

Select University Questions with Answers

I. HAMLET AS A TRAGEDY HAMLET AS A SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

Q. 1 Critically examine *Hamlet* as a Shakespearian tragedy. Is character or destiny responsible for the tragedy of Hamlet?

Or

Write a note on Shakespeare's concept of tragedy with special reference to *Hamlet*. How far is the statement "character is destiny" applicable to this play?

Or

Examining the salient features of *Hamlet* as a tragedy, consider how far it conforms to the accepted norms of tragedy.

Or

How would you read *Hamlet* as a tragedy or a problem play? Why?

Or

"*Hamlet* is not a tragedy, of reflection but a tragedy of diseased thought." Discuss.

Or

"In a Shakespearian tragedy, the accent falls on human responsibility rather than on supernatural suggestion." Discuss with reference to *Hamlet*.

Ans. Shakespeare's idea of a Tragedy. Aristotle defines tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious, and also as having magnitude, complete in itself in language with pleasurable accessories each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear; wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. With Shakespeare, as Dr. A.C. Bradley says, "Tragedy.....is concerned always with the leaders of the state—like Coriolanus, Brutus, Antony, at least as in *Romeo and Juliet* with members of great houses whose quarrels are of public interest. It may be called a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate. But no amount of calamity which merely befell a man

descending from the clouds like lightning could alone provide the substance of its story."

The hero: an exceptional individual. Shakespearian tragedy is essentially the story of one man and depicts his sufferings and misfortunes leading to his death. Shakespeare's hero is a man of noble birth and holds a lofty position in society. He has certain exceptional qualities which command respect and make him a man above the common run of mankind. His sufferings are also of an exceptional kind to produce strong feelings of pity, awe and terror. Shakespeare's heroes are noble and large-hearted—Macbeth, Othello, King Lear—and they occupy an important position in society. *Hamlet* also deals with the tragedy of one man, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark. He is popular among the people and is regarded as the "beloved of the distracted multitude". He is noble in his thoughts and dealings and has a sensitive conscience which prevents him from doing evil acts.

The hero's exceptional suffering. A Shakespearian tragedy is 'cathartic' and depicts the suffering and misfortunes of the hero in an exceptional way to produce in the spectators' hearts the feelings of pity, sympathy, wonder and fear. Hamlet too suffers terribly throughout the play. Hamlet is introduced as a man grieving over the death of his father. But even more than that his mother's hasty marriage with Claudius, a man in every way inferior to Hamlet's father has been a shock to him. The revelation that his father was poisoned by Claudius and the task imposed on him by the Ghost to take revenge drive him to greater mental agony as he is aware of his temperamental inability to avenge the murder. He has too many moral scruples and the realisation of it makes him undergo a greater mental suffering till his death.

Melodramatic element contributing to terror. In Shakespeare's tragedies we have an element of melodrama which contributes to the feeling of terror. *Hamlet* too has tinges of melodramatic elements. In the first Act itself we notice this element. The Ghost has been seen twice by the guards before the play opens. Horatio, the sceptic, is frightened and trembles at the sight of the Ghost. Hamlet too loses his cool at the sight of the Ghost and calls for the help of the angels to guard him. He is shocked even more when the Ghost reveals the true nature of his father's death and imposes on him the duty of avenging his father's death.

Various other melodramatic events take place in the play. The murder of Polonius by Hamlet takes place on the scene before the very eyes of the audience. Laertes revolts against King Claudius and in his furious mood makes angry speeches and demands justice for his father's death. In the graveyard scene Laertes leaps into the grave of Ophelia and is followed by Hamlet and a short scuffle takes place. The play closes with the death of the Queen, having drunk the poisoned wine, the death of Claudius at the hands of Hamlet followed by the death of Laertes and Hamlet at each other's hands. All these add to the melodramatic element of the play.

