Emotional Conflict, a Key to Artistic Unity of Character and Incident in Hamlet

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EMOTIONAL CONFLICT, A KEY TO ARTISTIC
UNITY OF CHARACTER AND
INCIDENT IN HAMLET

by

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of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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LIFE

Leonard Joseph Langenderfer was born at Swanton, Ohio, February 15, 1925.

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In September, 1942, he entered John Carroll University, at Cleveland, Ohio.

In February, 1943, he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Milford, Ohio, and was enrolled in the College of Arts of Xavier, University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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During the school years of 1946-1947 and 1947-1948 he taught at Xavier High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the school years of 1951-1952 he taught at Loyola Academy in Chicago, Illinois.
PREFACE

The play, *Hamlet*, as well as the character of Hamlet is complex and can be approached and understood in a variety of ways. In this thesis the author is trying to cast another light on the play and on the character by showing that there can be an artistic unity fundamental to both play and character. This artistic unity proceeds from the emotional conflict arising from Hamlet's disillusioned ideal of womanhood, from his disillusioned filial love for his mother. This emotional conflict, revenge and melancholy, is at first subordinate. During the first three acts it grows and finally manifests itself in a startling revelation of mind and heart in Act 3, scene 4. In this scene a change occurs in Hamlet's mind and heart. And in the final two acts he is no longer so melancholic but is now a man more capable of action.

It is possible, therefore, that this disillusioned love can offer another explanation of Hamlet's thoughts, words, and actions, and of the other incidents in the entire play.

It is called artistic unity because all the elements of the whole are ordered naturally into a singleness of impress, of thought, and of emotion.
Many scholars and literary critics were used in developing this thesis. But the greatest source of material has come from a study of the text itself.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION, INCLUDING A DEFINITION
OF ARTISTIC UNITY

One of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare, Hamlet, has been the inspiration of more literary endeavor and research than any single one of the other plays. There have been many opinions and interpretations of the play. In this paper is expressed just one of those countless and varied impressions of the play and of the character. Hamlet as a play and Hamlet as a character of real life both penetrate too deeply into the very core of the human heart to be thoroughly analyzed. This thesis only attempts to throw a different light on the play and on the character, thus offering a broader understanding of both the play and the character of Hamlet.

Both the play and the main character, Hamlet, are being studied together. This is done because it is well nigh impossible to understand the one without the other; both are inseparable. The more particular aim of this thesis, however, is to study the character of Hamlet in detail, expressing a different view of the man, and by that means also to come to an
understanding of the play as a whole. The purpose, in fine, is to show that the character of Hamlet has unity, artistic unity; and the consequent implication is that the play also has this same artistic unity. In approaching it from this point of view, the author believes it can be shown that there is something in Hamlet that may have been overlooked in former criticisms of the play.

The unity of the play, and especially of the character of Hamlet, centers around Hamlet's deep and devoted love and esteem of his mother. One scene in the play offers a solution for this artistic unity here discussed. That scene is Act III, scene 4, the interview of Hamlet with his mother. This scene is often disregarded in evaluating the play. By many it has been treated almost as a mere episode, unrelated to the main conflict; yet, it seems to be of vital importance for the comprehension of Hamlet's character, his motives, and his actions throughout the play. This paper, therefore, will show that, approaching the play from the author's point of view, and basing it on the text itself, the reader can see the whole play linked as an artistic unity, and that the character and actions of Hamlet the man are linked as an artistic unit.

Hamlet's decidedly Christian background and influence, his deep love and sympathy for his mother, fostered by the Christian ideal of womanhood, condition him for the shattering
disillusionment that follows the revelation of his mother's inconstancy. With disillusionment comes a crippling melancholy which grows during the first and second acts until it is relieved in the stormy dialogue with his mother, followed by her repentance in Act III, scene 4. This event offers a tremendous relief for Hamlet; this event dissipates his passion. And he becomes suddenly a man capable of action. This new spirit of action is noticeable in the following acts of the play.

Hence, the play has artistic unity. It has this unity because both character and play maintain their integrity throughout, the character of Hamlet by the deep filial devotion of a son for his mother, the play by the conflict which ensues between this deep devotion, based predominantly on emotion, and the duty urged by reason which oblige Hamlet to revenge the murder of his father.

Therefore, in the belief that it is the unity of the character which gives unity to this play, the main drift of this paper will center on the idealism of Hamlet as the ultimate explanation of his conduct and of the action of the play throughout.

This analysis will consequently concern itself chiefly with that one aspect, his idealism, disillusioned, and resulting in melancholy. The idealism focuses on his mother,
the model of all womanhood; it is frustrated by her conduct; and the necessary result is dejection. The early chapters, then, will treat exclusively of this dominating point: Hamlet's filial love and idealism and its disillusionment.

It is his love for his mother, wounded by her sin, that causes him such great melancholy; it is his love for his mother that, renewed and strengthened by her repentance, arouses him to action again. It is, in fine, his love for his mother that directs his entire life.

But since it is necessary to show that the unity thus achieved by the unfolding of Hamlet's idealism is truly an artistic unity, it will be well to discuss briefly the nature of artistic unity of play and character.

The unity of the play is a unity which we shall call organic, that is, a structural unity, meaning that all the parts fit together in presenting a unified impression. The unity in the character, from which the unity of the play as a whole results, is a unity much the same, that is, structural, meaning in this case that all the thoughts, emotions, and actions of Hamlet as a character fit jointly and compactly together in presenting a unified impression, growing organically one out of the other. Where organic, or structural unity, is used as the term to define the unity of the art, it is to be taken to mean that there is a conscious planning by the author, but that the
result is natural and spontaneous. Hence, we say it not only has unity, but that it has in addition artistic unity.

To show more in detail just what is meant by this, scholars who have written of and clarified the notion for us will be cited. It must be borne in mind first, though, that the aim is not so much to show the beauty of character, but rather to show integration of character, integration of thought, of emotion, and of action. Because the integration is organic, that is, so developed by the author that it seems quite natural, we say it is artistic integration. The passages cited will clarify this notion.

St. Thomas Aquinas has treated systematically of this subject of the prerequisites of artistic creation. When speaking of the essentials of all beauty, he says they can be reduced to three; namely, integrity, proportion, or harmony, and splendor. St. Thomas puts integrity first, integrity in the sense of organic unity. Proportion is the harmony of the parts within the organic unity of the whole. He says:

Ad Pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem integritas, sive perfectio; quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt; ... et debita proportion sive consonantia; ... et iterum claritas; unde quae habent colorem nitidum pulchra esse dicuntur.

1 St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, I, q 39, a 8.
The second element, due proportion, is common to all artistic creation. Now this order or due proportion is defined by the scholastics as "dispositio plurium ad unum."² It consists mainly in the correct disposition of the various parts of an object or action among themselves, and of each of the parts to the whole. This proportion is considered by many to be the most important element of any work of art and an essential to any creative production. St. Thomas considers it of more importance than the other constituent elements for he defines beauty primarily as that which has proportion. Many actions, such as unity, variety, and harmony, all of which are important to the making of beauty, are all implied in the notion of proportion, of the dispositio plurium ad unum.³

The fundamental note which we here take from St. Thomas as clarifying our notion of artistic unity is the note of the ordering of parts. St. Thomas sees its necessity everywhere, especially in beauty. Speaking of beauty, he says:

Unde pulchrum in debita proportione consistit.⁴

³ Ibid.
⁴ Summa Theologica, I, q 5, a 4, ad 1.
Any work of art, whether it be music, painting, architecture, or literature must of necessity have these qualities, especially that one quality of proportion, or the ordering of parts. It seems that St. Thomas, viewing the works of art in his day, in viewing especially the grand work of art, God's creation and the beauty around him, saw in it all a wonderful harmony, a wonderful order, a wonderful unity. He saw, in short, this unity in everything.

Another literary scholar, Dr. Paul F. Speckbaugh, having delved deeply into the annals of art, having carefully studied the various works of art, and having analyzed well the masterpieces of symphony, of painting, of architecture, and of literature, has determined upon several general canons which each work of art ought to have.

The first of these positive canons of artistic creation he cites as unity. About unity as a principle of art, Dr. Speckbaugh, of the Catholic University, says, "It is that

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5 St. Thomas in Psalms Davidis, 44, 2, resp. c.
6 Summa Theologica, I, q 21, a 1, ad 3.
quality, the presence of which in an artistic production impresses organically the one single effect." He then goes on to explain just what he means, basing his statements both on reason and on authority:

It is at once evident that the unity which is here spoken of is one of impression and not of objectivity. A work in reality may be composed of different parts, as, for example, a cathedral or a statue made of different marbles. Yet there is a unity because it has the appearance, it creates the impression of one thing. The next demand of this canon is that the creation should possess oneness in a definite manner. . . . It must be set before us as a creation born of one impression, one thought, one idea.

Dr. Speckbaugh then goes on to say that:

There is contained in this unity an unmistakable note of variety.

And this he defines as:

That quality, the presence of which causes an artistic production to possess diversity of form or character.

