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# HAMLET—THE COUP THAT FAILED \*

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“Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim milk masquerades as cream,  
High-lows pass as patent leathers,  
Jackdaws strut in peacock’s feathers-

Very true, so they do.

All that glitters is not gold,  
Black sheep dwell in every fold . . .”

W.S. Gilbert

From: *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878)

The land of Shakespeare was also the country of those gifted musical political satirists, Gilbert and Sullivan. Their penetrating observations and delightful way of poking fun at the hypocrisies, dishonesties, and misuses of power in political process, provided delicious entertainment, and perhaps offered a safety valve for some of the disillusioned. Gilbert and Sullivan grasped something essential about personality.

I propose that Hamlet, the play, seemingly centered on revenge, offers as a major problem for insight not psychodynamics, but diagnosis; not symptoms, but character; not past, but process; not declared intent, but veiled intent. Whether Hamlet, the man, is a black sheep—as I believe—or a white sheep in a black fold—as some believe (Lidz 1972, Friedman and Jones 1970)—or a black sheep in a black fold, or a wolf in sheep’s clothing, or a rogue in priest’s garb (but most certainly not the self-avowed peasant slave), or whether pretending to, or really wearing a hair shirt: he was most

\*Presented at the meeting of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, Beverly Hills, California, May, 1975.

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*J. Amer. Acad. Psychoanalysis*, 3(4): 383-403  
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Shainess, N., 1975: Hamlet - the coup that failed, In: *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, New York Vol. 3 (No. 4, 1975), pp. 383-403.

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decidedly *not* what most scholars and psychoanalysts have declared him to be a “nobel” prince.

Turgenev (1930), considering both Hamlet and Don Quixote, pointed out that while the Don’s outer appearance is ugly and laughable, Cervantes’ hero has faith, and love of the ideal: for it, he is willing to endure all privations, submit to any humiliation, surrender life itself. Hamlet, on the other hand, is attractive, graceful, pleases and seduces us. Yet to Turgenev, he is “scepticism personified.” He lives only to himself; he is an egoist preoccupied with his own personality, pondering its strategic situation, not its duties and obligations.

Kurt Eissler (1971) brilliantly observed that the play is like a dream in which there is a gap between the manifest and latent content. Before proceeding further, let me offer a summary of the play, asking that you keep the word “conscience” in mind.

A young prince (who calls to mind storybook tales of knights in shining armor) is called back to the realm because of his mother’s remarriage and the change in the monarchy. He bares his soul, initially, only to his friend Horatio, and to the audience. *He is tormented*. His father has been killed by his own brother, who then married his mother. She in turn has, in unseemly haste, “posted to incestuous sheets” committing incest and adultery. *Griefstricken, Hamlet sees his father’s ghost*, which apparently haunts Elsinore Castle. The ghost begs his son to avenge his death. A life for a life, Hamlet feels. Initially, the ghost requests that no harm be done to his faithless wife. She is to become the pivotal point in all of Hamlet’s agonizing, for her faithlessness renews, in the thinking of so many psychoanalysts (Freud 1900, Jones 1949), Hamlet’s oedipal conflict, by reminding him once again that someone else, not he, has possessed her sexually. Can he—and when will he—bring himself to do his father’s bidding? This is the remaining substance of the play. Of course, some further details remain: he is said to be in love with Ophelia, who is warned against him by both her brother and her wind-bag father, Polonius, chief councillor of the new royal family. In Hamlet’s determination to prove the murder of his father and the guilt of the new king, he arranges for the king, and all the court, to watch a play of similar theme, “The Murder of Gonzago,” which he terms a “mouse-trap,” inserting deftly some of his own lines, so that “the play’s the thing wherein to catch the conscience of the king.” Thereafter follow impassioned speeches and soliloquies, odd events and, finally, murders. Hamlet seems to delay killing the king, but finally does more than

called for. *Denmark can be described as fallen—the royal family is gone.*

Here is another version of the story:

