Hamlet's Therapy

By Paul A. Jorgensen

It is the purpose of this essay to call attention to an important, though doubtless secondary, objective of Hamlet's pilgrimage (like a Spenserian knight he can have more than one). This is the regaining of the sanity which he had formerly displayed as an ideal prince. Hamlet does recover; and his recovery is a part of the drama which grips us. Only thus can we fully account for the much-discussed "regeneration" of the hero in a play whose primary image is disease. And only thus can we realize the fullest meaning of his most impassioned speeches. We must view them as Hamlet's groping his way from an initial torpor and grief, through conscious anger, to a clear-sighted though troubled sanity. This groping serves as a prelude to his tragic wisdom and to his restoration as one who would have proved most royally had he been put on.

Unlike other psychological students of the play, I am not primarily concerned with the almost hopeless task of precisely diagnosing Hamlet's malady, and I am glad to agree with most critics that it is mainly pathological grief and its consequent disturbance, melancholia. My concern is a happier one, to show how he achieves what we would today call psychotherapy. My major evidence outside the play is from Renaissance treatises. Those dealing with remedies for grief and melancholia are usually, to Shakespeare's enormous credit, only partly relevant to Hamlet. The best of them, however, achieve an insight that is borne out by Freud and later students. I shall not hesitate, from too great allegiance to historical scholarship, to avail myself of a doctrine merely because it has not become outmoded. Freud's Oedipal view of Hamlet is unacceptable to most literary students; but one cannot so easily dispose of Freudian theories that are supported by the text of the play and by Renaissance psychology. What is certain is that Shakespeare achieved insights into psychotherapy which, though deriving from sixteenth-century theory, go centuries beyond the crude formulations of this theory. This he did

1A good Renaissance diagnosis is made by Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (New York, 1952), Ch. xii. More modern diagnoses will be cited later.
as a dramatist and not as a philosopher-psychologist, in which prosaic capacity he is firmly rooted in his own age.

Today we are decreasingly interested in what was formerly the big question of the play: Was Hamlet mad? The opinion of most literary scholars and psychoanalysts is that Hamlet, as he tells us, is afflicted by "sore distraction," that he occasionally suffers hysteria and mania, but that as a tragic hero he becomes sane enough to be responsible for his actions. This does not, however, rule out the temporary presence of disabling grief and melancholia, the most poignant qualities in his early soliloquies. Concerning Hamlet's mental disturbance, A. C. Bradley writes:

And if the pathologist calls his state melancholia, and even proceeds to determine its species, I see nothing to object to in that; I am grateful to him for emphasizing the fact that Hamlet's melancholy was no mere common depression of spirits; and I have no doubt that many readers of the play would understand it better if they read an account of melancholia in a work on mental diseases.²

Bradley is right. If we turn to Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" we find the following:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more intelligible when we consider that ... the same traits are met with in mourning.³

This is the Hamlet that we see at the beginning of the play and generally throughout the first three acts. But a change surely occurs, and many critics have noticed it. Bradley (p. 120) observes in the fifth act "a slight thinning of the dark cloud of melancholy." This, he thinks, may be part of a new sense of power after his dispatching of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but mainly it is a "kind of religious resignation." According to O. J. Campbell, Shakespeare "does not

²Shakespearean Tragedy (New York, 1960), p. 103. This, in general, is the opinion of scholars like J. Q. Adams, T. M. Parrott, and J. Dover Wilson.

leave his audience with the view of Hamlet as a slave to a kind of mental malady. The fatal wound in the Prince's breast restores his equilibrium and produces a brief interval of serenity.4 Robert Ornstein also attributes the improvement mainly to a last-minute confrontation of death, though he does see an improvement after the sea voyage.5 J. Q. Adams, who has made the only extensive psychological study of Hamlet's recovery, places the change in III.iv, with the appearance of the Ghost. According to Adams, the whole play breaks here:

From this time on Hamlet is increasingly better. He begins to display more interest in life, he takes on a more hopeful attitude towards the world, his thinking loses much of its morbid quality, and his confidence in human nature is in part restored. . . . In the final scenes of the play—as in the jesting with Osric, or in the friendly fencing contest with Laertes—his melancholia has almost disappeared.6

Adams' estimate of the time of Hamlet's change is convincing, for the last scenes must show Hamlet acting rationally; insight delayed to the moment of death does not occur for even so slow a thinker as Othello. But Adams has no better reason for Hamlet's recovery than that melancholia passes normally through several stages, and recovery is, in time, inevitable. Time was indeed a Renaissance explanation for some cures,7 but it was hardly a dramatic or significant one. Shakespeare worked his hero's cure into the dramatic texture of the play.