But more than these melodramatic elements, the feeling of unease and sadness is evoked by the sense of moral disorder and chaos in the world of Hamlet—the time is out of joint, and the state is an unweeded garden. All through the play, we along with Hamlet are faced with the issues of human corruptibility and morality.

Tragic flaw. Tragic flaw plays an important role in the sufferings of a character in Shakespeare's tragedies. Hamlet's tragedy is mainly due to a defect—'irresolution'—in his character. He is capable of impulsive action but not preplanned action. He kills Polonius on an impulse. The result is that the crime turns against himself and gives an opportunity to Claudius to send him to England. The consequence of his irresolution is that he delays his action of avenging his father's death. He thinks too much and meditates upon his own action. Hence he postpones the idea of killing Claudius, who is at prayer, for he thinks that if he murders him at this present moment, instead of suffering for his evils in hell his soul would go to heaven. He wants him to suffer in this world as well as in the next world. Earlier he wants to confirm Claudius's guilt before punishing him. So he gets the play enacted. The play reveals Claudius' guilt. In spite of that he still hesitates to avenge the murder and the enemy takes the initiative. The consequence is that he avenges his father's death at the cost of his own death. Had he been active and avenged the murderer at the time of the prayer, Hamlet would have avoided his own tragic death as well as the death of others.

Character is destiny. In Shakespeare's tragic plays 'Character is Destiny.' A combination of the defect in the character and fate accounts for the tragic end of the hero. In *Hamlet* too we witness Hamlet becoming a victim to this fate which destines his death at the hands of Laertes. The play itself begins with an atmosphere of supernatural power. It is Hamlet's fate that his father was murdered and the Ghost of his father enjoins upon him the duty of avenging his father's death. Hamlet well knows his incapability to carry out this work successfully:

The time is out of joint;—O cursed spite,
That e'er I was born to set it right!

Fate places the hero in such circumstances in which the hero is helpless to act. It is mere accident that Hamlet kills Polonius and has been sent to England the very same day for this act of killing. There again fate intervenes and Hamlet's ship is attacked by a pirate vessel and he returns to Denmark to meet his tragic death. Hence Fate plays a major role in the downfall of a tragic hero. Hamlet too is a fatalist and remarks of his own fate. "There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow" and "there's a divinity that shapes our ends." His end has already been shaped to avenge his father's death at the cost of his own and others' lives.

The conflict—internal and external. The action of a Shakespearian tragedy progresses through conflict which is both internal and external. The external conflict is between the hero and other characters and the internal is within the mind of the hero. In *Hamlet* we find the external conflict between Hamlet and Claudius, and Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet wants to kill Claudius to avenge his father's death and Claudius wants to get rid of Hamlet to ensure his own safety. Laertes wants to take revenge against Hamlet for killing his father and at the end of the play we see the fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet in which both are wounded and meet their deaths. The internal conflict is within the mind of Hamlet, and is revealed to us through his soliloquies. Throughout the play we witness this conflict of Hamlet in which he broods over his incapability to act, his irresolution, and hence his wish to die to escape from the wordly tortures and sufferings. Hamlet undergoes this internal conflict which is a mental torture and the consequence is that at time he takes recourse to madness as an escape.

The tragic waste. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are so noble and exceptionally honest and virtuous that when they suffer we feel that the element of good is wasted. This wastage of good is found in all Shakespearian tragedies. In *Hamlet*, Hamlet is presented as a Prince of nobility, with greatness of honour and genius. In spite of this he is not able to fulfil his father's ghost's wishes successfully without killing himself and hence the element of goodness is wasted; for if he is alive and the circumstances are different he could have as a Prince, done something good to his country. But now it has come to nothing. So in tragedies the expulsion of evil involves the waste of good.

Development in the character: realization of truth and resolution of the problem. In Shakespeare's tragedies we find a marked change in the character of the hero—'the realisation of truth of which he has been ignorant'; as Aristotle says "a change from ignorance to knowledge". Hamlet was the ideal Prince "Th' observed of all observers" in the beginning before his father's death. After his father's death he is in a state of depression and his character deteriorates. The demand of the Ghost causes him to suffer great mental conflict. He finds corruption and treachery everywhere.