A prince (an only child) tells others that his uncle has killed his father and hastily married the Queen, his mother. She is apparently a lascivious old girl, even at age 47, and could not wait to get into bed with his uncle, the murderer; or probably was having an affair with him even before. *He is enraged*. He seems to have an inner pipeline to all this, although he has not been at court, and apparently did not return for the funeral of his long sick old father, whom he allegedly loves so dearly, and who was said to have been bitten by a snake. Although he never states as much, he, the heir to the throne, has lost it through Gertrude’s remarriage only two months later. He is 30 years old and, unless some very unusual event occurs, he will probably not gain access to the throne for at least twenty years. “The time is out of joint” for him. How “weary, stale, flat and unprofitable” the prospect is. *He ponders all this* And then, *his noble father’s ghost appears, urging him to avenge his death*. The new king has become his enemy, and he thinks about revenge, rather than about how he—with no immediate prospect of gaining the throne—will spend his life as a prince. After all, what has he prepared himself for? *He is maddened*. He thinks, he prances, he soliloquizes, he schemes, he plots, he accuses everyone including himself; he is concerned about the conscience of everyone but himself. He uses foul language; he spills his venom on the innocent girl he has taken notice of—or rather, who has taken notice of him—and on his mother, and on all women. The alleys of his mind are filled with whores, drabs, scullions, painted ladies, traps, tricks. Of love—be it Agape, or Eros—there is no sign; of relationship, no sign: he is an alienated man. He alleges the king is guilty of murder to gain the throne: he will trap him, trap the king’s conscience, so that all will know his guilt, by having a play on the theme of kingly fratricide enacted, adding to the original text to increase its effect. On king, or audience, one might ask? How will the court recognize the king’s guilt? The king will blanch—a dubious proof. But if he persuades the court of the king’s guilt of murder, of his being a usurper, and of his mother’s guilt of incest and adultery, the throne will be his. The plot fails; he turns more determinedly to thoughts of murderous revenge. Yet he does not seize the opportunity to kill the king at prayer—in private. After all, not properly staged, will his story be believed? Will they perhaps accuse him of murder? Will he be (in his own

words) plausible (plausible)? Finally, with time running out, he kills not one but many --“overkill” as it were, including, indirectly, himself. His mother, broken-hearted, her world destroyed, knowingly drinks poison. *Denmark can be described as fallen, the royal family is gone.* (Compare the italicized phrases of the two versions.)

In thinking about Hamlet, it is useful to keep in mind a sonnet-like statement by Lorenzo, in *The Merchant of Venice*, used to the point by Charles Aring (1967) when writing about “Perception as a Moral Test”:

“The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not mov'd by concord of sweet sound,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;  
The actions of his spirit are dull as night,  
And his affections dark as Erebus.  
Let no such man be trusted.”

I have searched for strains of music in Hamlet. I found none. With these words, Shakespeare himself has revealed his intent about Hamlet.

Such a Tower of Babel exists over Hamlet among Shakespeare scholars and psychoanalysts, that it takes either courage or gall to offer something further. Perhaps additionally, passion. My fascination with “plucking out Hamlet’s Myserie,” with discovering what it was that was “rotten in the State of Denmark,” resulted from the fact that with each exposure to the play, I seemed to develop an intellectual diplopia—a blurred double vision which refused to fuse into a single clear image. Nicol Williamson’s version of the play was incendiary--it made the problem a burning one. Hamlet forced me, like an ophthalmologist doing a refraction, to try first one lens and then another, endlessly. The symptom is maddening, the search for relief exciting but difficult.

I insist that That Great Traveler, who has sat for four centuries in “that bourne from which no man returns” must have split his sides laughing at us, for these many years. We have all been gulled. It seems to have occurred to few that “things are seldom what they seem.” For Hamlet to have promised the Ghost--were he supernatural apparition, fantasy, hallucination, or trickster employed by Hamlet, that he would avenge his father’s death, is one thing. But for him to have a mind filled with sewage, to be equipped with the linguistic capacity to ridicule, prick, tear at others’ psyches, incite guilt, outdo a longshoreman in the use of vulgarities, attack women—all women--so venomously: this could

not be promised or offered--this had to exist in the person; it is the expression of a special style; it had to be selectively developed. We are what we say; we become what we do; we learn what we have paid attention to.

Hamlet uses--and misuses--everyone, including the father he supposedly loves. When he first addresses the ghost, there is no joy, no happiness at seeing his father again--not even astonishment. He questions, rather, the reasons for the ghost’s appearance, and then asks what he *wants*. Is this the response of a man grieving for a dead father? One whose death he decides to avenge? At this point I offer some definitions: the difference between the verb *avenge*--to punish on behalf of another person, and *revenge*--to inflict harm through personal anger and resentment, is clearly revealed by Hamlet’s tactics. Hamlet, you see, is an imposter. Helene Deutsch (1955) has defined the imposter as “one who endeavors to eliminate the friction between his pathologically exaggerated ego-ideal and the other, devaluated guilt-laden part of his ego . . . he desperately tries . . . to enforce it upon the world.”

William Needles (1965), in discussing “Exploitation of the Sense of Guilt,” points out that influences brought to bear upon a child in the very earliest years can establish a sense of guilt. In some, this leads later on to the development of an exploitative orientation--to make use of others dishonorably for one’s gain. He points to Lady Macbeth’s use of exploitation in her inciting guilt to prod her husband to murder Duncan. Strange that he did not turn to Hamlet, where examples abound. Needles adds that in our time of “moral bankruptcy” there are many individuals without any sense of guilt. Recent events around the Presidency and Watergate testify to this. One could say the actors of that drama were “neither mad nor feigning madness”--and yet, how mad they were! Hamlet had a long head start. Far from a study in conflict between ego and superego, or of repression, the problem of Hamlet is that his superego is nonexistent or vestigial.

