Chapter One


4 Frances A. Foster, “Dumb Show in Elizabethan Drama before 1620,” Englische Studien 44 (1911): 10 n. And see B. R. Pearn, “Dumb-Show in Elizabethan Drama,” RES 11, no. 44 (October 1935): 403. An excellent recent study, which includes comment on the show in Hamlet, is Dieter Mehl’s The Elizabethan Dumb Show (London, 1965). Chapter 2 of the present study makes frequent reference to Professor Mehl’s findings.

5 Space does not permit a separate documentation of each of the following interpretations, some of which are found in many articles and books. My synthesis of critical comment on the dumb show includes a number of studies dealing primarily or in some detail with the play scene: W. W. Greg, “Hamlet’s Hallucination,” MLR 12, no. 4 (October 1917): 393-421, and “The Mouse-Trap—a Postscript,” MLR 35.
NOTES TO PAGES 5-10


6 But see Flatter, Hamlet’s Father, pp. 47–51.


9 Here I do not, of course, use the term in its technical sense. See Bertram Joseph, Conscience and the King (London, 1953), pp. 30–32, for a similar use of the expression in its meaning of a mute exhibition of melancholy, grief, or passion.

10 E.g., the “solemn march.” Traditional uses of the convention will be discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

11 See, e.g., Wilson, What Happens in “Hamlet,” pp. 153, 155, and A. Hart, “Once More the Mouse-Trap,” p. 12. Wilson cites the discrepancy to support his argument that the dumb show comes as an unwelcome surprise to Hamlet. But that Hamlet censures dumb shows proves nothing about the nature of the play he commissions: quite aside from the fact that his speech and action are often at odds, his taste in drama is not the basis for his selection of Gonzago. And his allusion to dumb shows could well have stemmed from his preoccupation with the impending performance and the incidental knowledge that it contained a mime. Lacking proof to the contrary, one is safer
in assuming that Gonzago contained a dumb show when Hamlet first saw it than in conjecturing that it did not. But such an assumption still leaves one with the puzzling fact that Shakespeare selects this particular stage convention as one of the objects of Hamlet's scorn.


13 Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 75-78, 328-29. She speaks of Shakespeare's habit of seizing on "sound . . . as abhorrent"; of his tendency to connect noise with chaos, war, evil; of his use of "echoing and re-echoing sound" to emphasize the "boundless effects of evil."

14 It is on Hamlet's forecast of the stage wooing that Claudius rises. Since Hamlet later refers to the King's reaction "upon the talk of the poisoning," it is often assumed that Lucianus's speech or Hamlet's "He poisons him i' the garden for 's estate" occasions the King's departure. But the court knows of the wooing; it does not know of the poisoning. And whatever Claudius's reaction to the talk of poisoning, the talk of wooing "moves" him.

15 When Ophelia sees the dumb show, she says, "What means this, my lord?" and Hamlet answers, "Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief" (III.ii.148-49). The words miching mallecho are usually glossed "sneaking mischief." The printing mallecho (Malicho in the First Folio, Mallicio in the Second Quarto) results from the supposition of Malone and subsequent editors that the word originates in the Spanish malhecho ("misdeed"); though the OED says that there is no evidence that the Spanish word was familiar in English in Shakespeare's time, J. Dover Wilson says that it was current and ties "misdeed" to the "iniquity" of the players in introducing an "unauthorized" dumb show (What Happens in "Hamlet," pp. 157-58). However, Hamlet says first what the show is and then what it means, and it is more properly and simply a "bad echo" of Claudius's evil deed than itself "mischief" or "misdeed," though the context accommodates any one of the meanings. Miching, in all of its denotations, applies more aptly to "echo" than to the other glosses of mallecho: it means both "skulking" and "playing truant," and all three mean "neglecting duty" (the meaning Shakespeare evokes in Henry IV, Part I, [II.iv.450], when Hal is called a micher). Thus, in calling the dumb show a "miching" bad echo of a murderous deed, Hamlet may suggest, not only the connotations "sneaking" or "lurking," but also the "idleness" or "duty-shirking" of which he often accuses himself. Perhaps the commonest meaning of miche is "to pilfer," a signification that has less applicability to "mischief" or "misdeed" than to "bad echo," since the latter is pilfered from the Ghost's account. Hamlet's "This is miching mallecho" seems to me illustrative of Shakespeare's method of charging his words with several meanings; and I do not here seek so much to insist on
any one interpretation as to point to hitherto unconsidered possibilities in the much-debated phrase if one reads *mallecho* as a play on "bad echo."