Because Renaissance psychotherapy has been inadequately studied, it may be useful to survey briefly some of the approaches. Perhaps the most favored for melancholia was a religious one. But Hamlet does not, because he is not really a guilty soul, fit the category written about by so many Elizabethan divines. Paul H. Kocher has ably differentiated between the psychologically (or physiologically) and the religiously caused melancholia.8 Hamlet, unlike Lady Macbeth

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or Claudius with his "sick soul," would not have been classified as suffering from an afflicted conscience, which often had symptoms similar to psychological melancholia.  

When divines did offer guidance for psychological melancholia, they were not particularly helpful. When it is not manifestly derivative from psychological works, their advice (as exemplified by Thomas Adams, William Perkins, and Bishop Abernethy) is to mortify the passions. If the suffering is incurable, according to Perkins, "wee must humble our selves for our unquietnesse of minde... It is Gods will that we should suffer affliction, and withall humble our selves under his mightie hand." There may be a hint of this attitude in the "religious resignation" which Hamlet has been presumed to suffer (or achieve) at the end of the play, partially in his acceptance of Heaven's will in the punishment which will follow his slaying of Polonius and more clearly in his "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow." But Hamlet's psychological recovery, while perhaps related to this, is something achieved through the mind and emotions rather than through the will. I shall, however, refer to the religious theme later in the essay.

Moral philosophers were as busy as divines in offering advice and consolation. What is more, there is abundant evidence of their prescriptions in Hamlet; so much, in fact, that one might assume that they are held up as the ideal therapists. In a valuable article, "Hamlet's Book," Hardin Craig proposes that the volume which Hamlet enters reading (II.ii.168), and which he presumably reads during his solitude, is a familiar book of consolation, a work by Girolamo Cardano translated as Cardanus Comforte (1576). Professor Craig is undoubtedly correct in writing that "belief in the therapeutic power of books was characteristic of Renaissance students. If a hero found himself stricken with grief, as Hamlet did, it was natural that he should resort to a work on consolation. Cardano wrote De consola-

11III.iv.173-175; Vii.230. All Shakespeare references are to The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare, ed. W. A. Neilson and C. J. Hill (Boston, 1942).
Craig stresses the resultant universalizing of Hamlet's plight if we view him as benefiting from this moving book, for Cardano makes it clear that most of humanity is involved in the struggle against grief, fear, and weakness. Like other moral philosophers, Cardano stresses reasonableness and, above all, fortitude, which is principally what the grieving Hamlet has to learn.

Cardano is in the tradition of Plutarch, Cicero, Seneca, Boethius, and Thomas More. These writers have perhaps too little sympathy with human weakness or with strong, uncontrolled passions. Cardano is typical of them in writing, in a passage that seems to bear suggestively on Hamlet:

As therefore to cowards and men of no virtue, the timely death of the father hath ever brought hinderance: So to noble mindes: it be occasion whereby to shew themselves as they be. Thys must also be set before our eyes, that both lyfe and death be the gyftes of God, and do evermor de pend upon his providence. Therefore whosoever reproweth lyfe or Death, doeth in sylence disalowe & complayne of the devine Judgement, because both the one and the other is meete and profitable. (fol. 45v)

A similarly stern note is heard in: “A follye I do think to comforte those that through debility of mynde do cast themselves into misery: as foule delight, and desperate revenges” (fol. 10r). Nevertheless even Cardano recognizes the occasional inadequacy of stern reason in dealing with grief: “for oftentimes, though reason conforte us, and teache us that neither mourninge, is mete, neither that there is any cause of mourning, yet the sadde mynde of it selfe can not bee merye” (fol. 15v). He must have known this from personal experience—a circumstance which lifts the Comforte above most books of consolation. Philippe de Mornay, another very wise and sensitive commentator on human misery, states what perhaps Hamlet and other students felt about the utility of the moral philosophers in dealing with mental suffering: “They pacify not the debates a man feeles in himselfe, they cure not the diseases of his minde.”