He does indeed, carry within him “the stamp of one defect” (notice his superb observation about others!)--it is his lack of conscience. From this defect, all his cognitive processes flow. Notice the repeated emphasis on “conscience” throughout the play. Hamlet is constantly preoccupied with it, but generally complaining about its lack--in others. “The play’s the thing wherein to trap the conscience of the king.” Or, of Gertrude; “a conscience so blinded and inured to sin.” His statement, “For

conscience doth make cowards of us all," as an explanation to his delay in murdering the king, is generally misunderstood, for he denies the possibility of an internalized morality. Alas, this is a common theme today and part of a Skinnerian view of life—a lack of "will to be human" (to borrow the title from Arieti's fine book). The emphasis is on "cowards" (a derogating word), suggesting that we are afraid to act are cowards because someone may be watching, we might be caught. Should you doubt this, ask why he does not assert "conscience makes *heroes* of us all"? In commenting on "the play within a play," termed by him a "mouse-trap," he says: "That's villainous, and shows a pitiful lack of conscience." He perpetually incites guilt, or assumptions of guilt, in others. "He that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother . . . . . is't not perfect conscience to quit him with this arm?" Yet with all this concern about conscience, he kills Polonius, and turns instantly to his mother to jab at her again with his barbed tongue. There is no attention of his own act of murder.

What of the theme of revenge which Hamlet claims is put upon him, but to which he addresses himself so zealously? Horney (1948), in "The Value of Vindictiveness," observes that "vindictiveness can become a character trait . . . an attitude toward life; it can become a way of life . . . and as strongly compulsive as the neurotic need for affection. Its aims are manifold but include the need to humiliate, to exploit, to frustrate, to kill joy, tease, and disappoint. It is sadistic, focusing on the satisfaction gained from the power to subject others to pain or indignity." She adds, "the untrained observer sometimes finds it hard to believe that the vindictive person is unaware of what he perpetrates on others," implying that he is unaware. "Mad or feigning madness?" Here is part of the answer. Yes and no. Hamlet knows what he is doing, and yet he doesn't. As Horney states, "The vindictive person is as inaccessible as anybody who is in the grip of a blind passion." She points to the magnitude of the hostility, and its relentlessness, acknowledging that its deep source may be a sense of hopelessness about life. This may have been a substrate to Hamlet's feelings from infancy, but the loss of the throne has renewed it temporarily. "How stale, weary, flat and unprofitable" he declares his life. It is he has made it so. Horney also suggests that vindictiveness serves to restore injured pride, and to cope with an engulfing sense of helplessness.

This calls to mind Hamlet's most famous—and least under-

stood—soliloquy, where Shakespeare's great gift for ambiguity is masterfully expressed:

"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, . . . ."

To be or not to be—*what?* It is generally thought that the object of this substantive verb is *alive*—that is, that Hamlet ponders whether to go on living, whether to exist. But more consistent is a different object: to be king, or not to be king, *that* is the question. He goes on to talk about "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." What are they? The loss of a kingdom. When he asks "Who would these fardels bear?", what burden does he complain about? The loss of a kingdom. Life has refused to give him what he wants. Not to be denied, he sees the necessity to find a way to gain it—*any* way, and thus restore his lost pride and power.

Of course, a prime question is: what made Hamlet what he was? Psychoanalysts have struggled to understand this. Shakespeare has presented some excellent case histories among his works—cause and effect. There is no such information in Hamlet. In Romeo and Juliet, Juliet's nurse gives us, although briefly, all we need to know to predict her actions, and what her life will likely be. Of Othello, we learn the early insults which undermine his self-esteem and make him vulnerable to the green-eyed monster. But of Hamlet? Not a word.

Searching, and perhaps seizing upon the obvious, psychoanalysts, including Ernest Jones (1949) and Freud, (1900) have asserted about Hamlet, as did the gentle Ophelia, wrapped in idealistic adolescent dreams, "Oh, what a noble mind was here o'erthrown" (of which there is no evidence). An even larger number ponderously proclaim the ugly, sensuous venality of Gertrude, thus placing blame upon her. Says Jones: "Her disgraceful adultery and incest, treason to his noble father's memory . . . her negative and insignificant personality . . . her markedly sensual nature . . . etc." Samuel Rubin (1971) goes him one better, asking: "What kind of mother was this shallow, sensual, self-indulgent, and faithless woman for the intelligent, sensitive child that Hamlet must have been?" Grebanier (1960), the noted Shakespeare scholar, commented that ever since psychoanalysts discovered Hamlet, they have overworked the oedipal theme, Freud himself being eloquent on the subject, all causing the play to lose its comprehensibility and poetic worth.