In this context, it would do well to consider the problem faced by Hamlet. Why is he unable to take revenge as enjoined by the Ghost? When the Ghost asks him to avenge his father's death, Hamlet feels he has to do more—he feels he has been born to set right the very time which is 'out of joint' and restore moral order to the unweeded garden that Denmark has become. He has not only to bear the rottenness of the world; he has to 'act' in it. If he is to avenge his father's death, his 'act' will necessarily involve him in the general guilt of the world around him; not only because of the killing, but because it involves using the weapons of the corrupt world. Hamlet himself, before the play is over, has become a 'player' by putting on an 'antic' disposition, killed

Polonius, helped drive Ophelia mad, and sent two of his school friends to death. Hamlet never intended to become 'soiled' through such acts, but living in this dirty world, it is inevitable that Hamlet must become 'a little soil'd i' th' working", as Polonius says. Hamlet is troubled by the change and the mutability, the corruption and the infirmity of human life. He is aware of the fine balance between action and word, feeling and thought, but he cannot at first achieve it in himself. He vacillates between indisciplined torrents of emotion and thinking too precisely on the event.

In all Shakespeare's tragedies, the hero undergoes a transformation, generally indicated by a short period of absence of the hero from the scenes of the play. When Hamlet, for instance, reappears—after the voyage to England—he is a different man. He has grown. Till this moment he had been too quick to take the burden of the whole world on his limited and finite self. He had felt the whole time to be out of joint, and that he is to set it right: hence he misjudges Ophelia and he misjudges himself as a vermin crawling between earth and heaven: he takes upon himself to be his mother's conscience, expressly against the Ghost's orders: and most significantly, he postpones killing Claudius because he presumes that he is to decide if Claudius is to get salvation. He has assumed too much in his egocentricity. But by the last act of the play, Hamlet has learnt that there are limits to what human reason can comprehend. The roles of life, he learns, are not entirely self-assigned.

There is a divinity that shapes our ends

Hamlet is now ready for whatever is to happen, seeking neither to foreknow it nor avoid it:

If it be now, 'tis not come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all.

In the graveyard-scene he confronts, recognizes and accepts the condition of being man: he realizes that life is a mystery that man cannot understand fully. The pathos of the tragedy lives in the hero's anguished discovery of a universe more vast, more terrible, more inscrutable than is dreamt of in philosophy. Hamlet suffers to be wise, and in his final surrender to the mystery of his fate lies the glory of man—the essence of tragedy. Hamlet learns that man is not a totally free agent. With this awareness in mind he goes to face the fencing match and the King's intrigues without concern for self. Shakespeare is not concerned with the success or failure but is particular about the nature of man—'what a man is'. And in a tragedy, the truth is learnt too late by the hero to avert disaster.

Moral vision of the world. Poetic justice means that, "prosperity and adversity are distributed in proportion to the merits of the agents." But in Shakespeare's tragedies we do not find this kind of poetic justice for the heroes seem to suffer more than what is merited by their faults. But the overall effect conveyed by the play is not one of causeless suffering or unjust death. We are

led to believe that there is a moral order in the universe and that Hamlet's tragic end is due mainly to his fault. The death of Polonius is justified for he is a meddlesome fool; Laertes dies because he has fallen to evil by plotting with Claudius against Hamlet. Claudius is killed for murdering Hamlet's father, for planning to kill Hamlet and for his other wicked notions. Gertrude dies for her infidelity. These deaths are meted out for demerits and are rightly justified. But what would account for Ophelia's mental sufferings, insanity and death? She is the only innocent girl devoid of evil in the play. So her misfortune does not seem in keeping with a moral order. But Shakespeare's concept of moral order was of a deep kind. The world is too complex and before evil is conquered, it consumes the innocent too.

