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Henry too is envisioned *sui generis*. His momentary triumph over history is ended by mortality. The ending of Plutarch's life, with its implication of the dissolution of Alexander's achievement is put to use in Shakespeare's epilogue. Both have been bulwarks against chaos. When Alexander dies, it is the signal for internecine murder to begin. When Henry dies, it is the signal for another fall to occur in the "world's best garden." We can see from the Henry VI plays

that the death of the hero results in a flood of ambitions and provincial hatreds, of chaotic desires playing at cross-purposes. This, the epilogue concludes, "oft our stage hath shown."

It would seem then that *Henry V* takes only its plot from Tudor political *impedimenta*. It centers on a vision of the hero who would "th'Eternall overtake," and realistically traces both the brilliance and darkness implicit in the familiar story of the intellect in action.

The Tragedy of Hamlet's World View

RICHARD A. LEVINE

I

The problem of a "regeneration" in Hamlet has constantly plagued Shakespeare critics. If there was a change in Hamlet, that change has not yet been adequately described either in terms of the play itself or in terms of tragic drama. With regard to the type of change or lack of change in Hamlet, we find that there are essentially two schools of thought. One group of critics, represented most stoutly by E. M. W. Tillyard, feels that there is no real transformation in Hamlet's outlook. Hamlet does not gain any enlightenment through his experiences and, therefore, at the conclusion of the play he is not a "different" man. A contrary view of Hamlet is held by a second group of readers, by far the majority group. In this view Hamlet is cast into the mold of the traditional tragic hero who emerges from his struggles a better and more enlightened man. This second group sees *positive* changes in Hamlet's world view;

Hamlet becomes the Oedipus-like hero who has painfully but triumphantly come to see the supremacy of forces greater than himself and is the wiser for this regenerative sight. My own view agrees with neither of these. As I shall suggest, Hamlet is a tragic hero, but his purgation is negative rather than positive. Further, his tragic flaw, his vacillating and faulty world view, is reconciled by the last act of the play by means of the negative purgation which he experiences.

Hamlet is by no means a passive character; he reacts to the circumstances which envelop him. The point which we must bear in mind in this respect and which will offer one key to my further discussion is that the arena of action in this play is the intellect. Hamlet's struggle is an intellectual one and by the very terms of that struggle, willful "practical" action becomes impossible. To be sure, the tragic hero must not only struggle but he must emerge from his struggle purged and regenerated. Tillyard is convinced that no such changes occur in Hamlet. He fails to see how Hamlet undergoes any metamorphosis similar to that experienced by either Samson or

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Othello.¹ Tillyard is certainly correct—Hamlet's purgation is not the purgation of a Samson or an Othello, but this fact by no means precludes the possibility of a different kind of cathartic effect. In reality, this is precisely the case. Hamlet's purgation is negative in nature; there is nothing spiritually elevating in it. Nevertheless, it is the end product of the hero's struggling and it climaxes the developmental transformation of the hero's outlook. In Aristotle's term, Hamlet experiences *recognition* as he moves from ignorance to knowledge. The major failing of *Hamlet* criticism with regard to this point has been the insistence that the knowledge gained through recognition had to be ennobling—an unrealistic view at best. What then are the stages in this process from ignorance to knowledge?

II

S. F. Johnson, in the process of countering Tillyard's view, summarizes a great deal of the criticism regarding Hamlet's regeneration.² His own position falls short although it remains superior to Tillyard's against which Johnson argues reasonably. To Johnson, "Hamlet does not succumb to despair or become the victim of a deadening fatalism; rather he is the instrument of an inscrutable Providence . . ." (p. 206). By the concluding act of the play, Johnson feels that Hamlet is not only prepared to meet his death, but that he is "fulfilling providential purpose, . . . he has completely accepted his role as heaven's patient minister" (p. 205). This providence of which Johnson speaks is interpreted as a Christian providence; indeed, the play itself revolves about a Christian Hamlet enmeshed in the process of Christian purgation. Perhaps the two best briefs in behalf of a Christian Hamlet are those by Fred-

son Bowers and Irving Ribner.³ Bowers' discussion, however, rests upon the questionable assumption that the Hamlet of Act III is fundamentally the same Hamlet of Acts IV and V. Bowers is probably correct in stating that in Act III Hamlet believed Heaven was punishing him. But Hamlet is still to undergo significant change so that whether he is minister or scourge becomes ultimately an unimportant concern for Hamlet. Ribner's work, *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy*, is a considerable one. In the main, I have little quarrel with Ribner's reading of Shakespeare. I do argue, however, with the place assigned to *Hamlet* in Ribner's framework. Ribner agrees with Bowers: Hamlet as divinely guided minister gains salvation. My objection here is essentially the same I have with Bowers. Hamlet, in his process of growth, did pass through an area of spiritual confusion, but he ultimately rejected the entire Christian complex in his search for a world view by which to direct real action.