Let me remind you there is not a word in the play to back this view of Gertrude—it all originates with Hamlet. Further, there is no evidence of adulterous relations with Claudius before the death of King Hamlet; nor is there actual incest since Gertrude has no familial relation to Claudius. These pungent terms, adultery and incest, won an incredibly ready acceptance from almost all. What kind of fidelity is implied by the age-old cry: The king is dead; long live the king! It is accepted that the succession must go on. Could Gertrude's marriage have signified this? On the other hand, it is not generally realized that Denmark and England were the two exceptions to the prevailing rule of male succession in monarchy. They were elective monarchies, and of even greater import, the throne was Gertrude's. She could have ruled alone—facing, perhaps, a bleak and lonely life. I leave you to ponder the sensuality so many have inferred from her remarriage. And what is wrong with sensuality?

Some have observed, notably Fredric Wertham (1970), that Hamlet is not a veiled story of patricide; ambivalence in relation to the father causing delay in murderous revenge, as Jones has asserted. To Wertham, rather, the tale is one of matricide. The drama of Orestes, killer of his mother Clytemnestra is closer to the point than that of Oedipus Rex. There is much to be said for this view, although it is incomplete. Certainly, Hamlet became whatever he became because of serious early damaging experience. But the naïveté of psychoanalysts in assuming that the simple constellation of relationships in an ordinary family applies to royalty is incredible. The royal child may indeed suffer a damaging loss—the loss of mother in close relationship, but that it supposes an evil mother is an unjustified assumption. On the other hand, what the child experiences at the hands of various surrogate caretakers is generally unknown, to all but the child. Hamlet's rage is evoked by a major frustration: he will not accede to the power he anticipated when his father died—and it is his mother's action in marrying which is responsible. His rage at her may contain erotic elements, but the early roots of his hate are obscure. It is his mother's denial of ultimate power to him not deliberately of course—which evokes matricidal impulses.

This all suggests that renewed conflict at the age of 30 was not Hamlet's problem, regardless of what he suffered as a child. But that his hostility was all-encompassing, included murderous impulses and capacities, great rages, and grandiosity, there is no denying. Whatever the cause, the major result was the character-

logical development of great ruthlessness. An anonymous writer said in 1736: "Hamlet's speech upon seeing the king at prayer has always given me great offense. There is something so very bloody in it, so inhuman, so unworthy of a hero . . ."

Loss of the prospect of the throne set a vicious, ruthless man to scheming, in order to gain power. To do it, he "wrote" a mythic scenario outlining sins he knew were generally unacceptable. Just as birds of a feather flock together without consciously knowing why, so the psychosociopathic skill in playing upon others. Fearing to assert this rather shocking position, I searched for company, and found it among the old manuscripts at the Stratford Nuffield Library. The delightful man who wrote "A Throw for a Throne, or, The Prince Unmasked" must have been frightened too. James E. Wilson, who wrote under the pseudonym of Serjeant Zinn (1897) was clear about the fact that Hamlet's scheme was like a throw of the dice—a gamble. His book, of which I have the only other copy, is in the form of a conversation between Mr. Shakespeare and "the great silent majority"—the audience, therein called Mr. Silenzio—who finally has a chance to ask some pertinent questions.

A few further words about Gertrude are in order. She is, when speaking for herself, rather than being described by her vicious son, an exemplary woman. Not a word of anger passes her lips. She addresses her son as "Good Hamlet." Far from urging him to "adjust" as Friedman and Jones (1970) assert, she pleads with him to try to come to terms with his grief. She is aggrieved to see her son so unhappy. She is not fatuous, as some have said. She has an incisive mind: in response to the anxiety-ridden, obsessional, tangential, and ever-expanding speech of Polonius, she says: "More matter, less art." Four words which accomplish much. When Hamlet sadistically toys with her, she says, again incisively, "This is the very coinage of your brain." When he replies: "Lay not that flattering unction to your soul, that not your trespass but my madness speaks" she says "O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain." And what is his reply? "O throw away the worsen part of it, and live the purer with the other half." He can say this, of course, because he has no heart. His matricide is verbal—and this is the meaning of his statement "What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?" That is, what worth has a mother? What does the relationship give him in adult life? When he exhorts himself "Let not the heart of Nero [Nero committed matricide] enter this firm bosom," he does not reject matricide—

he rejects *physical* matricide. Character assassination and biting irony will do. On the other hand, since Nero was known as well for fiddling while Rome burned, it may have been delay that he was rejecting. In considering why the Ghost, when urging Hamlet to avenge his murder, counselled Hamlet about Gertrude to "leave her to heaven," I have concluded that Hamlet turned to the adultery-incest theme only secondarily, because the fratricide theme seemed to need bolstering. Constant repetition and lack of success in his overthrow scheme brought his matricidal rage into full bloom. Lidz (1972) sees Hamlet's madness as an expression of disillusionment and despair, pervading the hero's life. He recognizes, as few have, that Hamlet was deprived of a kingdom, although failing to see its centrality. But he feels that Gertrude's "infidelity" is crucial, and that the second denial of oedipal desires is significant, and triggered by the rejection of Ophelia. Poor Ophelia an apparently docile and innocent, seventeen-year-old girl, living in a time when women were chattels—has almost as much invective thrown upon her as Gertrude. Her defense, and that of other characters within the play, must be left to another occasion. Suffice to say, however, that her comment to Claudius, when mad: "Lord, we know what we are, but not what we may be [come]" is far from stupid.