He adds:

All these elements are related to one another in such a way as to preserve that first quality, unity, for it is quite patent that a mere assemblage of different things will not produce something artistic.

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 98.
Unity, then, according to Dr. Speckbaugh, is the first and necessary canon of artistic creation. And this unity he maintains is to be a unity of impression, a singleness of impression. Unity, however, cannot be had without the second necessity of artistic creation, variety. The two work hand in hand under the masterful direction of the skilled artisan. It is, finally, this unity of impression about which Dr. Speckbaugh speaks that determines the essence of artistic unity, the ordering of parts, as St. Thomas would say.

This basically comes down to the integration about which we were speaking before; and, when applied to character, it is the integration of his whole being, leaving a dominant impression.

So much for Dr. Speckbaugh.

Another scholar, Mr. John Bascom, in his book, the *Science of Beauty*, devotes an entire chapter to unity, which he considers the second condition. Of unity in art he says:

The unity to which reference is had is not that of office, as the concurrence of wheels in a machine, nor is it the unity of mere existence in the same place or time, but the harmony of expression by which the parts of an object unite in producing and deepening a single feeling. It is a harmony of sounds. Unity implies plurality, variety, and designates that concurrent power of the parts by which they become in their action on the mind a whole, lending themselves to a
single effect. 11

Later Mr. Bascom adds, when speaking of the necessity of variety:

It is by the concurrent, and not by the conflicting, action of a various thing, that the mind receives a more powerful impulse than belonged to any of the parts. We have now, not a unit, but a unity. The first is single in its impression on the senses; the second is complete in its elements, and complete in its sensuous impression, but one in its action on the mind. The band of thought has gathered the fagots into a bundle. . . .

Beauty, then, demands variety in its object, since thus only can there be combination, expression; it demands unity, since thus only is there combination, thus only is the sensible made the intellectual, and the diversity of things the harmony of thought. The unity is supplied from within, the diversity is found without in facts and objects, and the relation of these two elements we need to unfold in several directions. . . .

As the unity now spoken of is only a unity of the mind’s imparting and the mind’s receiving, it is evident that it is not exclusively dependent upon, nor does it certainly follow, any form of external unity. 12

The implication in this view of the unity in beauty is that the power of expression must depend on the singleness of thought which links the parts. All beauty -- and since unity is a necessity for beauty, all unity too -- is a beauty of relations


12 Ibid., 48-49.
of parts gathered into a whole. Thus, the unity required for beauty is a unity of mental, not sensible, impression. In *Hamlet* we can see easily this unity of mental impression — a host of actions, thoughts, and feelings produce one single effect on our mind, disillusioned filial love. And in *Hamlet*, besides, there is not at first sight any sign of external unity, but a unity more basic, internal.

Finally, we must consider one more scholar, writing on unity in art. Mr. C. F. Johnson in his book, *Elements of Literary Criticism* speaks of organic unity as opposed to logical unity. He says:

The principal divisions of unity are organic and formal unity. Organic unity is a quality of a higher order than formal unity. Formal unity or logical unity consists in adherence to a plan and in following out a line of thought, in systematic adherence to an outline laid down. It is the result of an intellectual process consciously gone through. Organic unity, on the other hand, results from the unconscious working of the artistic powers... organic unity, in which all the powers contribute to an unified impression... But organic unity results when all the details bear the impress of the individual imagination, and style, plot, and diction have the incom­ communicable mark of the same spirit.  

The authors above cited understand artistic unity to be...  

organic. It should not be difficult, then, to take from all of these a common element or elements and fuse them into a single note, which we shall call our definition of artistic unity.

As was noted previously, the unity of the play is organic, that is, a structural unity, meaning that all the parts fit together in presenting a unified impression, in presenting "the incommunicable mark of the same spirit." It is a unity which, as Mr. Bascom so well says, comes from within, not from without. Now, the element which seems to stand out most in the authors mentioned is that of singleness of impression. St. Thomas puts integrity first, by which he means organic unity. Dr. Speckbaugh speaks of a unity of impression, of one thought, of one idea. All of them, when speaking of the unity necessary for beauty, either explicitly or implicitly mention the necessity for variety, for the ordering of variety. It is this ordering of the manifold variety of parts into a unified whole which gives the work of art its beauty, which, in brief, makes it an artistic unity. Hence, with that notion uppermost in our mind and with the opinions of scholars to help us, we can formulate a definition of artistic unity. It is this: "Artistic unity is the ordering of all the elements of a whole into a natural unity and into a singleness of impression, of thought, and of emotion."
It is in this sense that both the character of Hamlet as a man and the play itself possess artistic unity. It is a unity based on a son's love and idealized worship of his mother, a love and worship resulting in bitter disillusionment. All centers on this. All thought, all feeling, and all action center on this. And all can be explained because of this notion.
CHAPTER II

SOME BASIC FACTS GENERALLY ACCEPTED BY SCHOLARS

Now that is has been defined what is meant by artistic unity, it remains to show in detail how this unity is applied to the character and to the play. The artistic unity centers around Hamlet's love and idealism of his mother. This filial love is impressed clearly on our minds in Act III, scene 4, a scene important for a vital understanding of the play; for it links the entire play in one whole.

To show how this scene is important in the play, it will be necessary first to restate some assumptions which scholars are inclined to accept. To list these truths of the play and to verify them as well as possible will be the scope of this chapter. These assumptions are used as a basis for the argument of artistic unity in the play. Here we state them and prove their authenticity by quoting various selected passages from the text, and by referring to the opinions of authors who have written on the subject.

The first of these generally accepted assumptions is
that "before the trouble came into his family, Hamlet had been a normal young man." This is rather easily verified by statements made during the first two or three acts by the King, by his mother, by Ophelia, and by Polonius.

The King, trying through Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to find the cause of this sudden disturbance in Hamlet, speaks to them in this wise:

Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation; so I call it,
Since not the exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. . . .

Act II, scene 2

Of this change the Queen also speaks in the same scene:

Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz:
And I beseech you instantly to visit
My too much changed son.

Act II, scene 2

And Ophelia, most of all, his lover, notices the change that has taken place in Hamlet. In Act III, after she has a rather long distracting talk with him, she soliloquizes after his departure:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye,
Tongue, sword;

---

Th' expectancy and rose of fair state,
The glass of fashion and mould of form,
Th' observed of all observers, quite, quite down!

Act III, scene 1

And we might add with Theodore Spencer, "for Hamlet, before his mother's second marriage, had been, as Shakespeare is careful to point out, the ideal renaissance nobleman; according to Ophelia he had a 'noble mind . . . the glass of fashion . . . etc.'"16 "He was by temperament trained to the optimistic view, an unbounded faith and delight in everything good and beautiful."17

To show more in detail that Hamlet, before the trouble had entered into his family, was a normal young man quite without any mental abnormalities or disturbances we quote here at length Fr. Simon Blackmore, S.J.

Though with the opening of the play, Hamlet be enveloped in gloom, and afflicted with grief, which induce him to a great and continued depression of spirits, it is clear that his natural temperament was far from melancholic. He is characterized as refined and courteous, princely in dignity and royal in manners, in form prepossessing, in temperament imaginative, in feelings sensitive and generous, and with a deep sense of propriety

16 Spencer, Theodore, _Shakespeare and the Nature of Man_, New York, 1943, 94.
17 Ibid., 95.
and respect for the moral order of things. 18

Fr. Blackmore then shows more in detail that Hamlet had been a well balanced man;

In those happier days, his was not the life of a mere student, nor was he peculiarly addicted to moody reflection, nor indisposed to action, but on the contrary, his must have been other qualities such as are loved and admired by the masses, and which won for him popular favor, and in fact made him the idol of Denmark. All know him to love and admire him. To the valiant Fortinbras he was a soldier, nor did he lose his love for military skill even in his saddest and gloomiest days. To Ophelia and the court, who knew him more intimately, he was, moreover, a scholar and a courtier, and the pride of the state, 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form, the observed of all observers.' 19

Fr. Blackmore lastly draws his conclusions from the text and its implications to show that Hamlet, in spite of what he may seem to us, was an ideal character:

From certain hints in the play and from logical inferences, we may reasonably surmise what was Hamlet's natural disposition. In other and sunny days, when unstricken by affliction, he was not prone to gloomy and brooding thoughtfulness, which is characteristic of the melancholic temperament; nor were his the mental sluggishness and dullness of passionate emotion, which mark the phlegmatic; nor was his temper the choleric which is fiery, irascible and easily roused to anger. On the contrary, he exhibited a calm and placid disposition, which his mother compared to


19 Ibid., 75.
that of 'turtle dove sitting over her golden couplets,' and which Claudius calls 'sweet and commendable.'

His natural temperament seems a happy combination, which is characterized by marked physical vitality, quick mental activity, strong sensibility, and impetuous action.