A unity of tone and effect. Shakespeare maintains a perfect unity of tone and effect in his tragedies. He gives less importance to feminine characters and makes them secondary characters to assist in the development of the plot. Gertrude and Ophelia are the catalysts to enhance the action and no vital importance is given to them. Shakespeare concentrates more upon Hamlet and Claudius, and the success and failure of each one's deeds.

Shakespeare deals with both tragic and comic elements without affecting singleness of emotional appeal. He presents the humorous speeches of Polonius with all his maxims to amuse the audience as well as the readers. Again the talk of Osric and the grave-diggers deviate our attention from the intensity of tragedy. Finally the wit of Hamlet, though comic and sarcastic, amuses us. This introduction of comic elements not only relieves the tragic intensity but also heightens the tragic effect by contrast. However, thematically, it will be seen that the comic and tragic elements combine to form a single emotional appeal throughout the play.

In this unity of tone and effect Shakespeare deviates from the views of Aristotle—that a well-constructed plot should be single in issue. Shakespeare does not stick to this law and his *Hamlet* is far from single in issue. Certain portions of the play can be removed and be enacted independently and without the play's coherence being affected. For example even if we remove Hamlet's talk over the bad habit of drinking and its consequences as well as "Hamlet's soliloquy which begins with "How all occasions do inform against me", the play will not be affected by discontinuity or incoherence. But these are trivialities which did not bother Shakespeare's mind.

Conclusion. Life is mysterious and unpredictable in *Hamlet*. Appearances are deceptive, and little is what it seems. *Hamlet* is a complex play which deals with several interrelated themes. The theme of revenge is prominent but it is no simple revenge tragedy. It deals with the problem of action in an evil world. When the hero comes to terms with the world, it is too late; his death is inevitable, aesthetically if not morally.

HAMLET AS A REVENGE TRAGEDY

Q. 2 "In *Hamlet* Shakespeare presents an incisive analysis of the conventions of the contemporary revenge play" Discuss.

Or

Critically examine *Hamlet* as revenge tragedy, bringing out its superiority over the conventional plays in this genre.

Or

"*Hamlet* belongs to a genre of plays often called 'revenge' tragedies". How far is this statement acceptable? Consider Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of revenge in the play.

Or

"In *Hamlet* Shakespeare presents a revenger who is both ruthless and reluctant". Discuss how this is a conflict basic to the play.

Or

"Hamlet's death is the ultimate result of his being charged by the Ghost to carry out instructions which were offensive to his moral principles." Discuss.

Ans. Introduction. *Hamlet* has its origin in the dramatic tradition of Revenge Tragedy. Revenge implies the wronged individual taking the law into his own hands in order to satisfy an inner passion though in civilised society this function of punishing the wrong-doer is entrusted to the government of the state. The motive for revenge is a primitive emotion to be found in natural man, though it is a dangerous emotion. Revenge—the action of retaliating for an injury done—proved a popular theme for dramatists for it enabled them to depict human passions, render rhetorical speeches, and present violent action. The dramatic value of these features was great in the secular theatre. Early dramatists as well as early audience considered vengeance to be a pious duty laid on the next of kin: it was wild justice, but for drama to be satisfactory and successful something more than strict justice was needed. The old Law claimed an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: vengeance demanded both the eyes, a jaw full of teeth, and above all that the victim, after exquisite torments of body and mind, should go straight to Hell there to remain in everlasting torment. A perfect revenge required, therefore, great artistry.

Seneca: a name associated with Revenge Tragedy. The very name Revenge Tragedy brings to our mind Seneca, the ancient Roman dramatist, who in turn was indebted to Greek mythology for his material. But he varied in his treatment of the themes and produced tragic effect by horrifying incidents, bloody actions and ranting speeches.

The chief features of the Revenge Tragedy. The Revenge Tragedy has a set pattern.

(i) It deals with crime, usually murder, with varying motives.