Hamlet may envy Horatio his Stoic self-sufficiency, his moderation, his ability to suffer all yet suffer nothing. He may read endlessly in the books (or book) of the philosophers. But so doing does

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not greatly help him. Much of the advice of Cardano and the other moral therapists is reproduced in the play, but it is not given the best of spokesmen. It is put into the mouths of Claudius and Gertrude. In the second scene, Hamlet is told that the death of fathers is common and natural, that to mourn excessively shows a will most incorrect to Heaven, a mind impatient. His attitude toward such reasoning is that "'tis common," probably implying that it is too much a matter of commonplace books and not enough a matter of dearly purchased experience. It is Claudius who triumphantly lays claim to successful conquest of grief, and through the very precepts of the "common" moral treatises:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
    The memory be green, and that it us befitted
    To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
    To be contracted in one brow of woe,
    Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
    That we with wisest sorrow think on him
    Together with remembrance of ourselves.

(I.ii.1-7)

Hamlet cannot so easily dispel grief and melancholia. Nor do I think Shakespeare felt it a culpable flaw in him to fail in so doing. With Brabantio in Othello, Hamlet might say: "But words are words; I never yet did hear / That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear" (I.iii.218-219); or with the grieving Leonato in Much Ado about Nothing:

    I will be flesh and blood;
    For there was never yet philosopher
    That could endure the toothache patiently.

(Vi.34-36)

Perhaps what is fundamentally wrong with the comfort books and the books of stern exhortation is that they talk at the patient. Shakespeare seems to have felt the hollowness of their encouragement and the futility of their comfort. We know from later experiences in treating melancholia that more dynamic methods, deriving from the patient's experiencing of emotion, are needed. These, moreover, would be ideally suited to drama.
Besides divines and moral philosophers, the Renaissance had many psychological writers, some of whom were also divines and some strictly physicians. But men like Timothy Bright, André du Laurens, Thomas Wright, Nicolas Coeffeteau, and Robert Burton, regardless of their area of learning, usually divide their therapy between the body and the mind. Therapy through the body was surely the least brilliant achievement of Renaissance psychology. Shakespeare ignores it in *Hamlet* (though he does not do so in *King Lear*). If Hamlet’s disease had been humoral, then bloodletting, baths, and a very complicated diet would have been indicated. Significantly, none of those trying to cure Hamlet once suggest such procedures. Hence, most of the predominantly medical treatises are of no relevance.

Hamlet’s relatives and supposed friends attempt to cure him by other strategies, most of them endorsed by the psychologists; and Shakespeare provides for his hero, in Horatio, one of the most commonly approved remedies for melancholia: a faithful friend. The friend should serve as someone to whom the sufferer can express his griefs and confide his secrets and in whom he can see the wholesomeness of sanity; a melancholy friend is dangerous. In all respects Horatio is exemplary. Hamlet sees in him a model of sanity, and Horatio is also an extraordinarily good listener. His “Ay, my lord” is his most characteristic utterance. But we do not very often witness Hamlet confiding any important emotions to Horatio. His most heartfelt unhappinesses are expressed in soliloquy. However, we should notice the degree to which Hamlet brightens up when he first sees Horatio, and even his exhilaration when he meets the two false friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The latter two, incidentally, seem to be provided by the King not only as a means of sounding out Hamlet but as a possible way to cure the youth whose antics cause him and the court so much annoyance. They come to Hamlet as therapeutic friends. Rosencrantz explains to the Prince the psychological usefulness which doubtless Claudius sees in Hamlet’s two schoolfellows: “You do surely bar the door of your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend” (III.-ii.351-353). Guildenstern, upon receiving his charge from the King,

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exclaims: "Heavens make our presence and our practices / Pleasant and helpful to him!" (II.ii.38-39). And Claudius himself clarifies (at least ostensibly) his motives to both schoolmates:

so by your companies
To draw him on to pleasure, and to gather
So much as from occasions you may glean,
Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus,
That, open'd, lies within our remedy.

(II.ii.14-18)

For Claudius is one of the principal characters in the play trying to cure Hamlet. One of his most eager remarks occurs when Polonius makes his promising, but mistaken, diagnosis: love melancholy. Claudius, hearing of a likely solution, exclaims, "O, speak of that; that do I long to hear" (II.ii.50). Hamlet's therapy, not his death, has been Claudius' attempt from the beginning, and remains so probably until Claudius becomes aware of Hamlet's murderous intent. We have seen that the King's first words to Hamlet are aimed at correcting the Prince's stubborn grief. Claudius, in fact, follows in this scene the traditional prescription for a therapist given by Robert Burton:

By all means, therefore, fair promises, good words, gentle persuasions are to be used, not to be too rigorous at first, or to insult over them, not to deride, neglect, or contemn, but rather, as Lemnius exhorteth, to pity, and by all plausible means to seek to reduce them: but if satisfaction may not be had, mild courses, promises, comfortable speeches, and good counsel, will not take place; then, as Christopherus à Vega determines, to handle them more roughly, to threaten and chide....