Hamlet is gifted with remarkable prudence. . . . No less remarkable is the habitual power of self command. . . . One of the strongest traits of the Prince's character is sincerity. . . . Hamlet was affectionate by nature. 20

The second assumption gleaned from authors and critics of *Hamlet* is that "when the play opens, he is suffering from an extreme grief or melancholia, which has changed both the inner and outer man." 21 Early in the play the Queen remarks to Hamlet: "Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark." (Act I, scene 2) And the King, also speaking to Hamlet, adds: "We pray you, throw to earth this unpervailing woe. . . ." (Act I, scene 2) Later, to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Claudius, trying to find the cause for Hamlet's sorrow says: "Something have you heard of Hamlet's transformation; so I call it, sith nor the exterior nor the inward man resembles that it was." (Act II, scene 2) And here also the Queen wonders: "And I beseech you instantly to visit my too

20 Ibid., 75.

much changed son." (Act II, scene 2) These remarks, taken in the general spirit of the text, all seem to imply that Hamlet is dreadfully sorrowful for some reason, and it is causing the King and Queen no little anxiety. Evidence, then, of this melancholy is contained in the remarks cited, as well as in the lament of Ophelia, and in certain passages of Polonius. And in the shrewd comment of the King after he has listened to the encounter between Hamlet and Ophelia we see the same:

Love, his affections do not that way tend;  
Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little  
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul  
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,  
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose  
Will be some danger.

Act III, scene 1

Hamlet's own words seem to show forth the spirit of melancholy when he says:

I have of late -- but wherefore I know not --  
Lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily  
With my disposition that this goodly frame,  
the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory,  
This most excellent canopy, the air, look you,  
this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and 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, though by your smiling you seem to say so.
Act II, scene 2

That is clear indication of just how Hamlet himself felt.

The third assumption is that, "The cause of his melancholy is his mother's marriage; it has been indecently hasty and he regards it as incest." His first soliloquy emphasizes the marriage and only the marriage:

O, that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Pie on't, ah Pie! 'tis an unweded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead; nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet, within a month --
Let me not think on't -- frailty, thy name is woman! --
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears; -- why she, even she --
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourned longer -- married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules; within a month:
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good;
But break my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

---

Act I, scene 2

There is Hamlet, expressing his own thoughts and feelings.

To that Miss Pearl Hogrefe adds:

It is noteworthy that he mentions his father's death merely as a fact which contributes to his disturbance about his mother and that he does not mention at all the loss of the throne to Claudius, although he has just watched Claudius take his place as King. In other plays Shakespeare uses the first soliloquy of a major character to point up important information. Is there any reason for not accepting the information as important in this play and as a cause for the melancholia? 23

This fact -- that his mother's seemingly incestuous marriage causes his melancholy -- is of great importance in explaining the artistic unity in the play; hence, too much emphasis cannot be given to it. We now quote Mr. A. C. Bradley, who has very clearly and pointedly explained this point in his book Shakespearean Tragedy:

Now this is what actually happens in the play. Turn to the first words of Hamlet, the words he utters when he is alone; turn, that is to say, to the place where the author is likely to indicate his meaning most plainly. What do you hear?

'O, that this too too solid flesh
Would melt, thaw and resolve itself
into a dew! Or that the everlasting
Had not fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world! Fle

23 Ibid.
"tis an unweeded garden that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely!"

Here are a sickness of life, and even a longing for death, so intense that nothing stands between Hamlet and suicide except religious awe. And what has caused them? The rest of the soliloquy so thrusts the answer upon us that it might seem impossible to miss it. It was not his father's death; that doubtless brought deep grief, but mere grief for some one loved and lost does not make a noble spirit loathe the world as a place full only of things rank and gross. It was not the vague suspicion that we know Hamlet felt. Still less was it the loss of the crown; for though the subserviency of the electors might well disgust, there is not a reference to the subject in the soliloquy, nor any sign elsewhere that it greatly occupied his mind. It was a moral shock of the sudden ghastly disclosure of his mother's true nature, falling on him when his heart was aching with love, and his body doubtless was weakened with sorrow. And it is essential, however disagreeable, to realize the nature of the shock. It matters little here whether Hamlet's age was twenty or thirty; in either case his mother was a matron of mature years. All his life he had believed in her, we may be sure, as such a son would. He had seen her not merely devoted to his father, but hanging on him like a newly-wedded bride; he has seen her following his body 'like Niobe, all tears.' And then within a month she married—'O God! a beast would have mourned longer'—and married Hamlet's uncle, a man utterly contemptible and loathsome in his eyes; married him not for reason of state; nor even out of old family affection, but in such a way that her son was forced to see in her action not only an astounding shallowness of feeling but an eruption of coarse sensuality, 'rank and gross,' speeding post-haste to its terrible delight. Is it possible to conceive an experience more desolating to a man such as we have seen Hamlet to be; and is its result anything but perfectly natural? It brings bewildered horror, then loathing, then despair of human
nature. His whole mind is poisoned.24

Again in Hamlet's own words we can notice his grief over the hasty marriage of his mother:

Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral Baked meats Did coldly furnish forth the marriage talles. Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!

Act I, scene 2

And here is proof that he regards the marriage as incest:

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent: When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed. . . .

Act III, scene 3

Since this particular fact plays such an important role in our treatment of the play, it might be well to prove the point very conclusively. That he regard his mother's marriage as incest is of great importance to our understanding of the play in the way we do understand it. Hence, we shall quote another Shakespearean scholar, Mr. Theodore Spencer:

At all events, the standard which Hamlet's soliloquy describes is not only the standard which his own lack of action so agonizingly seems to violate, it is also the standard which was violated by Gertrude in mourning so briefly for her husband, and in unnaturally yielding to her lust, so that her reason, in Hamlet's words, has become a pander to her will (her fleshy desire),

thus disgustingly reversing the natural order. Hamlet's own standards are high. "Give me that man," he says to Horatio, "That is not passion's slave, I will wear him in my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, as I do thee." And it is because he has this high standard that he is so torn apart by discovering that the traditional order in which reason should be in control of passion is only an appearance and that the reality of his mother's action proves human beings to be only beasts.\textsuperscript{25}

All this should illustrate rather conclusively that his mother's hasty marriage is the cause of so much grief in Hamlet.

The fourth assumption accepted by scholars is that "The trait which operates to cause his melancholia is a too great trust in people, a trust with an inability to maintain control when he loses the trust, or a tendency to idealize the people he loves."\textsuperscript{26} This might be expressed more precisely by saying that the cause of his melancholy is his too great esteem and confidence in the people he loves, especially his mother and Ophelia for whom he formerly had a high respect as people representing his high ideal of womanhood, motherhood, and of wifeliness.

This is evident if we consider the background of Hamlet's life, and the spirit of the age in which he lived. It is quite obvious that a person's environment and training and beliefs have an

\textsuperscript{25} Spencer, \textit{Shakespeare and the Nature of Man}, 101.

\textsuperscript{26} Hogrefe, 185.
important part in the development of the inner man. So it is here. Now, married love, womanhood, and motherhood were esteemed as sacred and inviolably bound up with the notion of religious perfection at that time. Notice, for instance, that Hamlet appeals to his mother in Act III, scene 4, on religious grounds. Notice, too, the frequent allusions to the spiritual in his soliloquies. Evidently, Hamlet values the spiritual over the natural.

Christian doctrine places the Blessed Mother far above other women. Mary is the model of all women; women are compared to her. Now, chiefly because of this doctrine, chiefly because of the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, womanhood was elevated in England in the sixteenth century. All this was the general religious spirit of Hamlet's age. Consequently, being of noble mind himself, Hamlet quite likely developed in himself this same spirit. Naturally, therefore, he so esteemed his own mother. He idealized her character, he idealized her motherhood and placed it on a very high level.

Not only womanhood, but also marriage was considered as a sacred sacrament at that time. Incest was looked upon as one of the worst immoral acts possible in that day, shocking, most disgraceful and scandalous. James I classified incest with

witchcraft, poisoning, sodomy, etc. In Scotland it was punishable by death, and so in England in 1650. Shakespeare often implies this in the play.

And Shakespeare's own view of the sanctity of marriage is revealed in other plays of his. This would seem to indicate that he directly intended that this view should play an important part in *Hamlet*. In *Julius Caesar*, for instance, Portia speaks esteem of marriage:

> My Brutus, you have some sick offense within your mind, which by the right and virtue of my place I ought to know of, and upon my knees I charm you, by my once commended beauty, by all your vows of love and that great vow which did incorporate and make us one that you unfold to me, yourself, your half. . . . Am I yourself but as it were in sort of limitation, to keep with you at meals, comfort your bed, and talk to you sometimes? Swell I but in the suburbs of your good pleasure? If it be no more, Portia is Brutus' harlot, not his wife.

**Act V, scene 1**

Also, in Desdemona we see a beautiful personification of Shakespeare's ideal of a wife. This "true and loving" wife of Othello was a "maiden never bold, of spirit so still and quiet that her motion blushed at herself." She was the sweetest innocent that ever lift up eye "and remained chaste and heavenly true," to her jealous husband. "Here I kneel if ever my will

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did trespass against his love either in discourse of thought or actual deed, ... not the world's mass of vanity could make me."