17 The technique employed when the pressure of a dramatic action does not alter with an alteration in dramatic form obliquely reinforces the Ghost's puzzling incidental observation that the essential nature of murder does not change with the reason for it (murder is "most foul . . . in the best" [I.v.27]), and obliquely counters the frequent assumption of the *Hamlet* characters that the *stamp* of a deed changes with its form: in a drama where acts of killing are presumed to vary in their essence as in their shape or color, one is indirectly reminded that stopping another man's breath has its own unvarying character, whatever the circumstances.

18 "Hamlet and the Mouse-Trap," p. 710.

Chapter Two

1 *The Elizabethan Dumb Show*, pp. xii, 126-27, 184.

2 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

3 See ibid., p. 101.

4 Perhaps the marching of Fortinbras's soldiers, which H. Granville-Barker calls a "martial little pageant" (*Prefaces to Shakespeare*, p. 115), is intended to recall a form and subject matter of the dumb show and thus to add indirectly to the definition of "dumb show." Suggestively, the sight of this "pageant" leads Hamlet to the conclusion, "O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (IV.iv.65-66).


6 Ibid., pp. 97-98, 93. Remarking on this characteristic of the mime, Mehl also says that "we have in *The Spanish Tragedy* that repetition which was typical of later dumb shows: the pantomime is immediately
followed by explanatory narrative and the same events are presented
twice in succession, the pantomime containing a typical gesture, while
the narrative stresses the more individual part of the story and gives
its general meaning" (p. 65).

7 Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, p. 264


9 Ibid., pp. 125, 133, 150, 153.


11 See, e.g., Mehl, pp. 65–67, on the historical tableau in *The Spanish Tragedy*, "a short symbolic gesture" that is "chiefly directed . . . at the Spanish court being entertained by this performance."

12 John Cunliffe, "The Influence of Italian on Early Elizabethan Drama," *MP* 4 (1907): 601, noting that the Italians used the *intermedii* in both tragedy and comedy, says, "By confining the *dumb shows* to tragedy . . . the English courtiers gave them greater usefulness and significance." The remark may need some qualification, but it does demonstrate the close identification of the English dumb show with tragedy, even though shows appear in other kinds of drama.


16 *The Elizabethan Dumb Show*, p. 61.

17 *What Happens in "Hamlet,"* pp. 146–47.

18 *The Elizabethan Dumb Show*, p. 177 n.
NOTES TO PAGES 36-45

Chapter Three

1 See, e.g., W. W. Lawrence, “Hamlet and the Mouse-Trap,” *PMLA* 54, no. 3 (September 1939): 721-22. J. H. Walter, “The Dumb Show and the ‘Mouse Trap,’” *MLR* 39 (1944): 286-87, says that this method of poisoning was “well known,” but he cites no other use of, or reference to, it in drama aside from the single instance noted by Fredson T. Bowers in “The Audience and the Poisoners of Elizabethan Tragedy,” *JEGP* 36 (1937): 501—Lightborne’s speech in Marlowe’s *Edward II* (V.iv.33-35). And, as Lawrence points out, the poison that Lightborne refers to is a powder, not a liquid. When Iago says, “I’ll pour this pestilence into his ear” (Oth.II.iii.362), Shakespeare figuratively joins the properties of speech, liquid, and disease, as he does in *Hamlet*, and perhaps he assumes a commonplace knowledge of a literal mode of poisoning. But it remains an uncommon method of murder and one uncommon in drama.

2 Norman N. Holland, “The Dumb-Show Revisited,” *N&Q*, 203 (May 1958): 191, commenting on the method of murder as “singular, if not symbolic,” points to the suggestiveness of the poison’s being poured into both ears.

3 Holland, who notes that the word *ear* appears twenty-five times in the play, observes that “the ear . . . links the complex of images and ideas associated with the body, disease, and poison to the play’s frequent references to language” (ibid., p. 191). And J. Swart, “I know Not ‘Seems’: A Study of Hamlet,” *REL* 2, no. 4 (1961): 60-76, links “the poison in the ear which we may now recognize as a symbol” with “protestations of constancy that will prove to be insincere” (p. 73). See also pages 74-75 in the fine essay by T. McAlindon, “Indecorum in *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare Studies* 5 (Dubuque, Iowa, 1969): 70-96.

4 After I had written this—indeed, at a time when my manuscript was being submitted to colleagues for criticism—Maurice Charney’s *Style in “Hamlet*” (Princeton, N.J., 1969), which contains comment on the word *blast*, appeared. Although he does not explore the significance of the speech imagery, he notes the connection between *blast* and “diabolic curse,” as well as “the notions of disease, explosion, [and] annihilating wind” in the word (pp. 81-82).

5 G. R. Elliott, *Scourge and Minister* (Durham, N.C., 1951), p. 21, finds the fact that the speech on the “dram of eale” is stopped by the coming of the Ghost “full of dramatic suggestion.”