Thus Claudius turns from "comfortable speeches" to a rougher handling during this scene. He is at first the kindly, fatherly counselor; then the severe uncle-father. Whether or not Claudius is sincerely seeking Hamlet's recovery, others would have viewed his solicitous and expert ministrations in this light.

The "precept" technique having failed, Claudius listens eagerly, but skeptically, to Polonius' diagnosis, and then endorses another psychological remedy for melancholia: diversion, particularly in the

form of a play. This proves to be an even more disastrous failure. After the murder of Polonius, Claudius proposes on his own another of the perennial remedies, this one being sea travel:

Haply the seas and countries different
With variable objects shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
From fashion of himself.

(III.i.179-183)

Psychologists were divided about the efficacy of this therapy, since it did not really alter the patient's view of himself or others. It is very unlikely that the sea voyage makes Hamlet psychologically well. The improvement is noticeable before he leaves Denmark. But the voyage promised to be useful to Claudius, while still preserving his reputation as a kindly therapist.

The Queen is to prove, in a way she does not guess, to be instrumental in Hamlet's recovery. But in her own shallow way, she too has been trying from the outset to cure her son. Her first diagnosis is a simple and fairly sound one: "I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage" (II.ii.56-57). But upon hearing Polonius' diagnosis, she changes, perhaps without much conviction, to a new hope:

And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness. So shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours.

(III.i.38-42)

It was believed, by du Laurens among others, that a victim of love melancholy could be improved by the possession of the love object. But Hamlet promptly relieves both Claudius and Gertrude of any hope on this score.

17Recommended by Burton, p. 482; Coeffeteau, pp. 343-345.
19André du Laurens, A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight (London, 1599), p. 121. Burton, p. 798, calls this the "last refuge and surest remedy."
The play becomes more considerably a study in psychotherapy if we recognize that most of the principal characters—Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—are engaged in the frustrating business of trying to diagnose and cure Hamlet's malady. But he is not a pipe for all fingers to play upon. The source of his grief, like the grief itself, passes show. Above all, he illustrates what seems to have been Shakespeare's attitude to psychotherapy from without. One of the most poignant and lasting questions in Shakespeare is Macbeth's "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd . . . ?" (Viv.40). And the doctor's answer points the way toward what truly occurs in Hamlet: "Therein the patient / Must minister to himself:" Hamlet recovers as a tragic hero and not merely as a mental patient. He achieves a new wisdom and self-knowledge; and this, I believe, is through the very modern, but also Renaissance, process of bringing to awareness his deepest feelings.

What is it in Hamlet's extremely complex nature that must come to the surface of consciousness? Many readers have noticed with dismay a ferocious quality in the gentle, meditative Prince. His treatment of Ophelia, if we are inclined to an ideal picture, approaches motiveless cruelty. Bradley came close to the truth when he observed Hamlet's "almost savage irritability" (pp. 105-106). This anger is not, obviously, the fact about himself that Hamlet most clearly recognizes in the first part of the play. It is, however, not unnoticed by Hamlet's keenest and most interested observer, Claudius. Near the midpoint of the play, the King perceives what I think the Renaissance would have recognized as the underlying source of Hamlet's melancholia. He calls it a "danger," but he is referring to the latent, grimly angry quality in Hamlet:

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. . . .

(III.i.172-175)

It is "the hatch and the disclose" of Hamlet's anger which gives mounting drama to the play even as it gives the sick Prince health.

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It is fully recognized by Hamlet himself late in the play when he warns Laertes:

Sir, though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear.

(Vi.284-286)

Melancholia is today recognized as often due to repressed rage. The anger, instead of being turned outward, is turned upon oneself, with resultant dejection, apathy, and self-reviling. This is the message of Dr. Karl Menninger's *Man against Himself* (1938). It was also so interpreted by Freud: "The self-tormenting in melancholia . . . signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in the obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self" (p. 251).

Objections to a Freudian interpretation of Shakespeare are often made on the grounds that it is anachronistic. We have here, however, a Freudian interpretation that was almost a Renaissance commonplace, with the one exception that Renaissance psychology did not construct a systematic theory based upon the unconscious. The system came much later, but the theory itself was both expounded by psychologists and depended upon for the correct interpretation of literary character.