If Gertrude played a part in Hamlet's downfall, by being over-protective and overly doting upon her only son, it points to the consequences of maternal overprotection-psychopathy—which David Levy (1938, 1939) has given thought to, and where an absent or cruel father also plays a part. But all this is conjecture—there is no basis for it in the play. Lidz views find support in the thinking of Barnett (1972), who has seen the play as a metaphor of lost innocence on coming of age. In Hamlet, it appears to be an innocence that never was.

There is one weak link in the chain of evidence I have presented to forge my view of Hamlet. Although King Claudius does not "blench" on seeing the play, thereby showing his guilt, he does, shortly, make some kind of confession. It seems to contradict his innocence. I pondered a long time about this. Changes in script and in punctuation have been common in the vicissitudes of the play's publication as quartos and folios, as well as presentation. What if the king, shortly after seeing "The Murder of Gonzago" is on to what Hamlet is up to, and ruminates about the directions of Hamlet's thought? Then, "O my offense is rank, it smells to heaven! It hath the primal eldest curst upon't; A brother's

murder" could be understood differently when question marks are added: "O, my offense is rank? It smells to heaven? It hath the primal curse upon it? A brother's murder?" This long soliloquy is the one false note to the second version of the play offered, yet it contains the same ambiguities to which the other soliloquies are prone, and can be reinterpreted. Also, the language is more characteristic of Hamlet than of Claudius. Few have observed that Claudius conducts himself at every point with dignity and restraint; with concern for Hamlet's mourning, but not anger; with recognition of the difficulties of his marriage—in view of the relationships—and with an indirect expression of genuine love for Gertrude, as now a part of him.

For the moment, two tasks remain: to say something further about Hamlet's language and his use of it; and then to offer some thoughts of Sullivan's and Fromm's which bear on the black and melancholy Dane.

Shakespeare, the master craftsman who could say "sweet are the uses of adversity"—of which this play is exemplar of its anti-thesis—was indeed crafty in his use of language. Alas, that in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's beautiful "mercy" speech is nothing but the rhetoric of persuasion, used to win for an undeserving client. And who is he? Her arrogant gambling fiancée, who she has tricked and deceived. What a pair! We must be wary then, of what Shakespeare's people say and why they say it.

Life is ambiguous, the "mysterie" of people cannot be solved through one interchange, one observation. Our skill as psychoanalysts depends upon how carefully and perceptively we listen. People present themselves to their own purpose, as Goffman (1959) has observed in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Fromm (1973) has noted that the man who is kind to another because that person is of use to him, may act in very different fashion when that condition no longer obtains. One might ask whether Erikson's (1950) concept of "basic trust" intends trust of everyone—or rather, trust until experience and observation suggest caution. Caution is necessary for survival of all creatures. The exploiter, politicizing speech, knows how to say what others want to hear, or what they do not want to hear. The myths and metaphors employed have purpose.

Ella Sharpe (1946) in considering Hamlet's self-derogations, feels they are the complement of his exaltation of his father. She uses, as example: "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I." One could add the well-known "Oh what an ass am I" and his charac-



terization of himself as "a dumb and muddy rascal," calling himself also "pigeon-livered." Of his father: "So excellent a king." This may indeed reflect two sides of the coin of his self-hate and compensatory projective gradiosity. But they are also intended to trick- to enlist others in denial, for example "No you're not." The retroflexed rage expressed here has been compared by some to expressions in depression and melancholia—it may be so, and used to similar purpose. They bear relation to his use of mockery, as to Ophelia "Are you honest, are you fair?", and of irony. But they are also used as political strategy.

In this connection, his resort to trapping the king's conscience through witnessing a play is a means of playing upon people, just as his language does this is one of the uses of irony. The Shakespearean scholar, Maynard Mack (1962) observed that Hamlet is the most alienated of all Shakespeare's heroes, his language being riddling, punning. Even the madness is riddling: how much is real, how much feigning? Hamlet is expert in the use of irony, scorn, and mockery, as his words to Ophelia indicate in the "Get thee to a nunnery" speech, or where he says "God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble, you lisp. . . ." etc. How telling it is when he says "yourselves," making it plural; and thereby multiplying the hurt. Or, to Gertrude in similar style: "Frailty, thy name is woman."