In terms of the play itself, Hamlet does not emerge in Act V as a knowing and confident minister of Christian providence. To be sure, he has reconciled his own world view by the time of the fifth act, but the reconciliation is one in opposition to a Christian world view. He realizes that he is driven by a force greater than himself, but that force is more the Stoic Logos than the Christian benevolent deity. Yet it is by this very reconciliation in non-Christian terms that Hamlet is purged and purges.

III

Within a very short span of time, Hamlet is subjected to three extreme shocks: his father's death, his mother's overly quick remarriage, and the revela-

¹E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Problem Plays* (London, 1950), p. 14.

²S. F. Johnson, "The Regeneration of Hamlet," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 3 (1952), 187-207.

³Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *PMLA*, 70 (1955), 740-749; and Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy* (London, 1960).

tion from the ghost that Claudius had murdered the elder Hamlet. The incontrovertible effect of these tremendous shocks on Hamlet is that they force him into a state of reflection. His serenity has been destroyed and he must reconcile these events somehow with a world view, i.e., man's place in the universe and the ultimate ends of action and existence. We can assume that Hamlet had previously considered such ultimate problems but rarely. It is logical to infer that metaphysical considerations played at best a small part in the rather carefree, comfortable, and secure life of "The expectancy and rose of the fair state,/ The glass of fashion and the mould of form,/ The observ'd of all observers. . . ." But with the triple shock, Hamlet was thrown into the alien state of melancholy and he was forced to grapple with the intrinsic arrangement, causative factors, and final ends of the universe. It is at this most crucial moment that the audience perceives Hamlet's unstable and inadequate *Weltanschauung*. And it is this very world view which emerges as the hero's tragic flaw by which he will fall. Yet by the solidification of his *Weltanschauung*, Hamlet learns and is purged.

The traditional view that Hamlet's tragic flaw lies in his inability to act is partly true. However, this inability to act is a direct result of his vacillating world view. Traditional religious belief and an attenuated stoicism contend for the mastery of Hamlet's ethos. The interplay between belief in a world hereafter and belief that death ends all is carried on throughout the first four acts of the play. (Coupled with the latter view is a belief that there is a divinity operative in the universe, but it is not divine in specifically Christian terms, not benevolent.) By the conclusion of the first act, the organizing elements of the play have been set in motion. Each of the three shocks has been delivered and Hamlet has promised the ghost that he will avenge his father's murder. However,

from this point to the conclusion of Act IV, Hamlet, the avenger, is incapable of straightforward action. He cannot willfully act because he is uncertain as to the final end of action and he cannot resolve that uncertainty. The universe is at once ruled by the benevolent Christian God and is an orderless, meaningless place:

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! O God!
O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
Seems to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! oh fie, fie! 'Tis an unweeded
garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and
gross in nature
Possess it merely.
(I. ii. 129-37)

Thus in this first soliloquy, even before the crushing third shock, the basic conflict in Hamlet's world view is presented.

The task which Hamlet has to perform is a double one. It is not only to avenge his father's murder, but also to cleanse the country of the new order. Denmark is a morally sick state; Hamlet is to purge it. Yet Hamlet's final comment in Act I regarding his function is most telling:

The time is out of joint;—O cursed
spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
(I. v. 189-90)

He realizes this early that he is incapable of the necessary action. There is no ethic by which he can direct action, thus the final end of action is doubtful and uncertain. In Act II, his world view continues to hover between an immortal and a mortal conception of man:

What a piece of work is a 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!

yet counterbalancing this:

what is this quintessence of dust?
(II. ii. 315-22)

Act III is in many ways the crucial act in both the development of Hamlet's world view and of his inability to act willfully. In the first scene we have the apex of Hamlet's soliloquies. Throughout this magnificent speech there are two melodies in a contrapuntal arrangement: death as the victor and ultimate end of existence counterpointed against the *possibility* of death as a transitional area to further existence.