The Renaissance recognized the inevitable relationship of passions, as it did of complexions. Joy may, as Miss Campbell has pointed out (p. 115), be the emotion commonly linked with grief. Such a connection was, however, one of the most obvious and least sophisticated observations made by Renaissance psychology. It was a far more brilliant observation to see that grief (with its resultant sorrow or melancholia) was inseparably linked with anger. Writing of pathological sorrow, Jean François Senault states:

Choler is of the same condition; though she make so much noise, she draws all her force from the Passions which compose her; and she appears not to be courageous, save only that she is well accompanied; she is never raised in our souls uncalled by Sorrow; she endeavors not satisfaction for injuries done unto her, unless sollicited by Desire, provoked by Hope, and encouraged by Audacity; for he that is irritated, promiseth himself
revenge of his enemy; but when he is so weak, as he cannot hope for it, his Choler turns to Sadnesse. . . .

The theory of the unconscious is here, but imperfect; for the false assumption is made that only fear of reprisal keeps one from venting anger and thus avoiding sorrow. A similar linking of choler and grief occurs in an earlier work, Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions*: "we must remember that *Choler* is also full of griefe and bitternesse, for that it propounds the injury received, the which shee cannot easily diggest . . ." (p. 559). And it occurs in Burton: "Anger, a perturbation, which carries the spirits outwards, preparing the body to melancholy, and madness itself" (p. 233). The connection between the two emotions goes back, however, not only to Shakespeare's time (e.g., Timothy Bright) but even to the classical period. In fact, one of the sources in which Shakespeare was most likely to have read of suppressed anger turning into sorrow or grief is Plutarch's life of Coriolanus. Martius alone, Plutarch writes, showed no outward anger at his banishment.

Not that he did patiently bear and temper his good hap, in respect of any reason he had, or by his quiet condition: but because he was so carried away with the vehemency of anger, and desire of revenge, that he had no sense nor feeling of the hard estate he was in, which the common people judge not to be sorrow, although it is the very same. For when sorrow (as you would say) is set afire, then it is converted into spite or malice. . . .

The important adjunct of suppressed anger turning into grief is that, as Freud has noticed, the individualpunishes himself. This tendency of grief to be self-punishing was noticed by Coeffeteau in 1621, though with inadequate emphasis upon the role of anger: "the soule helpes to afflicte herselue, whether that melancholy workes this effect, or that the continuall afflictions oppresse her in such sort, as she doth nothing but sigh under the burthen of sorrow . . ." (p. 327). Shakespeare seems to have recognized more clearly than did psychologists the necessity for a choice between punishing oneself and punishing the real (external) source of grief. *Hamlet* affords the

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most sustained dramatic evidence of his awareness, but in other works the message is made more explicitly.

In *Much Ado about Nothing* Antonio tries to comfort his brother, Leonato, not only by hortatory words (as we have already noticed) but by more dynamic psychological advice. He warns him of the danger and foolishness of self-recrimination:

If you go on thus, you will kill yourself;  
And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief  
Against yourself.  

(Vi.1-3)

And he offers the sensible therapeutic advice: "Yet bend not all the harm upon yourself; / Make those that do offend you suffer too (Vi.39-40).

A more sustained example of Shakespeare's depiction of paralytic grief slowly exposing the anger beneath occurs in *The Rape of Lucrece*. When Collatinus learns of the rape of his wife, he first exemplifies, as though in a speaking picture, the spectacle of one's grief raging, mutely, against oneself. Collatinus struggles, with at first only partial success, "to blow / The grief away that stops his answer so":

Lo, here, the hopeless merchant of this loss,  
With head declin'd, and voice damm'd up with woe,  
With sad set eyes, and wretched arms across,  
From lips new waxen pale begins to blow  
The grief away that stops his answer so:  
But, wretched as he is, he strives in vain;  
What he breathes out his breath drinks up again.

As through an arch the violent roaring tide  
Outruns the eye that doth behold his haste,  
Yet in the eddy boundeth in his pride  
Back to the strait that forc'd him on so fast;  
In rage sent out, recall'd in rage, being past:  
Even so his sighs, his sorrows, make a saw,  
To push grief on and back the same grief draw.