6 The reference to the “mole of nature,” like those to “the o’ergrowth of some complexion” and “the stamp of one defect,” is a detail in a
pattern of allusion throughout the play to surface blemish or external manifestation of defect—e.g., loathsome crust, tetter, ulcer, kibe, blister, canker, imposthume, pox, etc. But as the latter may indicate internal corruption, the "mole of nature"—explicitly linked to intrinsic conditions of "birth"—is also a detail in a pattern of allusion to internal blemish, to a poison in the blood. M. M. Mahood, Shakespeare's Wordplay (London, 1957), p. 117, finds in the use of mole here "a nuance of 'something that undermines from within' as well as . . . surface blemish" and thus an echo of a "shadow meaning" here in the subsequent epithet "old mole." J. R. Lowell, "Shakespeare Once More," North American Review 106 (April 1868): 659, observes that there is "a kind of genealogical necessity" in Hamlet's character; and Maynard Mack, "The World of Hamlet," Yale Review 41 (1952): 518, says that "even in himself [Hamlet] feels the taint, the taint of being his mother's son; and that other taint, from an earlier garden." Such observations that Hamlet's nature has been affected by conditions of birth, both general and particular, are in line with implications in the "mole of nature" phrase and are reinforced by implications in the "old mole" epithet, which is charged, like the earlier phrase, with several meanings and which serves, in the context of events, to suggest the internal and the external operations of both nature and fortune.

7 Like other commentators on the passage, I refer here to its general meaning—that the small portion of evil infects the whole substance. But Hamlet does qualify this description of the operation of the "dram of eale": the noble substance in the general censure takes corruption. Thus, there is, in the line, a comment on speech and on the speaker who, forgetting the "infinite virtues," judges only from the "particular fault."


9 Kitto, convinced that Shakespeare "meant something" by the gunfire, questions its use in the first act and then says, "In a later scene we read: Trumpets sound, and cannon shot off within. More guns—and now we understand: Claudius is drinking again, and Gertrude drinks, and the drinks are poison" (Form and Meaning in Drama, p. 262). Kitto's persuasion that the gunfire serves as a symbolic representation of poisoning is supported by such phrases as "contagious blastments," in which critics often find an imagery of poison or disease and which links both with the sequential sounds of trumpet and cannon.

10 Shakespeare's Imagery, pp. 75-78, 160, 328-29.
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11 The metaphorical pattern suggests that one must distinguish between the physical and the spiritual effects of both the literal and the abstract hebenon. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern die; and, in an age less convinced than Shakespeare's of a lesser importance in the physical consequence, testimony to their spiritual health may seem quibble. But it is surely not unimportant that Rosencrantz tries to turn the implication in Hamlet's sardonic remark about Polonius and that, unlike Polonius's hypothetical "Dansker" who "closes ... in this consequence," neither of Hamlet's former schoolfellows on any occasion verbally echoes the spirit of the malice he hears.

Chapter Four

1 See, e.g., W. H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), p. 113, and Charney, Style in "Hamlet," pp. 35-39, 76, 78. Charney has further comment on "the theme of secrecy and poison" (pp. 31-52) and "disease and physical impairment" (pp. 75-88).

2 But see Charney, Style in "Hamlet," pp. 115-23, who finds in the confinement images comment on "man's finiteness and mortality" and on "his attempts to break out of all confining boundaries with 'thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls'" (pp. 114-15).

3 Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare (Chicago, 1951), p. 374, says that "the metaphor Shakespeare uses for [an] upsurge of racial emotion" in Hamlet is "water—the oldest and most universal symbol for the unconscious." He later calls "the Water ... just another name for the infernal forces" that "rush in ... to possess man" (p. 383). I find nothing in Shakespeare's figurative references to water that supports the notion he uses it as a symbol for "the unconscious" and nothing in the play to suggest that revenge is not a matter of conscious choice. But Goddard's proposal that water, in Hamlet, symbolizes evil (though in need of qualification) is supported by the evidence of fact and figure. The elements, necessary for man's health and yet sometimes inimical to health, are potentially symbols for either good or evil. Thus, an element is figuratively employed as it fits particulars of plot and as an elemental attribute or action furthers argument. Details of the plot of Hamlet—the drowning of Ophelia, Hamlet's capitulation to the passion of revenge while on a sea voyage, his coming to terms with sea pirates—are suggestively combined with allusions to flood in descriptions of danger, violence, temptation (e.g., Hamlet is warned that the Ghost may "tempt [him] toward the flood," and Laertes, "in a riotous head," is like "the ocean, overpeering of his list"); and finally, in the First Clown's speech, a water symbolism
explicates the question of choice. By this time, the key word *flood*, its suitability in a drama about the danger in excess, has been established.