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 wish'd. To die; to sleep—
To sleep? Perchance to dream! Ay,
there's the rub.
(III. i. 60-65)

Hamlet's world view has moved to a position where we find the former element having gained a superseding status, but his *Weltanschauung* is by no means completely resolved at this time. Yet it is the very possibility of life hereafter in traditional Christian terms which prevents Hamlet from taking positive action, even if that action be suicide.

Thus conscience does make cowards of
us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of
thought,
And enterprises of great pith and
moment
With this regard their currents turn
[awry],
And lose the name of action.
(III. i. 83-88)

It is still in the realm of the intellect that Hamlet must act. And what is the play within the play but an exercise in

intellectual battle? Hamlet acts—and acts positively—within the framework of the imaginary. Further, his slaying of Polonius is another act clothed in imagination and far removed from willful action. Not only was there no time for Hamlet to reflect upon the deed, but neither did he see his adversary nor did he conceive of Polonius in human terms.

Queen. What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? Help, help, ho!

Pol. [Behind] What, ho! help, help, help!

Ham. [Drawing] How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!

(III. iv. 21-23)

Hamlet's encounter with Claudius while at prayer is of cardinal importance. It is at this point—perhaps more than any other—that we see the confusion of Hamlet's world view and his need for certainty regarding the final ends of action. The religious elements of that world view have asserted themselves, but in that very assertion we perceive that the religious view has become at best semi-Christian. Certainly the damned soul need not be launched into the afterworld at a moment of commission of further sin. Albeit Hamlet's outlook in this case is more Christian than stoic, it is a truncated Christianity which lacks any realization of final ends. Just as in his speech on suicide (I. ii. 129ff.) Hamlet's Christianity is based on superstition and fear rather than on any positive love and faith. Francis Fergusson approaches the crux of the cosmological problem inherent in the play when he states that "the Player-King presents very pithily the basic vision of human action in the play, at a level so deep that it applies to all the characters: the guilty, the free, the principals, the bystanders, those in power and the dispossessed."⁴ The Player-King says:

⁴Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater* (New York, 1953), p. 138.

Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none
of our own.

(III. ii. 221-223)

Out of context, one could conceivably make a case for this statement as being Christian. However, considered in the framework of the play, there is little relevance possible between this speech and any traditional Christian theology. It is a stoic comment on the ends of existence and, as we shall see directly, it encompasses within it the final reconciliation of the contending forces within Hamlet's world view.

By Act V, Hamlet has completely rejected all thoughts of afterlife. Stoic determinism with its motivating force *intrinsic* to the constitution of the earth has emerged as Hamlet's world view. Death is the victor over life and the sole end of life; the Christianity which for a time contended with this view has been rejected. Hamlet states his newly solidified belief clearly in the first scene of Act V—no minister of providence is this Prince.

Did these bones cost no more the
breeding, but to play at loggats with 'em?
Mine ache to think on't

(V. i. 99-101)

The very conveyances of his land will
hardly lie in this box, and must be in-
heritor himself have no more, ha?

(V. i. 119-121)

Let me see. [Takes the skull] Alas,
poor Yorick!

(V. i. 202-203)

Hamlet's view of man's place in the universe is now definite:

Hor. 'Twere to consider too curiously,
to consider so.

Ham. 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?

(V. i. 227-235)

Believing that man's existence ends with death and that the controlling force in the earth is intrinsic to the earth (V. ii. 5-10), Hamlet is able to enter into a state of knowledge; recognition is now possible.

We remember that one of Hamlet's purposes was to cleanse the state of Denmark. However, as we have just seen, by Act V he has realized that death is the primary operative end of existence and the victor over life. From this world view, Hamlet is purged of his initial desires of purging Denmark. He realizes he cannot change the world and thereby undergoes a negative purgation. The controlling force is based on neither goodness nor right; Hamlet is powerless to challenge its order. As many critics have said, Hamlet's was an inner conflict and an intellectual one. But he does reach a conclusion although it is a negative one and an intellectually passive one. Hamlet's world view does not remain unreconciled as so many readers claim. In the very terms of his intellectual struggle and final resolution, willful action is made almost ludicrous. However, Hamlet does kill Claudius and to this action we must turn.