Freud (1938) was brilliant in his exposition of the technique of wit, observing that economy of words is an important factor. He observed not only Hamlet's wittiness and punning, but his use of metaphor to make a vicious point. In speaking of his mother's allegedly hasty marriage to Claudius, he says: "The funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage table." This masterpiece of venom takes deadly aim at his mother. The brilliant and telling effect of his play upon the word *common* is another masterpiece. His mother tries to comfort him in his mourning by saying "Do not seek for thy noble father in the dust. Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die." His response "Ay madam, it is common," becomes a slur directed at her - the "it" is an indirect way of saying "you" are common. Freud distinguished between ordinary harmless wit, and what he called "tendency-wit"—the latter being either hostile or obscene. It is interesting that Freud observed wit as a social process, an interpersonal one, and noted that it serves to divert attention, by offering something which fascinates the hearer.

Joseph Slap, (1966) in considering sarcasm, observes that it is a

bitter taunt, cutting, caustic, stinging. He feels that two aspects stand out—the oral aggression, and the contempt. It is intended to damage or lower the self-esteem of the target. He cites Rado, who observed that it reflects the user's serious narcissistic wound, as well as dependence on positive expressions from others. He relates it to depression also. Previous quotations of Hamlet's serve to illustrate; another is his calling Polonius a fishmonger. But the uses to which Hamlet puts his various—and nefarious—verbal skills call to mind another prince who wrote (as an intellectual exercise, of course) about political ploys and schemings—Nicholas Machiavelli.

The imagery a person uses is quite significant in reflecting cognitive style. When Hamlet complains about "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" he tells us of his expectation and demand that things go his way, and also that he feels pierced and piercing in return. When he calls fortune a "strumpet," or refers to "pursy times," once again we are reminded that to him all women are whores, and sex a "back alley" function. How wise Polonius and Laertes were in warning the innocent Ophelia!

It is interesting that those most devoted to Hamlet in the play are the ones who do not accept all of his statements, or else, correct him. Perhaps it is not so hard to understand why Hamlet killed his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern so easily. The following interchange is relevant: Hamlet: "I have bad dreams." R & G: "Your bad dreams are ambition." Their offense is that they understand him too well. There are several occasions when Ophelia stands up to him. Hawkes (1965) observes that she turns aside his remarks about the "mouse-trap" saying "you are naught, you are naught. I'll mark the play"—she wishes to judge for herself. This is not in keeping with the mythic scenario he is creating.

A special capacity that Hamlet shows in his speech and manipulation of others is a way he has of tearing down, bit by bit. A patient of mine, British, finally acknowledged of himself that he was a "trimmer." The word is apt for Hamlet. Observe Hamlet's early speech about Gertrude's hasty remarriage (even as he acknowledges in speaking to her that at her age "the blood is tamer"): "That it should come to this! But *two months* dead! *nay, not so much, not two.*" Later in the same speech "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,*;" a little further on, "*Within a month, ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears . . .*" How fiendishly he tears away, implying only days—and his mother's

tears not yet dry. Later, talking to Ophelia, he says: "My father died *within these two hours*" She corrects him: "*Twice two months.*" (In this way Shakespeare also establishes the fact that Hamlet has been trying for two months to gain the throne.)

As a final consideration of Hamlet's use of language, a return to his use of the mythic scenario is enlightening. Edelman (1966) suggests that

"there is strong . . . evidence that language forms are central to the shaping of political values, attitudes and perceptions . . . . The political events upon which we focus can become infused with strong affect stemming from psychic tension, perception of economic, military or other threats, and from interactions between social and psychological phenomena . . . . People who are anxious and confused are eager to be supplied with an organized political order . . . and with reassurance that the threats are being countered . . . myth and metaphor [have] the power to intensify some perceptions and screen out others."

He adds that conflicts and passions create a range of myths and metaphors which shape perception of our political world and that the metaphorical view which is officially disseminated enjoys a significant advantage . . . and becomes the organizing conception into which the public thereafter arranges items of news. He considers why jargon is so successful, and notes that

"myths evoke a strong emotional response, out of all proportion to what the rational observer would expect. Among the most successful ones are those in which an outgroup is plotting to commit harmful acts; or where frightened people are led to feel that their benevolent leader will save them from danger, or where the belief is created that victory over an enemy will be achieved if all will work, sacrifice and obey the leader. When all are combined, and people are attached to these, they [people] assume a political identity of 'uncritical follower.'"

He observes that ambiguous phrases are particularly successful. He also stresses that by personifying the threat, the leader appeals to the temptation to see conspiracies rather than complex causes. Here in brief is an analysis of many of Hamlet's linguistic strategies and devices in his gamble for a throne, applicable as well to Adolph Hitler, and less directly to the Watergate-Nixon conspirators. Shakespeare perceived that the hypnotizers of the human herd understood naiveté and dependence, and illustrated that not only in *Hamlet*, but in *Julius Caesar* and all of the history plays.