4 The armor of Pyrrhus is given a figurative significance: see II. ii. 474–75.


6 Hamlet, who thus describes the Ghost to Gertrude (III.iv.135), refers to the Ghost’s apparel; but since in a speech soon after, he speaks of “habit” in the sense of “use” or “custom” as “a frock or livery, / That aptly is put on” and since all of the earlier details on King Hamlet emphasize the latter’s observance of martial custom, the phrase suggests several meanings, one of which I borrow here.

7 This speech, which presents a positive alternative to both blood revenge and passive endurance, has not received the attention it deserves. But see Harold Skulsky, “Revenge, Honor, and Conscience in Hamlet,” *PMLA* 85 (January 1970): 78–96. Hamlet’s words here to Polonius should be taken into account in any consideration of certain questions that repeatedly exercise students of the play: whether the play adheres to the formula of revenge tragedy and treats the aristocratic code as valid; whether, given a tradition of the heir’s legal right and moral responsibility to avenge a father’s murder and, on the other hand, God’s law forbidding private vengeance, Hamlet is faced with irresolvable moral dilemma; whether Hamlet is an individual settling a private score or an individual instrument of divine justice; whether Shakespeare poses, as the proper alternative to revenge, the Stoic ideal of enduring the vicissitudes of fortune.

8 *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1904), pp. 97, 100.
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10 For example, he calls Claudius ape, pajock, paddock, gib, bat, vice of kings, cutpurse, king of shreds and patches; Polonius, fishmonger and old baby; the Ghost, old mole and true-penny; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, sponges.

11 Harold S. Wilson, On the Design of Shakespearian Tragedy (Toronto, 1957), pp. 47-48, quotes these "disenchanted lines" in contrast to "Goethe's judgment: A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden it cannot bear and must not cast away." Wilson adds, "If either view causes us a shudder of dissent—and Goethe's certainly causes me one—we can hardly deny the grain of truth that each contains."


13 Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," PMLA 70 (1955): 744-45. One might more reasonably suppose that since during the day the Ghost undergoes a trial by fire in his prison-house, his "freedom" at night is a continuation of trial and also contains a potential for purge.

Chapter Five


2 In the phrase "Hillo, ho, ho" with which Hamlet is greeted after he first talks with the Ghost, there is an implied hawk-image, one that he picks up in his answer, "Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come" (I.v.115-16). Again, when he tells Claudius that he feeds on promises and adds, "You cannot feed capons so" (III.ii.99-100), he may—depending on whether feed or capons is stressed—be calling himself a cock, a most suggestive image if he does, indeed, apply it to himself.
And again, when the mad Ophelia, who appears to refer in her songs alternately to Hamlet and Polonius (e.g., “His beard was as white as snow, / All flaxen was his poll”) and to bid them both farewell as if both were dead, sings, “They bore him barefaced on the bier . . . Fare you well, my dove” and “For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy. / . . . And will he not come again? / No, no, he is dead” (IV.v.195–96;164, 167;187,191–92), the word dove, shortly to be used by Gertrude for Hamlet, and the name “sweet Robin,” which echoes the bird imagery, may be references to Hamlet.

3 Charney, Style in “Hamlet,” p. 66, draws this conclusion and suggests that Hamlet here distinguishes between himself (“the heron”) and his former schoolfellows (“preying hawks”).

4 Annotators, who note that “handsaw” is a corruption for hernshaw and that “hawk” is a tool like a pickax, appear to conclude that one must settle on one of the two categories for comparison. But whereas a sane man would compare birds or tools, a “madman” would make a “mad” comparison; and the double meaning in the words implements “a happiness that often madness hits on” (II.ii.212–13).


6 Such a claim moves Edward Topsell, The History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents and Insects (London, 1658), reprinted with a new introduction by Willy Ley (New York, 1967), I, 388, to say, “I do utterly dissent from all them that hold opinion that the Mole or Want is of the kind of Mice.”

7 Traditionally, the dog-image may be applied to ranters, as well as to deceivers. Topsell, The History of Four-Footed Beasts, I, 109, says, “The voice of a Dog, is by the learned interpreted a railing and angry speech.” There are other occasions in the play where the dog-image is evoked for those who are, in some sense, false: Hamlet describes flatterers and opportunists in the lines: “Let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp . . . Where thrift may follow fawning” (III.ii.65,67). And when he says, “For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, . . . Let [Ophelia] not walk i’ the sun” (II.ii.181,184), it would appear that his conviction of her falsity leads him to suggest the image for her.