(Act IV, scene 2) Of all his characters, however, Shakespeare pays greatest tribute to married womankind in his portrayal of Catherine of Aragon in *Henry VIII*. In her he shapes his highest ideals. Thru her he expresses his highest praise.

Sir, I desire you do me right and justice;
I am a most poor woman, and a stranger,
Born out of your dominions; having here
No judge indifferent, nor no more assurance
Of equal friendship and proceeding. Alas, sir,
In what have I offended you? What cause
Hath my behaviour given to your displeasure,
That thus you should proceed to put me off,
And take your good grace from me? Heaven witness,
I've been to you a true and humble wife,
At all times to your will conformable;
Ever in fear to kindle your dislike,
Yea, subject to your countenance, glad or sorry,
As I saw it inclined. When was the hour
I ever contradicted your desire,
Or made it not mine too? Which of your friends
Have I not strove to love, although I knew
He were mine enemy? What friend of mine,
That had to him derived your anger, did I
Continue in my liking? Nay, gave not notice
He was from thence discharged? Sir, call to mind
That I have been your wife, in this obedience,
Upward of twenty years, and have been blest
With many children by you: if, in the course
And process of this time, you can report,
And prove it too, against mine honour aught,
My bond to wedlock, or my love and duty,
Against your sacred person, in God's name,
Turn me away; and let the foul'est contempt
Shut door upon me, and so give me up
To the sharpest kind of justice.

Act II, scene 4

Now let us hear what Hamlet himself says of marriage.
He bitterly complains because of his mother's disregard of her sacred vows:

Such an act that blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Call virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
As false as Dicers' oaths; 0, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face doth glow,
Yea, this solidarity and compound mass,
With trustful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.

Act III, scene 4

This is ample proof of Hamlet's high esteem of womanhood, and of marriage, and consequently of the love and respect that he had for his own mother. Moreover, the very fact that his mother's conduct caused him such extreme grief and sorrow, such anxiety and distress, is a good indication that he held her on a very high pedestal, and, judging by the depth and intensity of his grief, we can safely say his estimation of her and all she stood for was correspondingly high. The fact that one woman's misconduct could destroy his esteem of all women, as of Ophelia, seems to show that his ideals were a little too high, and his confidence in the representation of them a little too great, thus causing in him complete dejection at the shattering of these ideals. And it is his own mother who destroys these lofty ideals. Her apparent indifference to that ideal makes it still worse; and Hamlet is engulfed in bitter disillusionment.
Another assumption is that "His grief is furthered almost at once by other events: ..."29 "He learns from the ghost that same night that his suspicion had a real basis, that his father had been murdered by Claudius; and he learns that his mother had been unfaithful to his father before the latter's death."30

List, list, 0 list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love -

Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. Murder most foul, as in the best it is; But this most foul, strange and unnatural.

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast, With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts --
0 wicked wit and gifts, that have the power So to seduce! -- won to his shameful lust The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen; 0 Hamlet, what a falling-off was there! From me, whose love was of that dignity that it went hand in hand even with the vow I made to her in marriage, and to decline Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor To those of mine! But virtue, as it never will be moved, Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven, So lust, though to a radiant angel linked, Will sate itself in a celestial bed, And prey on garbage.

Act I, scene 5

The words "seeming-virtuous queen" seem to indicate


30 Ibid.
her unfaithfulness even before the King's death.

"In the period of brooding between acts I and II (perhaps six or seven months) his grief is furthered still more by other events: Ophelia refuses to see him or to answer his letters; he begins to suspect that his mother had been a party to his father's murder, since the ghost had not explicitly said."\textsuperscript{31}

No, my good lord; but, as you did command, I did repel his letters and denied His access to me.

Act II, scene 1

This, as we shall see later, causes him no little disturbance. Also, from the incident of the "Mouse-trap" play the attention is called to the conduct and response of the queen as if the question of her guilt of murder is of more concern.

"Again in act II his state of mind (his confusion) is furthered somewhat by the fact that his old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, try to spy on him."\textsuperscript{32}


Why, anything, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to color:

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 186.
I know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the King and Queen must not fail.

Act II, scene 2

All this quite naturally adds to his confusion and to his dejected state of mind. Friends spy on him; a loved one rejects him; and he has suspicions of his mother's connection in murder - all this to any normal man, already grieved because of his beloved father's death, will only add sorrow and perplexity to an already tortured mind.

A sixth assumption: "Because of his melancholy and long brooding, he wonders whether the ghost was an honest ghost or not; this wonder relates to his revenge and to his fear that his mother had a part in his father's murder, since both are connected with the evidence of the ghost."[33]

The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil; and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative than this.

Act II, scene 2

In act III, when advising Horatio, to observe his father during the play, there is evidence in his speech that he still was not

33 Ibid., 186.
sure that the ghost was real:

There is a play to-night before the King;  
One scene of it comes near the circumstance  
Which I have told thee of my father's death;  
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,  
Even with the very comment of thy soul  
Observe mine uncle: if his occulted guilt  
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,  
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,  
And my imaginations are as foul  
As Vulcan's stithy.

Act III, scene 2

The seventh assumption: "His grief, with continued  
brooding, has brought on cynicism, bitterness, melancholy,  
paralysis of will, thoughts of suicide." Various passages from  
the text, from Hamlet's own words, clarify this statement:

Ay, sir; to be honest as this world goes,  
is to be one man pick'd out of ten thousand.

Act II, scene 2

Here is a slight manifestation of his cynicism, with an undertone  
of bitterness. We see more of this bitterness in:

Denmark's a prison.  
A goodly one; in which there are many confines,  
wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one  
of the worst.

Act II, scene 2

He admits to himself that he has noticed his own lack  
of activity lately:

34 Ibid., 186.
I have of late -- but wherefore I know not --
lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of
exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily
with my disposition that this goodly frame,
the earth seems to me a sterile promontory.

Act II, scene 2

When speaking of himself, his brooding and melancholy become
apparent:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
   . . . What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with
Tears and cleave the general ear with
Horrid speech. . . .
Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? Breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie I the throat,
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Ha!
'Swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liveried and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or else this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!
O, vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion.

Act II, scene 2

And he falls even to the depths of melancholy and of brooding
despair by contemplating the thought and prospect of putting an
end to it all:

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. To die; to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep;
To sleep; perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? ...

Act III, scene 1

In his talk with Ophelia we can easily notice traits of this
same cynicism and bitterness and dejectedness:

Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell.
Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool;
For wise men know well enough what monsters you
make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too.

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough;
God has given you one face, and you make yourselves
another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and 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.

Act III, scene 1
Much more evidence of the same kind is easily noticeable in the text, especially in the very words of Hamlet himself; but sufficient has been given here to account for his grief and depression and their consequent mental maladies.

The eighth and final assumption states that, "Because his grief has changed him and especially because the basic grief concerns the loss of an intangible ideal, he does not understand himself; thus he reproaches himself for failing to act." Evidence of this is especially compelling in the closing soliloquy of act II, in which he analyzes possible causes of his inaction, recognizing objective difficulties but sinking under subjective difficulties, growing from his own grief:

... Yet I,
A dull and maddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing... .
... Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain?...
... for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liveried and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal... .
Why, what an ass am I! Sure,
This is most brave, that I, the son of
a dear father murder'd, prompted to
my revenge by heaven and hell, must,
like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
and fall a-cursing, like a very drab, a scullion!

Act II, scene 2

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These assumptions, therefore, are well-founded on the text of the play and have solid objective reality. The importance of them here is that they give us a new view of Act III, scene 4, the central scene in our discussion of the artistic unity of the play. They form, as it were, a fundament and a basis for the argument.
CHAPTER III

HIS MOTHER'S CONDUCT, THE FOCUS

OF HAMLET'S ATTENTION

Hamlet is torn between reason and emotion. His reason tells him to revenge the murder of his father; his emotion directs his attention to the behavior of his mother. There is a conflict going on in the mind of Hamlet between reason and emotion. When Hamlet is concerned with revenge, reason rules his conduct and his thoughts. But, when his attention is directed to his mother, emotion completely over-rules. And in the final analysis it seems that his emotion for his mother is predominant in Hamlet's thoughts and actions.

"His reason urges him to revenge; but his emotions plunge him into melancholy and drain from him his power of action and thought."36 This emotion and disillusionment so overpower him that he is listless and apathetic towards everything. His ideals have been shattered. All he lived for is gone. Hence, his complete lack of activity is explained; he has no inducement

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to move towards anything.

Judging from Hamlet's first soliloquy, we feel sure that he was dejected because of the suspicion he entertained of his mother's conduct. It was this suspicion that took the spirit of joy out of his life and made him miserable.

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on 't! ah fie! 't is an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature,
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead; nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a King; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the wind of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite and grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month --
Let me not think on't -- Frailty, thy name is woman! --
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears: -- why, she, even she --
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourned longer -- married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month;
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break my heart; for I must hold my tongue.