Hamlet's speech on augury (V. ii. 230ff.) has caused considerable speculation. Again, it is my point that if this speech is read out of context a Christian interpretation can be given it. Further, whenever a Christian framework is unjustifiably superimposed onto the play, this speech is naturally invoked as evidence. However, in terms of the play, Donald A. Stauffer comes closest to the truth of the speech when he sees in it an overpowering stoicism: "augury is defied, destiny is bitterly acknowledged, and a passive readiness is all."⁵ If one

⁵Donald A. Stauffer, *Shakespeare's World of Images* (New York, 1949), p. 129.

agrees with the development of Hamlet's world view as presented in this discussion, there should be little problem in understanding why Hamlet abandons reason and follows "destiny." He fights the duel because there is no sense in escaping it. In this last scene of the play Hamlet can slay Claudius whereas he was incapable of performing this same act previously. In the prayer scene there had still been conflict between religion and stoical-nihilism; by the time of the duel scene the mental conflict had been reconciled. (Further, might we not speculate that a secondary reason for Hamlet's killing Claudius is that Hamlet then feels death to be the worst punishment he can mete out. If there is no after-life and since this life is all, what more devastating blow than ending life, especially a powerful life?) A further implication of Hamlet's rejection of Christian values is to be seen in his death speech to Horatio. The Christian who is on the verge of meeting his Maker looks forward, not backward. However, Hamlet, believing as he does in worldly existence as finite, urges Horatio to remain alive only to tell Hamlet's story, to *save* him in earthly terms.

So it is that Hamlet leaves life, having concluded his long and anguished intellectual struggle. That the contending forces in this struggle were Christianity and a particular brand of stoicism is not surprising. Shakespeare's age was embroiled in this very same intellectual struggle; Hamlet is in many ways an embodiment of that struggle. However, we should not assume that Hamlet's ultimate reconciliation is either the reconciliation of Shakespeare's age or the reconciliation Shakespeare foresaw. Rather it is the response to the given situation by a particular man—although the situation, the man, and the response are so deeply rooted in the universal that the play will always be meaningful.

Even though Hamlet's reconciliation is pessimistic and un-Christian, there is

present in the play a more theologically oriented viewpoint which Hamlet is incapable of perceiving. Of all the characters in the play, the gravedigger clowns are those literally and perhaps figuratively closest to the universal fact of death (one of the clowns has been digging graves for thirty years). Act V, which offers not only the resolution of the play's overt events but also of Hamlet's metaphysical questioning, opens with the appearance of the clowns. Thus in this most telling act, it is the clowns who are given the stage as the denouement begins. As so often before, the clowns are individuals able to penetrate truth although clothing this truth in the caps and bells of jesters. Ostensibly, they are speaking of the forthcoming inhabitant of the grave they are preparing. But let us look more closely at their words:

1 Clo. It must be "*se offendendo*," it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act, and an act hath three branches; it is to act, to do, and to perform; argal, she drown'd herself wittingly.

2 Clo. Nay, but hear you Goodman delver,—

1 Clo. Give me leave. Here lies the water; good. Here stands the man; good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he nill he, he goes,—mark you that? But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself; argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

(V. i. 9-22)

From one perspective these clowns are foretelling Hamlet's resolution of his world view and rehearsing his past conflict (note even the shift in person). Hamlet had been incapable of entering the water of knowledge (a common symbolic association) due to the very reason given by the clown: Hamlet could not act, do, or perform since he had no understanding of the ultimate ends of action. Further, as we learn

moments later, Hamlet's world view has been solidified and the resolution is in precisely those terms used by the clown: Hamlet has decided to let the water come to him. Such a juxtaposition between the clowns' speeches and Hamlet's entrance makes close reading of their conversation necessary.