8 “Porpentine” (I.v.20), “crab” (II.ii.207), “stricken deer” and “hart ungalled” (III.ii.282–83) are odd or oddly used instances of a description of men in beast imagery not cited in my text or elsewhere in footnotes. The passage in which the first appears is interestingly recalled in III.iiv.121–22. The second appears in Hamlet’s remark that Polonius “should be old as [Hamlet is], if like a crab [he] could go
backward." As in other of Hamlet's "mad" observations, it is hard to determine the point at which Hamlet's intended meaning stops and Shakespeare's begins. But conceding that old, rather than young, is the idiom and accepting the obvious meaning of the line, one still is struck by the apt and paradoxical suggestion of a figurative "oldness" that comes from going back rather than forward and by the echo of Ophelia's description of Hamlet's leaving her "with his head over his shoulder turn'd" (II.i.37). See Battenhouse, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 252, for interesting comment on this point.

9 Topsell, The History of Four-Footed Beasts, I, 2, 394–95, 389, 391, 83.

10 Ibid., p. 355.

11 Of course, the comment in the beast-images varies. Some that Hamlet employs are inoffensive; one for himself is commendatory; but most of them are pejorative.

12 In I.i.152–53, Hamlet modestly disclaims a likeness to Hercules. If later in V.i.314–15, there is a hint that he identifies himself with the son of Zeus, the evidence of an alteration in his character is reinforced.


15 Ezek. 16:49.

16 Polonius's accompanying description of "a savageness in unreclaimed blood, / Of general assault" (II.i.34–35) may be intended to recall Hamlet's description of the "vicious mole of nature." If so, unlike Hamlet, Polonius suggests that an inherited condition and the commonness of error, either in men or in young men, add up to excuse.


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19 *Julius Caesar* IV.iii.98–99.

20 If Rosencrantz is distinguishing between question and demand ("He answered our questions sparingly, but our demands freely"), the only conversation we have heard between Hamlet and his former schoolfellows sheds no illumination on the distinction, since Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have made no demands on Hamlet and have asked few questions, none directly to the point of Claudius's commission. Hamlet, on the other hand, has asked more than two dozen questions and has demanded "by the rights of [their] fellowship, by the consonancy of [their] youth, by the obligation of [their] ever-preserved love," that they be "even and direct" with him. One might say that they have been "niggard of question; but, of [Hamlet's] demands, / Most free in [their] reply." It might be argued that Rosencrantz is deliberately misrepresenting the facts to curry favor with the King by implying that he and Guildenstern are carrying out the spirit of the King's request or to obscure their inefficiency as sleuths. But it seems much more likely that the contradiction between the conversation we have heard and Rosencrantz's description of it (if we are not to suppose other unheard conversation in the interim) merely reflects a gentlemanly desire to put the whole matter in the best possible light and a response to what the speaker considers only a natural concern for the health of a kinsman and prince.

21 "The Mystery of *Hamlet,*" *ELH* 30, no. 3 (September 1963): 207.

22 *Form and Meaning in Drama,* p. 335.


24 *The Wheel of Fire,* pp. 316, 35.

25 See Leo Kirschbaum, "In Defense of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern," in *Two Lectures on Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 5–18, for intelligent comment on these two characters.

Chapter Six

1 For evidence of Shakespeare's firsthand familiarity with the *Aeneid,* see T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana, Ill., 1944), 2:466–96. Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theater,* p. 140, says, "The anagoge, or ultimate meaning of the play, can only be
sought through a study of the analogical relationships within the play and between the world of Denmark and the traditional cosmos.

2 Virgil's Aeneas says, "The picture of my dear father came to mind / As I watched king Priam, a man of the same age, cruelly wounded, / Gasping his life away"; and he warns Anchises, "Pyrrhus is coming ... he loves / Butchering sons in front of their fathers, fathers at the altar" (The Aeneid of Virgil, trans. C. Day Lewis [London, 1952], pp. 47, 50). Since he portrays Pyrrhus as one who offends against age, family affections, and religion, the Virgilian hero's account of a king's death is a peculiarly appropriate choice for use in Hamlet; and the words of Shakespeare's Aeneas are reminiscent of the portrayal of Pyrrhus as a father-killer, as well as a king-killer: see, e.g., II.ii.480, 496. An omission in Shakespeare's version of the account of Priam's death is suggestive, particularly so if other versions are familiar to some part of his audience: unlike Virgil's Aeneas (or the Aeneas in Marlowe and Nashe's The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage), Shakespeare's Aeneas makes no explicit reference to Pyrrhus's slain father Achilles; one wonders whether Aeneas's outrage at Pyrrhus's "hellishness" in killing a father is thus given an element of the "particularity" that Hamlet finds in one instance of father-killing, but not in another.