- (ii) The duty of vengeance is laid on the next of kin or near relative.
- (iii) Invariably a ghost is involved, generally the ghost of the dead which reveals the crime committed and lays upon the hero the duty of avenging the murder.
- (iv) The person who is charged with the duty of avenging the murder encounters many impediments to vengeance.
- (v) The duty is accepted as something sacred and the murder is avenged with disastrous consequences.
- (vi) There is much blood-shed and crude physical horrors and when the murder is avenged, the avenger and all others closely concerned perish together in one gory ruin.
- (vii) The language is generally astounding and bombastic.

The revenge theme. The revenge theme was very popular during the Elizabethan era, for it offered much scope for the display of passions, ranting speeches and bloody actions. The revenge theme deals with exciting plots which arouse the people's emotional excitement to a much greater level than an ordinary theme could. Such plots are found in the revenge tragedy and they have an immediate appeal for the audience. Hence Shakespeare, in his *Hamlet*, adopted the dramatic tradition of the revenge tragedy, but his artistry lifted the play much higher than any play treating this theme. During the Elizabethan era, the Greek and Latin classics were of much interest and the dramatists found the theme of revenge quite imitable. They adopted not only the bloody action and ranting speeches of those early plays presenting the revenge theme but also the supernatural figures and the madness brought on the characters by desperation. Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's own *Titus Andronicus* are the best examples of the dramatic use of this revenge theme in the early Elizabethan age. In both plays are pictured the difficulties which are faced by an injured man in identifying the murderers and punishing them. But they avenge the murders successfully and are satisfied with their revenge.

The supernatural element. An important feature of the revenge tragedy is the ghost of the dead which reveals the crime committed and the identity of the culprit and lays the duty of avenging the murder. The role of the ghost is to urge the avenger to action and the avenger encounters many impediments in achieving the goal. Finally he avenges the murder with much difficulty and perishes in the encounter. *Hamlet*, no doubt, conforms to the tradition of revenge play in the light of these points. Hamlet is enjoined by his father's ghost with the duty of avenging his father's death. When it finds him inactive it appears again to "whet" his action and exhort, him to a speedy revenge. Hamlet, though, finds the time 'out of joint' and determines to set it right. He considers the entrusted work of the ghost as something sacred but he also thinks about the action required of him. Hence he avenges the murder at the cost of his own life as well as the lives of many others. Thus, revenge becomes the central theme of *Hamlet*, and the supernatural element is fully exploited.

Revenge motif in 'Hamlet' The theme of revenge is extended beyond the main character. There are other revenges also. Fortinbras wants to take revenge on Denmark for the losses sustained by his father in a duel with Hamlet's father. Fortinbras is frank and openly expresses his motives. His actions too are honourable; hence he manages to vindicate his father and to win back much more than his father lost. Laertes too seeks to avenge his father's death and the insanity of Ophelia. He succeeds in punishing the murderer at the cost of his own life for his indulgence in foul deeds. Hamlet wants to take revenge against Claudius, the murderer of his father, the usurper of his rights to the throne and the seducer of his mother. He too avenges the death of his father at the cost of his life due to his 'irresolution' and 'inactiveness'. Thus there is the element of murder, adultery, incestuous marriage, insanity, faithlessness—all elements of Revenge Tragedy.

Melodramatic element. Apart from the above mentioned elements, there is the melodramatic element also. There is bloodshed: violent, terrifying scenes are depicted or described in keeping with the Revenge tragedy tradition. For example there is the eavesdropping-scene, Hamlet's assumed madness, Ophelia going mad and drowning, Polonius being killed by Hamlet, Claudius plotting against Hamlet and sending him to England with orders to execute him on English soil, an enraged Laertes attacking Claudius's castle and demanding justice, Laertes and Hamlet leaping into the grave of Ophelia and grappling with each other, the ship in which Hamlet travels to England being attacked by the pirate vessel and finally in the closing scene several deaths taking place. Gertrude dies having drunk the poisoned wine, followed by Claudius who is wounded by Hamlet with the envenomed sword and compelled to drink the remains of the poisoned wine: Hamlet and Laertes die with the wounds of the same poisoned sword at each other's hands. The staging of the 'Mouse-trap' play represents all the horrors on the stage.

Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of revenge. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has all the elements of a Senecan revenge play; however, his treatment of the revenge theme makes the work much more than a mere Revenge Tragedy. Though it is a tragedy of "blood and horror" the treatment of the theme is not so crude and gross as that of the conventional Revenge tragedy. These elements have been refined to raise *Hamlet* far above cheap melodrama. The supernatural element is not crude but acts as an instrument of justice to punish the evil-doer. Again Shakespeare's treatment of the theme of duty—a son's duty of avenging his father's death—is more complex than others. In avenging the murder, in other plays, the material considerations act as impediments. But in *Hamlet* it is Hamlet's own conscience, and his psychological refinement that are the impediments. It is *Hamlet's* own conscience, and his psychological refinement that are his impediments. Above all, the language lessens the tone of cruelty and violence and makes *Hamlet* a higher work of art.

Hamlet as a revenger. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare presents a revenger who is both ruthless and reluctant. As a revenger he must act, on behalf of outraged virtue, to restore a violated order, set right what is 'out of joint'. But the act he is impelled to do, involve him in evil of the kind which he would punish. As the ruthless revenger he exemplifies in his own person the evil which is inseparable from the good in human nature; as the reluctant revenger he can symbolize the good's abhorrence of it.

Psychological analysis in the play. Goggin's remarks on *Hamlet* that it "is not to be regarded as a tragedy of revenge, but as a tragedy of the human soul" is true, for Shakespeare has portrayed Hamlet as a man of irresolution in spite of his extraordinary intellectual genius and personality. Whenever he is called to act upon the Ghost's injunction, he vacillates due to the conflict which is going on within his mind. He meditates upon each of his actions and reflects on life—this makes him an inactive man. A man of deep thought is less man of prompt deeds. Whenever he acts, he does so on impulse, but he is incapable of pre-planned action. Only in his soliloquies do we come to know his real nature. It is Shakespeare's skill in the presentation of the character of Hamlet that distinguishes his play from the conventional Revenge Tragedy.

Complex threads of comparison and contrast elevates "Hamlet". *Hamlet* is no simple Revenge Tragedy. Shakespeare has woven into the play complex threads of contrast of character and ideas on the efficacy and value of revenge to elevate it much above the common plays of the Revenge genre. Shakespeare has broadened the vision of the play to a consideration of the universal mysteries of man's being. Hamlet's task, when placed in the widest moral context, is not simply to kill his father's killer but by doing so to rid the world of the satyr and restore it to Hyperion. The theme of revenge is repeated and contrasted in case of Fortinbras and Laertes. Fortinbras, the son of a dead king and nephew of a reigning king (comparison with Hamlet is obvious) is actively campaigning to set right his father's alleged wrongs. He is all 'hot' for action. Even when his efforts for his father's lands are over, and his soldiers are diverted 'against the Polack', Fortinbras is a contrast to Hamlet as a man of action in a daring enterprise. The sight of his army risking death for a worthless patch of ground comes to Hamlet as a rebuke. Hamlet's soliloquies point out that he is aware of delaying rightful revenge, but he cannot help it. Fortinbras finds a quarrel in a straw: Hamlet, having a powerful and genuine incitement, yet delays his revenge. When he does act, he kills Polonius in mistake for the King, and the second revenge action is ready to begin.