But turning from Hamlet's skill at myth-making and use of metaphor in political incitement, Fromm (1973) casts further light on Hamlet's character. For Hamlet shows all the qualities described by Fromm in his thoughts about malignant destructiveness: sadism, in which there is a passion for unrestricted power over another being; and necrophilia, the passion to destroy life, and an accompanying attraction to all that is dead, mechanical, and decaying. The only time Hamlet has anything good to say about someone is after the person's death. For "Poor Yorick," whose skull the gravedigger unearths, and whom Hamlet knew, he seems to express some compassion; and for Ophelia, he can mention "love" only after she is dead. How brilliant and inspired a contrivance of Shakespeare to have a grave scene, setting the proper locus for Hamlet's necrophilia. All of his irony, mockery, scheming is directed toward the death of others, emotionally or physically. Of course, the neurotic drive to power as a compensation for feelings of inferiority was observed by Alfred Adler (1917).

Compare Hamlet's rages with the description Fromm gives of Adolph Hitler's.

"One cannot speak about Hitler's talent for impressing others without mentioning his attacks of anger. [Hitler's] spells of anger even though not rare, were the exception, but they could be of the greatest intensity . . . [they] occurred on two kinds of occasions . . . in his speeches . . . [where] this anger was quite authentic because it was fed by his very genuine passion of hate and destruction, to which he gave full and uninhibited expression . . . . Genuine as these oratorical expressions of hate were, they were not uncontrolled. He knew very well when the time had arrived to let go and whip up an audience's emotions . . . . His angry outbursts in conversations seem to have been born of another nature . . . like those as a child, when he felt frustrated . . . . He used these outbursts to intimidate people, but he could also control them when he felt it was expedient to do so."

Here again—as with Hamlet—conscious and unconscious, "not mad nor feigning madness." He too could "tell a hawk from a handsaw [henshaw]." This view of Hitler is confirmed by John Kenneth Galbraith\* in reviewing Payne's, *Life and Death of Adolph Hitler*: "he depicts him as a monstrously cruel man with an acute understanding of political and mob psychology . . . even

\*New York Times Book Review, April 22, 1973.



his most trusted generals were suspect." Here Hitler's paranoia is noted as well. Shakespeare well recognized that the hypnotizers of the human herd understand naiveté and dependence.

To complete an understanding of the pathology in Hamlet, however, it is necessary to turn to Sullivan, whose observation of process was so important. He said (1953) that the malevolent transformation—meaning the start of hating, sadistic and destructive behavior—occurs when the child meets with consistent rebuff in his need for tenderness. The "bad me" seems to become central, and the substitution of malevolent behavior occurs whenever there is a need for tenderness. Further along, Sullivan says that developmentally, the child learns verbalisms which are rationalizations to deceive the authority figures; or else, "as if" (or pseudo) behavior develops, which includes dramatization and also obsessional maneuvers. The basic malevolent attitude is that one lives among enemies (because the need for tenderness brings on anxiety or pain). Sullivan relates this problem in good measure to the mother—her lack of satisfaction with the father leading her to say things like "you're just like your father." Or else, she identifies with the child's behavior, saying "He's rebellious just like me" (thus encouraging such behavior by her vicarious pleasure in his negativism).

Another development may occur in the malevolently transformed person and this, of course, probably relates to the pressure of outer events. This is the paranoid transformation—the massive transfer of blame, as a security operation. Sullivan states:

"Although hallucinations do not necessarily usher in schizophrenic episodes, they very frequently do so. In the paranoid transformation, those dissociated tendencies which are still apart . . . and related to the "not me" feeling now are personified in . . . others. And these others carry the blame for what had to be dissociated as intolerable. In his process of personifying the specific evil, the transformation begins to move fast, since it is wonderfully successful . . . it begins to put on these others, people who are outside of him, his enemies everything which he has clearly formulated as defect, blamable weakness, and so on."

Sullivan adds that in the development of the paranoid state, in which the schizophrenic prelude is very inconspicuous, it is in some ways more ominous, and the beginning phase has a curious relationship to what he calls moments of illumination. "These occur when by extremely fortunate circumstance, one actually

sees . . . a real situation that he had been selectively inattending to, so that he is really better oriented." But far more common than these fortunate illuminations is the onrushing paranoid transformation of personality—the transfer of blame—in which the person suddenly "sees it all." The beginning of this process comes literally as a sudden insight into some suspicion, and it comes with a blaze of horror. This could well have been the point at which Hamlet "heard and saw the ghost," and elaborated his mythic scenario. Sullivan added that at times, there can be a recession of all this fearing of enemies and seeing plots, and so on, in favor of a profound preoccupation with disorders of bodily function—with the idea of disastrous things going on.