3 Dido's husband, Sychaeus, is treacherously murdered (like Virgil's Priam "before the altar") by her brother Pygmalion, an intemperate "monster." Later, Sychaeus's ghost appears to Dido in a dream and discloses the truth about his death (see The Aeneid of Virgil, p. 20). Shakespeare's choice of Aeneas's tale may have been influenced by pertinent facts in the history of the hearer Dido: both she and Hamlet have experienced the grief attendant on such a deed as the one Aeneas describes, and both have a visitation from a ghost.

4 Virgil's Aeneas, in a notable passage, pauses, his movement of revenge against Turnus arrested when the latter pleads, "... if the thought of a father's / Unhappiness can move you—a father such as you had / In Anchises— I ask you, show compassion for aged Daunus, / And give me back to him." But after momentary indecision Aeneas—like Shakespeare's Pyrrhus after "pause"—sets to work with renewed fury (see The Aeneid of Virgil, pp. 287-88). In the Aeneid Pyrrhus does not pause; nor does he in Dido, Queen of Carthage before killing King Priam (see Clifford Leech, "The Hesitation of Pyrrhus," in The Morality of Art [London, 1969], pp. 41-49). The "wind" that occasions Priam's fall, the subsequent "crash" of Ilium, and the resultant "pause" of Pyrrhus appear to be details introduced into the story by Shakespeare (the questionable editorial emendation of wound to wind in Marlowe's play [II.i.254], to be based on Shakespeare's version). In ascribing arrested motion to the avenger, Shakespeare may have intended only to add another of the details linking Pyrrhus and Hamlet. But if, exploiting the particulars of a well-known passage wherein
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Aeneas, after pause, refuses to pity a father, Shakespeare intensifies ironic undertones in his Aeneas's condemnation of Pyrrhus's ruthlessness, he also reinforces comment elsewhere in Hamlet on the mote in the eye of the avenger.

5 I depart here from my text: Craig follows the Globe text, based in this instance on the First Folio. In Q, the stage directions for the entrance of the Danish King and Queen are Enter Trumpets and Kettle Drummes . . . ; for the entrance of the Player King and Queen, The Trumpets sounds. Dumbe show followes. In F, the directions for the first entrance include Danish March. Sound a Flourish; for the second, they are Hoboyes play. The dumbe shew enters. The explicit call in the Second Quarto for a reiteration of the sound of trumpets serves a dramatic purpose, one that would have a striking impact if a director, by echoes in staging and action, were to underscore the implications in the juxtaposed entrances to the same sound. J. Dover Wilson, The Manuscript of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” and the Problems of Its Transmission (Cambridge, 1934), 2:182, says that the “superior authority” of the directions in the Second Quarto is “incontestable”; that “Q [should be given] the preference when stage-directions differ”; but that omissions should be supplied “from F, where F offers a plausible reading” (187). Directions in Q for the stage use of trumpet, drum, and gun support, in every instance, my argument on both the general and the particular symbolic implications in the use of such noise: the pattern starts when a “Flourish” marks both the entrance and the exit of King, Queen, and their Attendants in Act I and when in the same act the pomp and circumstance of “A florish of trumpets” and the noise of “2. peeces” mark the “rouse” of the King and his courtiers; in Act II again a Flourish heralds the entrance of the King and the Queen, and though nothing marks the entrance of the Ambassadors, significantly “A Florish” heralds the entrance of the Players; in Act III the implication in the juxtaposed entrances of the Danish rulers and the Play rulers to the sound of “Trumpets” is heightened by the fact that the first entrance of King, Queen, and Attendants in this act and at the beginning of Act IV is not accompanied by sound; in Act V “Trumpets” and “Drums” mark the entrance of “King, Queene, and all the state” and, during the fencing match, there are the directions (289, 292) Trumpets the while (not in F,) and Drum, trumpets and shot. Florish, a peece goes off. Subsequent directions in F are more detailed and suggestive: both F and Q, direct that the far sound of a march mark the approach of Fortinbras (359,360); F, but not Q, calls for the entrance of Fortinbras “with Drumme” and contains the final stage direction, Exeunt Marching: after the which, a Peale of Orde- nance are shot off.

6 This phrase comes from Measure for Measure I.iii.54.

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8 See, e.g., III.i.53; IV.v.86; IV.vii.109; V.ii.78; II.ii.383-84; II.ii.502. When "painting" carries a different meaning, it is still used to figure forth falsehood, vanity, futility: the harlot employs a "plastering art" (III.i.51); women substitute "paintings" for the face God gives them (III.i.148); Hamlet, as he looks at Yorick's skull and just before the advent of the mourners with Ophelia's body, says, "Let [my lady] paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come" (V.i.213-14).