(ll. 1660-73)

This is a fairly close approximation to the grief-stricken Hamlet of the first soliloquy, turning most of his anger upon himself. These two stanzas reveal that catatonic grief is far from a passionless state.
Then, in *Lucrece*, Brutus makes perfectly explicit, in advising his friend, that the anger should be turned outward:

> Why, Collatine, is woe the cure for woe?  
> Do wounds help wounds, or grief help grievous deeds?  
> Is it revenge to give thyself a blow  
> For his foul act by whom thy fair wife bleeds?  
> Such childish humour from weak minds proceeds;  
> Thy wretched wife mistook the matter so,  
> To slay herself, that should have slain her foe.

(II. 1821-27)

Shakespeare was not alone among creative writers in recognizing this harsh truth. A comparable episode occurs in Sidney’s *Arcadia*. Amphialus, reacting to grief first with “a deepe sigh... seemed even to condemn him selfe, as though indeed his reproches were true. But howsoever the dulnes of Melancholy would have languishingly yeelded thereunto, his Courage (unused to such injuries) desired help of Anger...”

The obvious therapy for melancholia, then, is to convert grief to its real, but disguised, source: anger. The psychologist Timothy Bright cautiously prescribes this remedy, though only after first recommending that the patient try reason, divinity, and avoidance of disturbances (Bright became a divine after a career in medicine):

And if no other perswasion will serve a vehement passion, of another sort is to be kindled, that may withdrawe that vain and foolish sorowe into some other extremity, as of anger. . . For although they both breed a dislike, yet that proceedeth of other cause, rebateth the force of it which first gave occasion, and as one pinne is driven out with another, so the later may expell the former..."25

This is, except for the caution, the advice of Malcolm to the stunned Macduff. Like Hamlet, Macduff is first stricken by his own unworthiness rather than anger toward Macbeth. He refers to him-


24This is suggested, but without application to *Hamlet*, by Ruth Leila Anderson in her pioneering study, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays* (Iowa City, 1927), p. 91. Laertes is effectively cited by Miss Campbell (p. 115) as a youth who successfully converts his grief to anger.

self as "sinful Macduff" (IV.iii.224). Malcolm tries to persuade the thane to break out of his torpor and express his real grievance—first of all merely to "give sorrow words." Then Malcolm speaks the lines that represent the outstanding insight of Renaissance psychotherapy: "Be this the whetstone of your sword; let grief / Convert to anger; blunt not the heart, enrage it" (IV.iii.228-229). Changing from the blunted to the enraged heart, and converting grief to anger—these represent the progress of Hamlet from self-reviling muteness to the consciously and accurately enraged Hamlet of the last scenes. To recount this progress would be to tell the play; I can here point only to a few crucial speeches and episodes.

When we first see Hamlet, he is almost catatonic in his melancholia. We learn from him that he sighs and weeps (recommended, yet superficial, ways of relieving grief), but he speaks almost not at all to other people. His hostility to his parents is expressed only obliquely, sometimes in asides and in ironic and punning comments. Irony is of course a disciplined, intellectual rather than emotional, form of expressing anger. It does not ease the heart; and Hamlet later in the second scene, at the end of his first soliloquy, seems to apprehend an important fact about his grief: "It is not, nor it cannot come to good. / But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (I.ii.158-159). The body of the soliloquy does outwardly direct some anger—toward his mother's behavior—but it is spoken only to himself. In speaking to his mother, he is coldly courteous. The tone of the soliloquy and its principal direction point to self-punishment. It is not his mother whom he wishes to destroy but himself:

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!

(I.ii.129-132)

In Hamlet's second soliloquy (II.ii.575-634) the anger is much more evident. In fact, the soliloquy is his most ranting one. He is beginning to feel, though not to express to others, the fullness of his anger: "Bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecher-

Later he is to resort to the "antic disposition," which permits him freedom to insult others. I suspect that the need for expressing anger, and not hysteria or caginess, is the real reason for the antic disposition.
ous, kindless villain!” Significantly, however, almost all of the abusive language of the speech is still directed against himself. He is “a rogue and peasant slave,” “a dull and muddy-mettled rascal,” “an ass.” But he is much more alive than he was in the dull grief of the first soliloquy. He may be angry mainly with himself, but he is at least consciously trying to whip himself into a perception of the emotion that underlies his melancholia. Anger, though misdirected, has come very much to the surface.