Act I, scene 2
Why does Hamlet feel that way? Why is he downcast? He tells us himself. It is because there is something about his mother's conduct that perplexes and distresses him; and that something he seems quite sure is engendered of evil.

Later he makes sardonic remarks about the hasty marriage:

I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student,
I think it was to see my mother's wedding. . . .

Indeed, my lord it followed hard upon. . . .

Thrift, thrift, Horatio. . . .

Act I, scene 2

Note now what Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch says of Hamlet's suspicions about his mother:

I have tried to illustrate, by that passage beginning 'that it should come to this. . . .', with what violence of loathing his soul is affected -- even before he suspects murder -- by his mother's fine and foul haste in mating so swiftly with her husband's brother, by the scent of lust in, nay of incest, in the union; for again and again Hamlet and the ghost insist upon the marriage as incestuous. That thought is preying on Hamlet's mind before ever he hears of the ghost.37

Evidence of the presence of the two disturbing factors, the conflict between reason and emotion, his revenge and his mother's conduct, wearing on his mind begins in act I as Hamlet speaks to the ghost of his eagerness for revenge.

Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.

Act I, scene 5

But immediately afterwards, when the ghost describes his mother's conduct, he falls silent. Here the ghost speaks at great length and in return Hamlet says nothing. It seems that he is too shocked to make any remark; it is too much for his sensitive and idealistic nature. Previously he had been suspicious of his mother's hasty marriage. The ghost now tells him of his father's murder and assures him of his mother's sin. He is anxious for the revenge, but clearly there is a conflict there directing his attention away from the revenge. He wonders about his mother. And this interview with the ghost is important, for, says Mr. L. W. Rogers:

The communication between Hamlet and the ghost is by no means trivial or casual. The whole future of the tragedy turns upon this pivotal point. Hamlet shapes his program by the information thus received. The information thus received causes in him the internal conflict between reason and emotion, between his mother and father. Hamlet acts as any normal person would under similar circumstances. His beloved father's death causes no little

38 Rogers, L. W., The Ghosts in Shakespeare, Chicago, 1925, 18.
sorrow; and he learns his father was murdered by the man he hates. Thus, revenge enters his soul. But even more intense than hate and desire for revenge is the shattering revelation that his mother has fallen from the perfection on which his youthful idealism had placed her. He is completely disillusioned and confused. He cannot understand it. He had noticed how his mother and father had loved each other. But now he discovers that she is faithless, and he is suspicious that she is even guilty, at least partially, of his father's murder. What then is there left to live for? His only other love, Ophelia, he distrusts because he has come to distrust all women, since his ideal of all women has fallen. The bitter dejection, the melancholy, the sorrow, which results makes him incapable of action.

In the mind and heart of Hamlet, dejected because of the suspected sin in his mother's hasty marriage, and filled with revenge because of his father's murder, there has come a great struggle, a struggle of loyalty and love. Grief arising from his mother's conduct diverts him from his revenge. Paralyzing emotion is gaining the ascendant. This becomes clear when he stages the "Mouse-trap" play. His energies are divided between getting the evidence of his uncle's guilt and finding out the truth about his mother; and her reaction here appears to be even more absorbing to him than that of the King. He has the play staged primarily to catch the conscience of the King, but it is
to be observed that he recasts the lines to catch not only the
King but to learn also the truth about his mother. The words he
puts into the mouth of the player show his concern with his
mother. There, too, is a conflict within the focus of his at-
tention; he is observing the King; yet he is also observant of
his mother's reactions. In many speeches he thus has emphasized
the Player Queen's vows of love and fidelity. For example, she
remarks:

In second husband let me be accursed!
None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

Act III, scene 2
This is followed by Hamlet's aside, "Wormwood, Wormwood!" After
a long speech, then, by the Player King, the Player Queen calls
curses on herself:

Both here and hence persue me lasting strife,
If, once a widow, ever I be wife!

Act III, scene 2
This, then, is followed by Hamlet's sudden remark: "If she
should break it now!" Then, after short parting speeches between
the Player King and Player Queen, Hamlet asks his mother, "Madam,
how like you this play?" The Queen answers, "The lady protests
too much, methinks." This innocent remark confuses Hamlet. The
reaction he had expected to find in his mother was not forth-
coming. He discovered here that she was indeed, either quite
innocent of any knowledge of his father's murder, or a woman of
steel, a perfect actress in complete command of her emotions. And those characteristics did not suit the Queen at all.

Up to this point the emphasis has been on the Queen, as if the question whether she is guilty of murder is even more important than the guilt of Claudius. But the sudden break in the play by the King and his angry departure turns Hamlet's attention once again to the King. The internal struggle continues.

Evidently, his concern with his mother proved so absorbing as to prevent his concentration on revenge.

If the attention is concentrated on a certain plan of action and soon after is deflected, however slightly, by some other plan of action, it follows that this other course of action has at least some little bearing of importance in estimation. By how much the more the attention is deflected by so much is the alternative of importance. Now, in this case we have seen that Hamlet's anxiety for his mother has almost completely over-ruled his intention of revenge. Consequently, it can be safely said that, since interest in his mother has not only deflected him from revenge, but has dominated his attention from the beginning, there could be nothing, not even his father's murder, so important to him as his mother's betrayal of the trust he had placed in her.

There are times, however, when the motive of revenge takes precedence and then reason has the upper hand. This is
seen in act III, scene 3, when he spares the King at prayer. Hamlet had purposely staged the play to catch the conscience of his uncle. It did not fail, for the sudden, hasty departure assured him that the King was guilty of murder. He has just assured himself that the ghost was a real ghost and was really speaking the truth: "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word a thousand pound; Didst perceive?" Hamlet was now sure: "Upon the talk of poisoning?" Soon after, though, he is told that his mother wants to see him in her closet.

In the close of act III, scene 2, when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern report that his mother wishes to see him, his feeling rises as never before as he drives toward action concerning her.

'T is now the very witching time of night, When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out Contagion to this world; Now could I drink hot blood, And do such bitter business as the day Would quake to look on. Soft! Now to my mother; O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom: Let me be cruel, not unnatural; I will speak daggers to her, but use none; My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites; How in my words so ever she be shent, To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

**Act III, scene 2**

This scene is not a chance scene, nor is the following. This scene is important because Hamlet himself has been strain- ing every nerve for it, because Hamlet considers it important him- self. He has always wanted the interview, and, now that it is
coming, he is carried off his feet. In act III, scene 2 and 3, his thoughts and actions show the agitation, the anxiety, over the Queen's guilt. Like a volcano comes the surge of emotion as he moves toward the interview with her.

He goes, but in the meantime he passes the King's room and sees him there at prayer. This is the chance he has been waiting for. Now is the hour to strike and satisfy his thirst for revenge. He draws his sword, and then halts. It is reason which tells him to do so. Reason tells him he will only be sending his uncle's soul to heaven, and that would not be revenge.

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do it. And so he goes to heaven;
And so am I revenged. That would be scanned;
A villain kills my father; and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven,
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father groosely, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him; and am I then revenged,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No!
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid bent:
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't;
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereeto it goes.

Act III, scene 3
It is the sudden return of attention to his mother that finally calls him away: "My mother stays; this physic but prolongs thy sickly days." Clearly, then feeling for his mother overpowered his hate and desire for revenge. It was reason which made him delay at this instance the revenge; but it was his mother who turned his attention completely away from the King.

And it is only after this moment of decision calmly and rationally arrived at that, anticipating the immediate interview with his mother, his feeling rises. This begins in act III, scene 2. When revenge is the concern, reason is uppermost; but, when it is his mother to whom his attention is directed, reason is overruled by feeling. Reason it was that caused him to spare the King. But in the very next scene, when emotion is in the ascendant, he suddenly rushes upon Polonius and kills him, thinking it is the King. This emotion was intense and was caused by the concern for his mother. It clearly shows the predominance of interest for Hamlet.

Finally, the best proof, it seems, for showing that his mother's conduct rules his attention comes in the very interview with her. As soon as he meets her, the flood gates of intense and pent-up emotion burst open. He rushes about almost madly, threatening to kill her, and killing Polonius. And, also, added proof is given when the ghost appears again. The ghost reminds him of his duty of revenge, but Hamlet is already too far
gone, he is too much buried in the depth of his feeling and attention for his mother.

Have we yet seen Hamlet in such a fit of emotion? Has he ever yet, when contemplating revenge, showed such intense feeling? Here his whole strength, his whole soul, his whole will, and his whole mind is centered in the meeting with his mother, in concentration upon her. Evidently, then, this has been the meeting he had been yearning for. Revenge has been completely lost in the surging current. His mother has completely absorbed his mind and heart.
CHAPTER IV

TRANSFORMATION OF CHARACTER

Thus far we have seen that the cause of Hamlet's melancholy was his mother's hasty marriage which he regarded as incestuous. Also, we have seen that concern for his mother's conduct has preoccupied almost all of his thoughts, emotions, and actions.