Hamlet has been considered by some to be obsessional—it would be more accurate to say that he is a man obsessed. But his actions are also the Sullivanian dramatizations of the malevolent person undergoing paranoid change. Even further, he employs the rhetoric of the skilled politician, using myth and metaphor to whip the herd to frenzy, to assure backing for his actions, so that his power will not be challenged when he takes over.

The start of a more malignant disintegrative process often occurs at a point when an individual's grandiose and unrealistic expectations are frustrated by life circumstances. Then, when plans have failed, efforts to achieve ends compulsively fixed and determined become more and more impromptu, because of the rigid inflexibility of the cognitive style. The lack of conscience or deficient super ego is both cause and effect. It stems from and also furthers the person's grandiose alienation, in which all others exist only to serve him. His lack of contrition testifies to this.

## CONCLUSIONS

Previous studies of Hamlet have been rooted in the psychoanalytic conceptions of Freud and Jones, attempting to understand Hamlet's behavior in the light of the classic oedipal conflict.

It is my view that there is no anamnestic data within the play to substantiate this. Further, Shakespeare's great gift in the use of ambiguity adds to the problem of understanding Hamlet, the man, by creating a multifaceted personality, observable in depth through his interactions in many different relationships.

Largely unnoticed is the fact that the initial view and background of the play, setting forth the basic premises accounting for

Hamlet's actions, are presented by Hamlet himself, and are not confirmed by others.

The major clues to Hamlet's personality are revealed through his linguistic and cognitive styles. Here, his preoccupation with conscience the conscience of others, not his own—and his continual efforts to incite guilt in others, are keys to his psychopathic, alienated, and antisocial destructive trends. There is no sign of love in Hamlet, no indication of love for Ophelia, or any woman—his only reference to women is as whores.

*Hamlet* is if anything a study of matricide, but verbal rather than physical matricide, rationalized and disguised by Hamlet as the avenging of fratricide, as an ethical commitment to filial love. Yet in point of fact, there is no evidence of filial love, nor is Hamlet bent on avenging; rather, he is vindictively engaged in revenge—a very different psychodynamic process.

Hamlet's vengefulness is substantiated by the work of Horney, who cites him as an example. His alienation, lack of capacity to love, linguistic style of sarcasm, ridicule, scorn, riddling, punning, and incitement to guilt, are supported by Freud's brilliant analysis of language. Hamlet's rages, a well known facet of the sociopathic personality, as well as his necrophiliac orientation, are clarified by the thinking of Erich Fromm.

What triggers all this; what occasions the action of the play? Hamlet, enraged by loss of the throne just as he is on the verge of ascending it as the result of his father's death, conceives of a stratagem to gain the throne by playing upon the court. He is well equipped for this by his psychopathic cognitive style, and malevolent, destructive personality. His efforts are directed against the royal couple, and his aim is to enlist the sympathy and help of others, enflaming emotions in relation to two universal taboos: fratricide and incest.

His accusation of incest is an attempt to set the court against the Queen, and the readiness of men to respond to this accusation when it is directed against women is witnessed by the volume of psychoanalytic papers condemning Gertrude—all without actual substantiation. Why does he not attempt to murder his mother in revenge? Perhaps his reasons are two-fold. His matricidal intent is sated through language. Also it serves his purpose, his mythic scenario, better, since he is clever enough to realize that actual matricide is an even more deeply lodged taboo than fratricide or incest, and would evoke greater anxiety and rage against him.

Hamlet does not delay in the murder of King Claudius, as is

commonly believed. He does not vacillate. He seeks the *right moment*, when the king's murder will bring him support by others at court—he himself must not be vulnerable to accusations of murder, rather than “just avenger” of his father's murder. But as time runs out and the king and queen become more firmly established, making his mythic scenario less inflammable, events seem to run against him, and he must improvise, resorting to less carefully conceived stratagems. In his frustration, his already well-developed malevolence undergoes rapid paranoid change, fitting Sullivan's theory of the malevolent transformation. Here again, it well illustrates Sullivan's conceptions of the rapidly organizing paranoid psychosis with its dramatizations—this is the key to Hamlet's increasingly “mad,” yet not typically schizophrenic, behavior. His schemes, like most, work better in the conception than in reality; and with increasing failure he becomes more grossly psychotic in paranoid fashion.

In short, Hamlet is an alienated destructive man who cannot tolerate what he considers to be “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”—his loss of the throne, and all that goes with such a position. He cannot bow to fate, and plans a desperate coup—a “throw [of the dice] for a throne,” as James E. Wilson described it.

In conclusion, I say “Villainy, they name is Hamlet,” and offer a couplet:

Sweet William put us to the test—  
His work on Hamlet was some jest!

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