In Hamlet’s progress from grief to anger, the “To be, or not to be” soliloquy (III.i.56-88) is crucial. After it is spoken, Hamlet seems capable of venting his anger upon Ophelia, though only indirectly upon Claudius (who overhears the veiled threats but is not, strictly speaking, addressed as an enemy). The soliloquy is usually interpreted as a contemplation of suicide. It is certainly, but not totally, that. Hamlet is still more grieved than angered, more intent upon punishing himself than upon punishing others. But we should observe that the second line of the speech turns to a subject somewhat different from the more famous first line:

> 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.

“Suffer,” or “bear,” as opposed to “take arms,” becomes the key word of the rest of the soliloquy. Indeed, the speech is thoroughly meaningful only if we take it to express Hamlet’s growing awareness that his one hope (Heaven is not yet seen as “ordinant”) is to change from passiveness to angry activity. It is a debate, not simply whether to be or not to be, but whether to “bear” or to do. “For who would bear the whips and scorns of time . . . ?” “Who would fardels bear . . . ?” Only fear of the future “makes us rather bear those ills we have.” Significantly, much of the grievance is directed outward: against the oppressor, the proud man, unrequited love, the law, the insolence of office, and the suffering of the patient man. From this point onward Hamlet is much less patient. His “danger” is becoming overt. Within a few lines he is lashing against Ophelia and women, and we thereby are becoming aware, as is Hamlet himself, of where his true hostility lies.
The anger is against his mother, though it is first misdirected against Ophelia and all women. By the end of III.ii, Hamlet is no longer a victim of melancholia, precisely because he has turned the frightening force of his hatred upon the one person who has most cruelly betrayed him and his father. Here, incidentally, one must radically depart from the Oedipal theory. To assume that the Prince resents his father, one must disregard not only Renaissance psychology but the most emotional passages of the play. Perhaps for this reason the psychoanalytical critics, including Ernest Jones (the best of them), are indifferent to Hamlet's recovery from mental distress. One can account for this recovery only through the content of the emotional speeches and their change of hostile direction from Hamlet to his mother. The elder Hamlet never, even after Hamlet's hostility has come to full consciousness, is spoken of unlovingly.

"Now could I drink hot blood" (III.ii.408). In this passionate declaration Hamlet is still speaking only to himself, but there is no doubt of the completeness with which he has transferred his loathing from himself to his mother. He could now, if it were not for being unnatural, become like Nero. When we next see him with his mother, in the great closet scene (III.iv), he speaks no longer to himself but to her. The scene is dramatically, perhaps, the most successful in the play. Except for the soliloquies, it contains Hamlet's most heartfelt lines. In fact, it is the only scene in the play in which Hamlet talking to others is as impressive as Hamlet talking to himself. It is this, I believe, because it is essentially dealing with the same theme as the soliloquies: Hamlet's anger. But it is less subtle and interesting than the soliloquies because the anger is not so painfully disguised.

Even here, however, Hamlet must—for the last time—struggle against his impulse to suppress his true feelings. The struggle is now a brief one and occurs only because the Ghost appears and warns him to comfort his mother. The Ghost, who (very much like the early Hamlet) has "a countenance more in sorrow than in anger," does not share Hamlet's murderous hatred of his mother; indeed, it is partially the Ghost's command that has kept Hamlet from more promptly converting his grief to anger. The Ghost now looks at Hamlet in a way almost to redirect his emotion to tears rather than anger:
Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects; then what I have to do
Will want true colour, tears perchance for blood.

(III.iv.127-130)

The hesitancy, however, does not last. Hamlet does not kill his mother, but he speaks to her with “words like daggers” and with brutal, sexually specific candor. By the end of IV.iv, there is no question as to his commitment: “O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth” (IV.iv.65-66).

The importance to Hamlet of the closet scene has been recognized by John E. Hankins, who calls the scourging of Gertrude almost a “conversion” for the Prince:

Nowhere after this scene does Hamlet show the same bitterness that he had earlier expressed. Even in his subsequent resolve to kill the King, he seems animated by a desire for justice rather than by vengeful hatred. . . . The emotional catharsis of his experience has given him a certain serenity of spirit which he has not felt at any earlier time in the play.27

But Hamlet does not (occasion does not permit it) entirely lose his anger; and one may well ask what effect such an emotion would have upon a final Renaissance estimate of the hero. Although anger was a dangerous passion, it had its defenders, particularly those who recognized that there was no such state as a lack of passion, and that if a cause for anger existed, it was hazardous and foolish to suppress the emotion. Pierre Charron writes, typically, of the danger of “smothering” choler:

There are some that smother their choler within, to the end it breake not forth, and that they may seeme wise and moderate; but they fret themselves inwardly, and offer themselves a greater violence than the matter is worth. It is better to chide a little, and to vent the fire, to the end it be not ever-ardent and painfull within. . . . All diseases that appeare openly are the lighter, and then are most dangerous when they rest hidden with a counterfet health.28

27The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays (Chapel Hill, 1941), pp. 51-52.