In this chapter the purpose is to show that the interview with his mother, act III, scene 4, is the most important incident in Hamlet's life, at least as far as the play is concerned. All along, his grief has been growing in intensity. And for a long while he has been contemplating this meeting with her, to have it out with her and thus to learn the truth about her past actions. Now the time has come; and we wish to show that because of this interview with his mother, Hamlet becomes a changed man; that his grief begins to leave him; and, that now he begins to return to a more normal state of mind and action. It is this scene that solves the difficulties and doubts of his past, and it is this scene that prepares him for a new and more peaceful future.
Hamlet's deep melancholy is caused by his suspicions of his mother's infidelity. In this scene one cause of his melancholy is removed; he is convinced that his mother has had no part in his father's murder. Another cause of his grief is modified: he learns that his mother realizes her sin with Claudius, and, best of all, that she is repentant and sorry. If we follow closely the actions and thoughts of Hamlet throughout this interview with his mother, we cannot help but notice the convictions at which he arrives, and the mental and emotional change that comes over the man.

He begins the scene giving full vent to the pent-up emotions that have been stored within him all this time. He lets go the rage of fury within. When his mother rebukes him, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended." he quickly replies, "Mother, you have my father much offended." When she asks if he remembers her, he more openly replies, "You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife," a pause, revealing the effects it had on him, "and would it were not so, you are my mother." There is real pathos in those words and real bitterness. For the Queen to do it is bad enough, but, his mother and the ideal of his life, that is far worse.

Hamlet had previously resolved to show her that he was angry with her for her sin, that he still loved her person: "I
will speak daggers to her, but use none; my tongue and soul in this be hypocrites; how in my words soever she be shent; to give them seals never, my soul, consent." Here, however, it seems that when he first encounters his mother, his emotions completely over-ruling his reason, he is ready to murder his own mother because he so loathes her betrayal of his father. Instead, he spends his rage in the hasty and rash deed of killing Polonius.

Then, when the Queen admonishes him for the act: "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!" he turns again his full attention and emotional outburst against her, driving home to her the foulness of her own connection with murder: "A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother, as kill a king, and marry with his brother."

The Queen, surprised and shocked at this remonstrance, could only respond in all simplicity and sincerity: "As kill a King!" This accusation and especially the reply are very fundamental in the scene. They are spoken to suggest the Queen's innocence. What follows manifests Hamlet's belief in her reply, in her innocence. He is so impressed by her shocked astonishment, that all doubt of her guilt vanishes on the instant. "The best argument for this view lies in the fact that Hamlet never again refers to her as being guilty of murder and that he does
change his attitude to her in this scene. But, immediately after he is satisfied of her innocence in the murder, he turns his attention to her incestuous marriage. And now again he gives full range to his passion. He upbraids his mother:

Peace, sit you down,
And let me wring your heart; for so I shall
If it be made of penetrable stuff;
If damned custom have not braz'd it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.

Act III, scene 4

The Queen wonders what she has done, and this for Hamlet is only further incentive to tell her plainly what he thinks of her conduct.

Such an act that blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Call virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there, makes marriage-vows
As false as dier's oaths; O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words! heaven's face doth glow;
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act.

He accuses her of infidelity, of violation of the marriage contract. She pretends ignorance. Then:

Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;

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An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination and form indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man;
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows:
Here is your husband; like a mildewed ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment: what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion; but sure, that sense
Is apoplexed; for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was'never so thrall'd
But it reserved some quantity of choice,
To serve such a difference. What devil was't
That thus hath oozened you at hoodman-blind?
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.
O shame! where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,
And melt in her own fire; proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason panders will.

Act III, scene 4

All the while she had pretended ignorance to any infidelity. But, finally, under the torrent of Hamlet's scathing words she admits her guilt. She shows her consciousness of guilt and her repentance in speeches like these:

0 Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

0, speak to me no more;
These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears;
No more, sweet Hamlet!

Act III, scene 4

And after the appearance and disappearance of the Ghost, she
again confesses to her inward feelings, having already begged him
to leave off.

0 Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.

What shall I do?

Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath,
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me.

Act III, scene 4

All during this confession of the Queen we can easily
notice a change coming over the mind and heart of Hamlet. His
attitude towards his mother changes completely. At this first
sign of her repentance and confession, Hamlet's violent feelings
and passions are calmed. Emotions no longer rule. From the
storm-tossed Hamlet a new man emerges, a man more like the Hamlet
we once knew him to be. He no longer bitterly admonishes his
mother, but with filial and childlike tenderness pleads with her
to change her way of life. Like a priest Hamlet has struggled
violently to win back her soul from sin, and only after a long
and arduous effort does she yield. Then, he is quick to grasp
the chance and he begs his mother, the woman, the ideal, he has loved so much, he begs her to repent and to do right in the future.

Confess yourself to heaven;
Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;
And do not spread the compost on the weeds,
To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue;
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good.

Act III, scene 4

When she says, "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain,"
he bids her quietly:

O, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night; but go not to mine uncle's bed;
Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery,
That aptly is put on. —
Once more, good night;
And when you are desirous to be blessed,
I'll blessing beg of you.

Act III, scene 4

He is very kind and loving to her. He advises her in all sincerity to "Refrain tonight, and that shall lend a kind of easiness to the next abstinence; the next more easy; for use can almost change the stamp of nature, and either master the devil or throw him out with wonderous potency." And he adds later: "so again, good night. I must be cruel, only to be kind, "somewhat,
it seems, apologizing for his anger.

Then when she asks, "What shall I do?" he is inspired by a sudden infusion of renewed love and faith. He tells her to give up her sin:

Not this, by no means, that I bid you do; 
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. 'Twere good you let him know. . .

Act III, scene 4

And the greatest proof that this interview has changed Hamlet comes in the final part of the scene. He now "trusts her; he tells her of his own free will about his plan to outwit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and thus he stakes his own life on his belief that she will be true to him."[41]

There's letters sealed, and my two school-fellows, 
Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd, 
They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way, 
And marshall me to knavery. Let it work; 
For't is the sport to have the engineer 
Hoist with his own petar; and it shall go hard 
But I will delve one yard and below the mines, 
And blow them at moon.

Act III, scene 4

Again, finally, we see another sign of a changed at-

[41] Ibid.
titude towards his mother. And what a change it is from what his attitude to her was at the outset of the interview. There it was: "Mother, you have my father much offended. Come, come, you answer with a wicked tongue." But here he has completely forgot the guilt of his mother; he has completely forgot his loathing for her; instead, he now again is a loving son of a loving mother. And he concludes the scene on this note of endearment, so gentle, so forgiving, so kind and loving: "Good night, Mother, good night, indeed."

Since his whole mind and will are centered, not in the task of avenging his father's murder, but in his mother's conduct, Hamlet is now completely relieved; and he has suddenly become a new man again. His hopes, his dreams, his ideals, once so miserably shattered, have, as it were by magic, been restored. And that magic has all come from this one interview with his mother; it has come in an understanding of her; it has come with his realization of her innocence of crime, of her repentance for her sin.

How would any normal son feel, if, loving and esteeming both his father and mother so dearly and so highly, he should suddenly lose the father to whom he was so devoted? Add to that fact that while still mourning his father's death, he discovers his much loved mother had a share in his murder, and, worse still, that she has seriously sinned, she whom he loved so much, sinned
with the man who killed his father, taking him into incestuous marriage; and to that add the character and reputation of this Claudius. What loving and sensitive son would not almost go mad if such ideals and loves were shattered in so horrible a way.

His father's death grieves him; yes; but his mother's sin does so more. Naturally, then, when he learns she is not guilty of the murder and that she is sorry for her sin, he will be relieved and feel more human again at least part of his ideals back.

It must be evident, now, that in the explanation of the whole play, this scene should be given more stress and more consideration. It remains now to show that the change resulting from this interview with his mother lasts, not only for the duration of this same scene, but for the length of the play, and that its prize result is the continued increase and growth of the gentler side of Hamlet's character.
It is the talk with his mother that cleanses Hamlet's soul of all bitterness, of grief and melancholy. It is a catharsis of his emotions, of his very life. And now, relieved of the shadow of worry and suspicion and disgust, he is slowly but surely recovering from his disease. Because of this interview with his mother, Hamlet begins immediately to rise from the depths of extreme grief and melancholy and to resume the character of a more normal man of action. A rather obvious proof of this lies in his final words with his mother in the interview. There, contrary to his past suspicion and disgust, he is telling her, the wife of the King who plotted his banishment, about his own designs to thwart the plot. Evidently, he again trusts her virtue. Evidently, too, the clarity and vigor of his plan points out a different aspect of Hamlet's character.