9 See Charney, *Style in "Hamlet,"* pp. 137-53, on Shakespeare's "terms of art."

10 See Skulsky, "Revenge, Honor, and Conscience in Hamlet," p. 82.

11 But see Battenhouse, "The Significance of Hamlet's Advice to the Players," p. 9, where he says, "Hamlet, after all, has the spirit of a Herod. The audience can thus enjoy . . . a kind of theater fare which [Hamlet's] aristocratic theory has forbidden." But has Hamlet forbidden Termagants and Herods (a particular stage fare) or overdone Termagants and out-heroded Herods (an acting style that does not hold to character)? The latter seems to me closer to what is actually said; but since Hamlet's words are ambiguous, I carefully record above what he does not specifically say. In arguing that Shakespeare does not endorse the theory expressed in Hamlet's advice, Battenhouse must narrow that advice to a particular meaning. Although he makes an admirable case for the contention that Hamlet's "views reflect canons typically neo-classical" (p. 6), it seems to me that in a play where a man repeatedly utters truths he denies or misapplies in action, one cannot say that that man's words comprehend only a meaning in line with his actions or tastes as elsewhere revealed. One may find in Hamlet's warning to the Players to avoid an excess that destroys illusion an implied dislike for a particular stage matter and in the rule that the play must show "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" a sympathy for a "Jonsonian idea." But to say that if Hamlet did not violate his own rules (in his action as character), we would be stuck with "intolerable drama" is to ascribe to the violated rules only a special meaning—e.g., the rule of modesty that Hamlet violates does not refer to a general modesty Shakespeare admires but to a neoclassical "modesty" he censures. If some of Hamlet's words of advice accommodate a special interpretation, indirectly supplement Shakespeare's criticism of neoclassical drama, and help to characterize Hamlet's "view of life" as "melodramatic," it still seems to me that one must resort to special pleading to argue that Hamlet's advice does not also accommodate general truths that Shakespeare approves. And when Battenhouse finds in Gonzago and in the Player's Speech a mimicking by Shakespeare of styles of "underdone" and "overdone" writing, he appears to me to imply that Hamlet's advice is endorsed by Shakespeare, if the meanings Hamlet may have given his own words (as revealed by the dramatic insets) are not. The question of Shakespeare's
endorsement of Hamlet's advice aside, Battenhouse's argument indirectly provides significant reinforcement for the conclusions of my argument on the show/play symbolism.


14 Craig, who inserts no word in line 169, notes that the line is “usually emended by inserting master after either, following Q, and early editors” (*Works*, p. 928 n). Other editors, with more attention to meter, insert shame or curb. But the logic of the whole passage, which points to custom, habit, use as “angel” or “devil,” as well as the force of the immediate either-or construction and the sense of the words immediately preceding the defective line, suggests that Shakespeare may have written here some such word as “aid,” “act,” or “play,” in contrast to “throw him out.”


16 Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, pp. 360–62, says that there are two Hamlets; that “up to the play scene, the opposing natures in Hamlet are in something like equipoise” (p. 373); that it is “God's Hamlet” who chooses to put on a play (p. 362); that Claudius is “a fit subject for the redemptive power of art” (p. 364); that although Hamlet “has an opportunity to act like Shakespeare,” he does not let the play “speak for itself,” as Shakespeare would do (p. 364); that he makes “the right choice, but then . . . convert[s] an instrument of regeneration into an instrument of revenge” (p. 382); that after the play, Claudius turns from “preparation for a fresh murder to repent the murder that has rendered this further one necessary” (p. 369). And Goddard asks, “If the mere fragment [of Gonzago] . . . could produce this de-
gree of repentance, what might the whole play, left to itself, have effected?” (p. 369). But whatever one might wish, Hamlet does not put on a play for the purpose of redemption or regeneration; and such implications in the label “God’s Hamlet” for the dramatist Hamlet are not true to fact. Second, not only the intention of the dramatist but also the nature of the drama is, as Hamlet demonstrates, relevant to the effect of the drama. If Shakespeare argues that a play can be remedial, he obviously does not ascribe an uplifting or health-promoting force to all plays. And both the idea that a particular result in Hamlet is dependent on the presentation of a play and the idea that quantity (Gonzago enacted from start to finish) would enlarge that result are denied by the fact that an off-hand remark by Polonius effects the kind of self-accusation Claudius expresses after the play-scene. Third, one can no more claim that Claudius’s reaction to Gonzago is repentance than that Hamlet proposes to redeem him with the play. And when Goddard says that the two choices facing man are “art and war” (p. 382), he disregards his own perception elsewhere that art may be a kind of war. This is not to give Goddard’s often suggestive and imaginative insights less than their due but rather to say that he sometimes shortchanges them.