28Of Wisdome, trans. S. Lennard (London, 1625), p. 564. Moreover, the irascible power was generally considered to be more desirable than the concupiscible (including grief). See Coeffeteau, pp. 28-29.
The quotation is an apposite one, for the central image in the play is the opening of a hidden disease. Montaigne speaks to much the same effect, and with his refreshing and prophetic good sense:

I would rather persuade a man, though somewhat out of season, to give his boy a wherret on the ear, then to dissemble this wise, stern or severe countenance, to vex and fret his mind. And I would rather make show of my passions, then smother them to my cost: which being vented and expressed, become more languishing and weak: Better it is to let its point work outwardly, then bend it against ourselves.29

There may also be present in *Hamlet* an endorsement of what Hiram Haydn has called the "ireful virtues" as opposed to the Stoic virtues in the movement which he proposes under the name of the Counter-Renaissance.30 Certainly in all of Shakespeare's four major tragedies there are extended, and usually persuasive, passages defending an aggressive rather than passive confronting of grief. In *King Lear*, which alone we have not considered, the King spends much effort in deciding between patience (involving grief and tears) and wrathful revenge. It does not matter to the rightness of his conclusion that he is actually unable to take revenge:

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,  
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!  
If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts  
Against their father, fool me not so much  
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,  
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,  
Stain my man's cheeks!

(II.iv.275-281)

Shakespeare, unlike the moral Spenser of Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, did not decisively condemn noble anger.31

Are we, after all, to assume that the intolerable suffering of a tragic hero is better than the display of anger? Is anger against oneself really better than anger against others? If we so conclude, we


31Anger is of course not the solution to Lear's mental suffering. He is not a melancholic. The Alcibiades episode in *Timon of Athens* (III.v) also vindicates anger as opposed to "bearing."
must condemn Hamlet and his final, healthy self in a world worthy of anger. Hamlet in the last scene is angry, furiously angry. The good nature and fairness he has shown to Laertes and the King is mightily abused, and he reacts with anger no longer toward himself but toward the aggressors.

He does, however, show intermittently what Hankins rightly calls "a certain serenity of spirit." And because the religious motif is so strong in the final scene, one hesitates to ascribe his serenity primarily to psychological recovery. Critics have written at length about the "regeneration" of Hamlet, and by this they mean his spiritual, not his psychological, well-being. Perhaps the two are not so disparate as we make them today, notably in literary criticism. Perhaps the only kind of religious acceptance that counts dramatically is that achieved with a clear mind. A Hamlet destroyed during the depths of his melancholia would scarcely be a tragic hero. We should also not forget that only the last scene shows a religiously serene Hamlet. His psychological recovery has occurred safely before this time.

But I do not wish to arouse the anger of the religious critics (many of whom would do well to sample the efforts of Elizabethan divines to treat melancholia). All that I seek to achieve in this essay is a renewed respect for the psychological view of Hamlet, without in any way minimizing the importance of a religious view, here and in much great tragedy. The psychological view, particularly if the sufferer achieves new insight, can lead to emotions comparable to those claimed by the religious view. Man can, after all, win his tragic way to wisdom not merely through resignation to God's will, but also through self-knowledge, through understanding his own hidden thoughts and feelings. Hamlet, at once the most religious and most intelligent of Shakespeare's heroes, does both.

32The strongest interpretation is that of J. A. Bryant, Jr., Hippolyta's View. Some Christian Aspects of Shakespeare's Plays (Lexington, 1960), Ch. viii. See also the stimulating, but more moderate, criticism by Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy (New York, 1960), Ch. iv; also Paul N. Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise (New York, 1957), Ch. vii. The earlier scholarship on the subject is helpfully analyzed by S. E. Johnson, "The Regeneration of Hamlet," Shakespeare Quarterly, III (1952), 187-207.

33I try to bring the two together in my article "Hamlet and the Restless Renaissance," Shakespearean Essays (Knoxville, Tenn., 1964). Therein, in fact, I argue that a goodly part of Hamlet's self-deprecation has a religious (as well as psychological) basis.