The emphasis here is to show that, not only is it after his brief interview with his mother that his change occurs, but especially and simply because of this talk that he undergoes a change in his emotional outlook, in his intellectual attitude, and in his active participation in life. Since his whole heart
was not in the task of seeking his father's revenge, but more with his mother, the knowledge he has gained of her causes him no little relief and renewed enthusiasm. Fr. Blackmore, of whom we have already heard, thinks much the same:

From the death of Ophelia, we naturally pass to the scene of her burial. Without interrupting the action of the drama, her funeral serves as a brief respite for the audience before the breathless onrush of the fast approaching and final catastrophe. The action is carried on by grave-diggers who by their grim humor and heartless indifference to the nature of their work, form a strong background to the scene wherein, by contact with most opposite extremes, the character of the hero is further luminously revealed. The weird humor of his philosophizing on life, the grave-diggers and their gruesome moralizing, the funeral procession and the grapple in the grave, are all contrivances which make the scene a miracle of construction. It exhibits a remarkable change in Hamlet since his return to Denmark. No longer indulging in soliloquies, nor in expressions of weariness of life, nor in self-reproachful analysis of thoughts and feelings, he abandons with one exception the role of dementia and, with the mists of melancholy slowly dissolving, discloses a new consciousness of power.42

The determination which he showed in telling the Queen of his plan to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern has already been noted. In act IV, scene 4, in his talk with the soldiers of Fortinbras, he speaks with a vigorous rhythm which

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is entirely different from that contained in his earlier soliloquies. There is self-reproach, but it is self-reproach with a difference. He acts decisively when he changes the letter on shipboard and sends his two former friends to their death, when he escapes to the pirate ship, and parleys with the pirates to take him back to Denmark.

The spirit of bitterness and cynicism vanish; nor is he given to solitude now. And, as opposed to the morbid thoughts of suicide which possessed him earlier, he now confronts death, as he handles the skull, with philosophic calm. Witness his attitude as the grave-diggers throw up skull after skull:

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! It might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'erreaches; one that would circumvent God, might it not? . . .

There's another; why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? . . .

No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither With modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it; as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?

Act V, scene 1

The symptoms of melancholy and extreme grief give place to humor and lighthearted banter when he speaks to the grave-diggers:
I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in't.

Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine.
Tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.

How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the card, or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it; the age is grown so picked, that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his knee. How long hast thou been a grave-digger?

Act V, scene 1

Also, in his interview with Osric, Hamlet shows a rather merry wit and mimicry which we had not seen before in the earlier acts:

I humbly thank you, sir. Dost thou know this waterfly? • • •

I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use; 'tis for the head. • • •

No, believe me, 'tis very cold; the wind is northerly. • • •

But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

Act V, scene 2

Again, Hamlet, who hitherto had expressed himself in terms of despair, now puts his trust in Providence.

... and that should teach us there's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will.

Why, even in that was heaven ordinant. I had my father's signet in my purse, Which was tho model of that Danish seal;
Folded the writ up in form of the other,
Subscribed in it, gave 't the impression, plac'd it safely,
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea-fight; and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.

Not a wit; we defy augury. There's a special
Providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now,
't is 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 has aught of what he leaves, what is 't to leave betimes? Let be.

Act V, scene 2

His recovery is probably incomplete; and time is needed to heal wounds so deep. Thus, the discipline of will and mind over emotion remains imperfect, for a while at least, and this is seen when he gives way to grief at the death of Ophelia. He is shocked and surprised; and the bravado of Laertes puts him "into a tow'ring passion."

Yet in the remainder of the play, acts IV and V, Hamlet has not only lost his melancholy, but he is more capable of action, and he shows vigor of mind and will. Fr. Blackmore, taking up from the death of Ophelia, speaks of Hamlet as follows:

From the death of Ophelia, we naturally pass to the scene of her burial. Without interrupting the action of the drama, . . . 43

In his talk with Horatio, before Osric brings the

43 Ibid.
challenge, both the vigor of his language and his ideas demonstrate his own belief in his capacity for action. Thus he comments to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

Why, man, they did make love to this employment; They are not near my conscience. Their defeat Doth by their own insinuation grow. 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes Between the pass and fell incensed points Of mighty opposites.

Act V, scene 2

Horatio responds by commenting, "Why, what a King is this!"

Hamlet continues:

Does this not, thinks 't thee, stand me now upon -- He that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother, Popp'd in between the election and my hopes, Thrown out his angle for my proper life And with such cozenge -- is't not perfect conscience To quit him with this arm?

Act V, scene 2

Mr. A. C. Bradley also notices a change in Hamlet.

He speaks of Hamlet after his return to Denmark and says:

In what spirit does he return? Unquestionably, I think, we can observe a certain change, though it is not great. First, we notice here and there what seems to be a consciousness of power, due probably to his success in counter-mining Claudius and blowing the courtiers to the moon, and to his vigorous action in the sea-fight. But I doubt if this sense of power is more marked than it was in the scenes following the success of the 'Murder of Gonzago.' Secondly, we nowhere find any direct expression of that weariness of life and

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that longing for death which were so marked in the first soliloquy and in the speech 'To be or not to be.' This may be a mere accident, but it must be remembered that in the fifth act we have no soliloquy. But in the earlier acts the feelings referred to do not appear merely in soliloquy, and I incline to think that Shakespeare means to show in the Hamlet of the fifth act a slight thinning of the dark cloud of melancholy, and means us to feel it tragic that this change comes so late. And, in the third place, there is a trait about which doubt is impossible, a sense in Hamlet that he is in the hands of Providence.45

Though Mr. Bradley admits only a slight thinning of the grief and melancholy, he nevertheless implies that there is a definite change in character.

As the play comes to its close we can see even more marked signs of this change in him. Pearl Hogrefe, speaking of this point of Hamlet's change of heart says:

The use of Fortinbras and Laertes as foils for Hamlet has perhaps more point when we compare them with a Hamlet who would normally be capable of action but who has been deflected from it by inner conflicts. Fortinbras acts without any special philosophy or emotion, so far as we know; Laertes acts without thought and with an emotionalism which has no moral checks.46

A final clue to his change of mind is that he has accepted the challenge to the fencing match as one who does not

45 Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1949, 143.

fear action." And in the final scene we see him capable of action, both for his mother and for his revenge. His wounding of Laertes seems deliberate. Certainly his killing of Claudius is swift and timely. He shows himself capable of energetic action in wresting the cup from the hands of Horatio and persuading him to live, to set the world right about the guilt of Claudius and to protect the good name of Hamlet. He acts also to provide for the throne: "But I do prophesy the election lights on Fortinbras; he has my dying voice." And "It is Fortinbras who emphasizes Hamlet's capacity for action in the close; and at that place in the play, in which Shakespeare usually has his characters emphasize important details."

Mr. E. E. Stoll, seems to notice this change in the character of Hamlet. Here he comments on a remark of Hamlet's.

'It will be short; the interim is mine.'
If ever resolution spoke, it was in such accents as these. If he be conscious of dereliction of duty, why in his last soliloquy did no specific instance of it, like sparing the King at prayer, occur to him.48

Each one of those seemingly minor details may, taken

47 Ibid., 194.
separately, appear insignificant and of little worth in showing Hamlet a renewed man of action again. Yet, when we consider them as taken together, and, especially when we consider them in the light of the little activity or intellectual and emotional vigor Hamlet showed throughout the first part of the play, we cannot help but be impressed by the renewed strength, vitality, and interest manifested so evidently in the Hamlet as we now see him. Clearly Hamlet is a changed man. Mr. E. E. Stoll also seems to realize the glorious flowering of the character of Hamlet here at the close. He speaks highly of him:

'Shakespeare seems to have determined,' says Mr. Bradley, 'that his hero should exhibit in his latest hour all the glorious power and all the nobility and sweetness of his nature. . . . ' Yes, both that and the rest of him -- his filial love and grief, his generosity and gallantry, his fierce energy and self-assertiveness, his scorn for evil-doers and his affectionateness for his friends. What changes in Him! -- The many sided Hamlet, yet ever himself, as, mortally wounded, he turns from the King to Laertes, to Horatio, to the Queen, to the pale and trembling Danes, and to his friends again! He curses the King to his face with still greater vehemence than behind his back, and as he bids drink, jests an embodied nemesis:

'Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damn'd Dane,
Drink off this potion! Is thy union here? Follow my mother.' He appeals to the others, to his people who love him, in parentheses, and with a waving aside of the personal matter as after his premonition:

'Had I but time, -- as this fell sergeant,
death, is strict in his arrest -- 0. I could tell you -- but let that be. 49

The cause, therefore, of this change of heart and mind in Hamlet was brought about because, and only because of his interview with his mother in Act III, scene 4. It is after this interview that the change begins to take place, and with time Hamlet progresses in his ascent from the depths of melancholy and extreme grief to the heights of lighthearted action and thought again.

49 Ibid., 27.
CHAPTER VI

A CONCLUSION, SHOWING THE ARTISTIC
UNITY OF INCIDENT

In chapter one it was stated that artistic unity is "an ordering of all the elements of a whole into a natural unity and into a singleness of impression, of thought, and of emotion." Now, the final question is, how well does the character and the play also, correspond to that definition set up as a criterion for this discussion?