The exchanges between Hamlet and the gravedigger are again an exercise in contrapuntal arrangement. Hamlet's intellectual resolution is both un-Christian and literal whereas the gravedigger is oriented to the traditional Christian view of death and his expression is relatively figurative. The counterpointing begins with the entrance of Hamlet and Horatio. The clown states that the houses he makes last till doomsday, an assertion which has as its basis the view of death as merely a transitory realm. Further, the clown sings of the grave's lack of finality (for one is only a guest when visiting). Yet this is the very scene in which Hamlet states most clearly his recently reconciled world view. If Ribner is correct in assuming that "every one of the tragedies is a separate attempt, if not finally to answer the great problem of man's relation to the forces of evil in the world, at least to pose it in such a way that new facts may be freshly illuminated in terms of human experience,"⁶ then the gravedigger scene is of even greater significance; for Shakespeare has delicately set up a counter melody to Hamlet's.

IV

Let us now particularize on one aspect of *Hamlet's* continued cogency and popularity. Roy W. Battenhouse suggests the interesting view that Hamlet's tragic flaw is Original Sin. "Adherence to the Word through the grace of baptism, therefore, is the only medicine and cure: what is needed is a radical re-

orientation of man's affections."⁷ Theodore Spencer sees Hamlet's conflict as the Renaissance conflict between the contrasting pictures of man as he should be and as he is. "But in Hamlet . . . , they [traditional beliefs] are an essential part of the hero's consciousness, and his discovery that they are not true, his awareness of the conflict between what theory taught and what experience proves, wrecks him."⁸ By coupling these two views, we can see clearly the modernity of Hamlet's tragic problem. In many ways, both Battenhouse and Spencer, while referring to Hamlet, highlight the twentieth-century crisis of Western civilization.

Is not Hamlet's intellectual struggle in essence the very struggle which every feeling human being must go through? In Hamlet's case the particular quality of his path toward reconciliation is the contrapuntal arrangement of the conflicting ethics which we observed previously. Not only is the humanity of the hero thus emphasized, but the nature of the struggle itself is highlighted. Without faith, Pascal's "gamble," the struggle must end in terms similar to Hamlet's. Instead of the more personal awareness of Hamlet's case, we have today the views of scientific materialists whose statements—as the three shocks to Hamlet—force us into Hamlet's state of reflection. For example, the shock of philosopher W. T. Stace:

For it came about in this way that for the past three hundred years there has been growing up in men's minds, dominated as they are by science, a new imaginative picture of the world. The world, according to this new picture, is purposeless, senseless, meaningless. Nature is nothing but matter in motion. The motions of matter are governed, not

⁷Roy W. Battenhouse, "Hamlet's Apostrophe on Man: Clue to the Tragedy," *PMLA*, 66 (1951), 1111.

⁸Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (New York, 1942), p. 94.

⁶Ribner, p. 8.

by any purpose, but by blind forces and laws.⁹

Or the shock of Bertrand Russell:

Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief. Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving, that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no

fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave . . . —all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects can hope to stand.¹⁰

Indeed, how like Hamlet's view is Russell's (the literal view of science). Undoubtedly, in intellectual terms to a greater or lesser extent, every man must wage Hamlet's struggle, and for this reason alone *Hamlet* is perhaps the most compelling of all Shakespeare's plays for the modern reader.

⁹W. T. Stace, "Man Against Darkness," *Atlantic Monthly*, 182 (September 1948), 54.

¹⁰Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," *Mysticism and Logic* (London, 1918), pp. 47-48.

An Existential Examination of *King Lear*

JAMES V. BAKER

I

The central preoccupation of existentialist philosophy is a concern for man's being in reality, or for human reality as it is present in this world. Its business is, in part, at least, descriptive, that is to describe the experiential structure for all human beings. Existentialism is the philosophy of human existence.

If one looks closely at the human condition, one notices that severe limitations are imposed upon it; it is extremely bounded. It is bounded by birth and death. Not only that, but each one of us is, if I may be permitted the expression, "in a fix," situated, at this particular time, at this particular place. We cannot

escape time and space. Time and space are our jailers in the elementary jail. Man is a time-bound creature. He has only a very limited amount of time in this world.

It will be necessary to define the term *category*, because it is a very useful term under which the human condition can be studied. I define a category as an instrument for inquiring into a problem.

The basic existential categories are as follows: First, being born into this world and finding ourselves here. Secondly, being towards others and finding ourselves existing among other people who are similarly bounded as ourselves; this is the whole realm of intersubjectivity, of our relations with others. Third, experiencing certain elementary emotions, such as fear, love, or hate; the existentialists have made particular capital out of the study of an emotion which is called anguish. Anguish is experienced

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