiness is all' is also in a way conditioned and facilitated by Hamlet's eventual recognition of the harmony of love—the splendid blaze of passion kindled by and manifested in his embrace of Ophelia's corpse in the grave—when mind, body and soul are assimilated into an organic and indissoluble unity? In such a moment of ecstasy there is no flinching from death, no parrying of the inevitable but one can afford to look into its face with a certain fixity of vision. Hamlet's attitude at this stage reflects a degree of poise—an essential pre-condition of the resolution of discords although the complete resolution seems to elude his grasp. A semblance of charity and tenderness is indeed exhibited by him towards Laeretes before the duel starts. When he declares: 'If 't be so,/Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd,/His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy' (V, ii, 229-31) it does not look that he is striking a posture and his voice more or less rings true. He does not treat death either as absolutely trivial or awesome but takes the burden of anguish and responsibility upon his purgated consciousness. In such a context it appears as if the veil has been taken off the countenance of truth temporarily and Hamlet achieves a half-glimpsed knowledge of the terror and absurdity which cleaves to the very st ucture of mundane life. And yet the total resolution of disharmonies is no more than a chimera and Existenz continues to remain a tantalizing, inscrutable and unidentified mystery.

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