From what has been said in the preceding chapters it appears it corresponds quite well. We summarize briefly. Before the play opened, Hamlet's emotional and intellectual outlook was characteristic of his noble character and background. He learns, however, of his father's murder. His reason tells him, after the appearance of the ghost, to take revenge. He also has learned of his mother's moral about-face. This plunges him into deep grief. His emotions completely over-rule his reason and this concern deflects him from the purpose of revenge. His mother's conduct

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50 Supra, 12.
occupies the center of his attention and anxiety. As the play progresses it is clear that it is this concern that directs all his actions. And as the play progresses this grief and sorrow is deepened into madness and bitterness and into despair. But the interview with his mother, act III, scene 4, provides a catharsis for Hamlet. He is relieved by the knowledge that his mother had no part in the murder of his father and by the knowledge that she is conscious and repentant of her sin of adultery. This takes a great weight off the emotional and intellectual strain, burdening the mind and heart of Hamlet, and, as a consequence, in the final scenes he returns to a man more in correspondence with the noble character we once knew him to have. Taking all this as a complete whole and maintaining that, because of his deep filial love for his mother, he is plunged into this despair by her sin, relieved by her repentance, and proceeds to an active life again, maintaining also that this flows so naturally from the character given and from the circumstances, we conclude that very definitely there is here a natural unity and that there is a singleness of impression on both the intellectual and the emotional part of man. We therefore conclude that the character of Hamlet has artistic unity.

To support this position, it might be well to have the opinion of someone else on the subject. Pearl Hogrefe again
helps us. She speaks much the same:

The outstanding new assumption is that Hamlet's melancholy lifts in III, 4, because its causes have been removed or modified; and that the lifting of his melancholy, in the interview with his mother, is the direct cause of his changed attitude to life and death and his greater capacity for action in Acts IV, and V. Another new assumption is that his two basic concerns produce in him a conflict so great that his brooding over his mother's guilt gets in the way of his revenge. These two concerns are closely integrated throughout the play; act I, where Hamlet's eager talk of revenge stops after the ghost mentions the mother's guilt, and where Hamlet is told to get revenge, to leave his mother to heaven, and to her conscience; in Act II, where Hamlet broods and reproaches himself for in-action; in Act III, where he uses the play for both concerns, spares the King, reproaches his mother, and is urged by the ghost to return to his 'almost blunted purpose.' His two concerns are also united at close, in the killing of Claudius. Thus Hamlet seems a less baffling mystery because his changes, from a normal man of action to a melancholy man of inaction, to a less melancholy man of some action, are united and explained through his talk with his mother in Act III, scene 4. The conflict between his two concerns integrates the whole struggle.51

We can go on from here and say by way of implication that taking the play as a whole and viewing each incident in this light, it seems that everything hangs together quite nicely. First of all, it seems rather clear that this view throws some light on the main difficulties in regard to the play.

We begin by saying that the cause for the delay in Hamlet's revenging his father's murder is explained if we say, as has been shown, that his concern for his mother has deflected him from the revenge, that the emotion caused by the discovery of his mother's sin has overruled the reason which directs him to the revenge. There has been a conflict between his duty of revenge and his concern for his mother. His mother's conduct occupied most of his attention; hence, the delay in the act of revenge.

Taking this view, we have an explanation of such scenes as act I, scene 3, in which Hamlet's love for Ophelia is made manifest, of the visitation of the ghost, of the presence of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, of Hamlet's words with Horatio, of Hamlet's interview with Ophelia, of the behavior of Polonius, of the "Mouse-trap" play scene and the reasons for its being staged in just such a way, and, finally, of Hamlet's failure to kill the King in act III, scene 3. This view of the play helps to explain Hamlet's thoughts and words, especially his soliloquies, as well as those speeches of both the King and Queen. It explains the wonder of the King and Queen about Hamlet's prolonged dejection in the beginning of the play, and the King's plan to banish him. All this now has meaning because of the one scene, act III, scene 4; all this has meaning because of that
one dominant impression, Hamlet's disillusioned filial love.
Moreover, in the final two acts each scene comes also to have a
definite meaning and a close connection with the whole. This is
apparent from chapter V in which we saw how in acts IV and V
Hamlet began to move towards a man more capable of action and
less capable of melancholy.

Next to the difficulty of the delay in the revenge
ranks Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia. Taking the play from
this point of view, we can say that because his ideal of all
womanhood has been so completely shattered by the sin of his own
mother, he has come therefore to distrust all women; and so he
grows into a hatred of even Ophelia, thinking that she too would
turn to wrong as his own mother has done. This is very notice­
able in his talk with her:

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner
transform honesty from what it is to a baw than
the force of honesty can translate beauty into
his likeness; this was sometime a paradox,
but now the time gives it proof.

This spirit grows on him the more he speaks with her:

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 mother had not born me;
I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with
more offences at my back 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 earth and heaven?
We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us.
Go thy ways to a nunnery.
And again he adds:

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, you lisp, and nick-name 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 nor more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.

Act III, scene 1

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch adds a helpful note to this notion of Hamlet's distrust of all women especially of Ophelia:

Hamlet loves Ophelia. But the discovery of his mother's lust drives him into a loathing perversion of mind against all women and especially towards this single maid of his choice. Even as in the recoil from Cressida's perfidy Troilus swings round upon the holiest memory of women -- 'Think! we had mothers!' -- so, in the recoil from a mother's lust, Hamlet swings round, rends the veil down from that other altar of love, scatters the sacred fire, stamps black the live coal. 52

Another, and most important scene, Hamlet's death, is explained if we consider Hamlet's disillusioned filial love as the key to the play. Shakespeare very cleverly introduced Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia early in the play, and Shakespeare was very careful also to show the close relationship between them and Hamlet. Now, it was Hamlet's care for his mother that critically persuaded him to leave the King at prayer and not to

52 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Shakespeare's Workmanship, Cambridge, 1949, 150.
kill him. It was Hamlet's towering passion that caused him to rush on Polonius and kill him. This deed, as has been shown, was caused by the release of feeling in the presence of his mother. And it was this deed that led ultimately in his discovery of her innocence of the murder; it was this act that eventually led to his own death in the end. For the killing of Polonius enraged Laertes; it brought Ophelia to suicide, and it sealed Hamlet's fate. At the King's instance, Laertes made plans for the killing of Hamlet. In act IV, scene 7, the King and Laertes are talking:

... But to the quick o' the ulcer; --
Hamlet comes back; what would you undertake,
To show yourself your father's son in deed
more than in words?

To that Laertes Responds:

To cut his throat i' the church.

But the King has a better idea:

No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize;
Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
Will you do this, keep close within your chamber.
Hamlet returned, shall know you are come home;
We'll put on those shall praise your excellence
And set a double varnish on the fame
And Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together
And wager your heads; he, being remiss,
Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword untasted, and in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.

Laertes agrees, but has a better idea still:
I will do't.
And, for that purpose, I'll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank.
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratched withal: I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that, if I call him slightly,
It may be death.

Act IV, scene 7

Ophelia's death followed by the graveyard scene only
aggravated the hatred that ultimately led to the death of all
the principals involved.

Hence, the integration of the entire play is clarified.
If we consider Act III, scene 4, as the central scene, and if we
consider Hamlet's disillusioned filial love as the central and
governing note, if we consider this as poised in conflict with
his desire for revenge, we have then an adequate explanation of
the entire play. The play, as well as the character of Hamlet,
has integration. Both have unity, artistic unity.

Finally, it seems that it can be safely conjectured
that had not Hamlet's chief concern been with his mother's con-
duct and had not his depression been dispelled in act III, scene
4, the character of Hamlet, his thoughts, and actions, and feel-
ings, might have taken an altogether different turn, as would
also the whole sequence of incidents in the entire play. It seems
safe to say, then, that the play hinges around that one scene,
the interview of Hamlet with his mother, act III, scene 4, hence having artistic unity. It seems safe to say also that the thoughts and actions of Hamlet hinge around his disillusioned love for his mother; hence, the character of Hamlet has this artistic unity. And the play becomes more united if we note that the incidents of the play depend in large part upon the actions of Hamlet.

Thus, there is in the character of Hamlet a structural unity, or organic, natural unity, i.e., all his thoughts, emotions, and actions fit together in a single unified impression. There is "the incommunicable work of the same spirit," deep filial love disillusioned and in the end regained. And, consequent upon this, there is in the play as a whole this same structural, or natural, unity, meaning in this case that all the incidents fit into a joint and compact whole. As has been noted all the incidents flow from and are closely connected with the character of Hamlet.

Thus following the definition that "Artistic unity is the ordering of all the elements of a whole into a natural unity and into a singleness of impression, of thought, and of emotion," we have attempted to show that the play Hamlet as well as the

53 Johnson, Elements of Literary Criticism, 33.
character of Hamlet both have this artistic unity. There is, finally, in Hamlet an artistic unity of character and of incident, based fundamentally upon an emotional conflict.
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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Leonard J. Langenderfer has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

August 23, 1953

Date

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Signature of Adviser