17 These words have produced some extraordinary acrobatics from critics reluctant to confront Hamlet’s savagery: e.g., one critic calls Hamlet’s stated reasons for not killing Claudius “compunctions” and draws a contrast between him and an uncompunctious Laertes who declares himself willing “to cut [a] throat i’ the church”; some of those most disposed to judging Hamlet only by his words arrive variously at the conclusion that here he does not mean what he says; another commentator takes a different tack: “Anyone who knows Elizabethan Literature ought to be aware that none of Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have been greatly shocked by Hamlet’s words.” Censure of Hamlet’s words and action in this scene is sometimes similarly nimble: one critic adds a refinement to the charge of remissness in dispatching the King—murder here, since Claudius is praying, would be “just and merciful”; another, overcome with a sympathy generated by Claudius’s self-condemnation, scants the fact that the “kneeling figure grappling . . . with the problem of repentance” does not repent, and finds Claudius here “morally superior” to Hamlet. The scene is a touchstone to the critic’s bias, subjectivity, insensibility, willingness to equivocate, or sentimentality. Essentially, it presents two instances of choice-making: Claudius opts to persevere in evil; Hamlet chooses to connive at a revenge beyond any shadow of condonation. Claudius has called for “light” and angel help—he is shown seeing, in the clearest light, his sins, the straits to which they have brought him, and the way out; yet he refuses to profit from the reason that tells him of repentance, “What can it not?” Hamlet happens by, conceivably providentially, and is made aware of the King’s heaviness (quite a different matter from an awareness of only violence and treachery); and though his “scanning” it that the King will go to heaven if slain may show lack of knowledge of the King’s spiritual condition, it shows an awareness of Heaven’s rule for the repentant sinner. Yet he refuses to imitate the
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action he ascribes to God and resolves to circumvent (or to utilize for his own ends) the law that he acknowledges. Neither Claudius’s retention of the “offence” in the face of a knowledge of heavenly justice nor Hamlet’s cruelty and presumption in the face of a knowledge of heavenly mercy suggest that Shakespeare is pointing to either man’s moral superiority. What he depicts is choice, choice made in defiance of a law that both choosers acknowledge. The ruthless action both men subsequently adopt is the inevitable concomitant of the choices made here. See John Vyvyan, The Shakespearean Ethic (London, 1959), pp. 138–39, for interesting comment bearing on this scene. A complexity in the matter of choice is suggested in an observation by Roy Walker, The Time Is Out of Joint (London, 1948), p. 95: Hamlet “is obsessed with hatred of evil, not love of goodness, and from hatred only hatred grows.”

18 Many critics find Hamlet changed for the better after his sea voyage: e.g., he is “no longer in the tumult but above it”; he “has acquired some breadth of charity”; he is “become again the ideal prince.” Such views are hard to reconcile with his conduct at Ophelia’s grave. But whether one argues him changed for better or worse, he certainly remains unchanged in one respect: as before, he makes no move against Claudius; as before, he denounces the King only to Horatio. One can no longer adduce that he is incapable of prompt and ruthless action or that he has had no concrete proof of Claudius’s perfidy. It would appear that Hamlet can be roused to murderous action only by immediate and overt challenge or threat to himself, as when he responds to the alarm raised by the hidden spectator in the Queen’s closet, to the letter calling for his execution, or to Laertes’ physical assault on him at the grave: “... take thy fingers from my throat; / For, though I am not splen­tive and rash, / Yet have I in me something dangerous, / ... hold off thy hand” (V.i.283–86).

19 Joseph, Conscience and the King, p. 50.

20 See n. 5 above.

21 Although I employ the common reading of the phrase, Hamlet’s ambiguous reply (“The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing ... Of nothing”) to Rosencrantz’s words (“My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go with us to the king”) suggests that he may have the Ghost in mind, in which case his own words unintentionally and ironically provide even more illumination on the cause and nature of his own state. It would be characteristic of Hamlet to react against expressed regard for Claudius’s kingly authority; to seize an opportunity to remind his hearers, however obscurely, of his father; and to insist that Polonius is with the King, the dead King to whom body cannot be assigned, since he is
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"a thing . . . Of nothing" (the phrase recalls the use of thing to describe the Ghost).


23 Ibid. In connection with Ornstein's comment above, I should like to draw attention to Kenneth Muir's "Imagery and Symbolism in Hamlet," Etudes Anglaises 17 (1964): 352–63, which I came across too late to cite in other contexts. Saying that "a study of all the imagery" in Hamlet will "prevent us from assuming that the play is wholly concerned with the psychology of the hero," Muir adds that it "may also prevent us from adopting the view of several modern critics" who seem "to debase Hamlet's character to the extent of depriving him of the status of a tragic hero" (p. 363). Lest it be hastily concluded that my argument puts me in the latter camp, I want to note explicitly that an integral part of my argument on the significance of the show/play symbolism is that Shakespeare maintains sympathy with Hamlet and, concurrently, Hamlet's status as tragic hero.