Laertes, as the young son of a murdered father, is all the situation asks for. He is the typical 'revenger'—all that Hamlet is not. His every word and gesture invites comparison with Hamlet. He would cut his enemy's throat in Church while Hamlet spares the king at prayer. If Hamlet feels conscience makes coward of men, Laertes consigns conscience to the devil and declares: "I dare damnation". But the contrast does not disparage Hamlet. What we see

of Laertes as revenger, unhesitant and violent, with neither awe nor scruple, careless both of the safety of the realm and of his own salvation, makes Hamlet's deficiencies in this part glaring. But the revenge of Laertes involves Hamlet as its object. The situation of revenge is revealed as one in which the same man may act both parts; and the paradox of man's dual nature, compound of nobility and baseness, god and beast, is exemplified in the hero's dual roles. And a hero whose tragic role it is to punish and be punished, to do evil along with good, might well be reluctant to perform it. Thus the delay in the action required of Hamlet.

Theme of revenge widened to universal issues. The theme of revenge is seen in no narrow sense in *Hamlet*; it is part of a much broader, much more universal vision—the issue of the human condition. 'To be or not to be' is a question that Hamlet muses upon. It is the premise of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as of the traditional Hamlet legend, that a son should avenge a father's death. But Shakespeare's concept of revenge is not simple. If the play imposes on its hero the duty of revenge, it does not follow that revenge has unqualified approval. The question of revenge is caught up with issue of 'good' and 'evil'. Evil is implicit in the very task of revenge which nature imposes on Hamlet. Thus the theme of revenge becomes part of the fundamental conflict the play exhibits in *Hamlet*. He must participate in life, though reluctantly. However, in the last act there comes a change. Hamlet has come to terms with the destiny of man. He is ready for the death which completes life's universal pattern. He perceives that the universe is governed by some supreme, mysterious design. Revenge still has its ruthlessness, as witness what it does to Rosencrantz: but reluctance, now that he recognizes and submits to a universal order, is at an end. He has accepted his place in this mortal world, and instead of recoiling from what life involves, he is willing to play his part. In the final contest between the two sons avenging their fathers, such tainted with the evil he would destroy, punish one another, yet die forgiving one another. The avenger who kills the King when he has himself received his own death would at last fulfil his duel role. The avenger has recognized a truth which goes beyond all petty revenges and conflicts in "the readiness is all".

Conclusion. To call *Hamlet* a Revenge Tragedy would be to do the work a great injustice; it would ignore the play's artistic superiority over other plays of this genre. The language which evokes a special world befitting great tragedy, the universal issues it takes up and tries to resolve, the complex nature of its hero—all these qualities lift *Hamlet* much above what is conventionally termed 'Revenge Tragedy'. It is a standing example of what a great artist can do with a conventional theme. It is only fitting that its avenging hero Hamlet dies to the beautiful heavenly benediction of Horatio, his friend:

Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest,.....

rather than to the satisfied gloatings of a ghost as in other revenge plays.

II. DRAMATIC STRUCTURE OF *HAMLET* PLOT AND STRUCTURE

Q. 3. Examine the view that, far from being a dramatic failure, *Hamlet* is a most carefully constructed play.

Or

Despite its melodramatic elements, *Hamlet* is a work of artistic construction. Discuss.

Or

Hamlet is a play whose structure is artistic as well as complicated: it is thus more than just the story of a son's revenge. Discuss.

Ans. Introduction. Far from being an artistic failure, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a well constructed play. Theoretically, objections might certainly be brought against the play. Critics may say that emotions in it do not find their objective correlative as T.S. Eliot said. However, a perusal of the play is sufficient to remove all doubts regarding its success as a well constructed play.

Diverse elements to please a heterogeneous audience. A dramatist writes for the audience unlike the poet. Shakespeare, being a man of the theatre, knew well that the Elizabethan audience was far from being a sophisticated audience and it had a penchant for crude and rather melodramatic spectacle. So to entertain such an audience he had to introduce melodramatic scene such as the ghost scene, the play within the play, the graveyard scuffle, the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, Ophelia's madness and her drowning and the tragic death of Polonius. Such incidents were admired by his audience and Shakespeare was possibly influenced by such taste. The "groundlings" had a great love for themes involving revenge and bloodshed. What is noteworthy is that Shakespeare with his genius interrelates all these elements into a cohesive whole and makes *Hamlet* a well constructed play. Each of these elements has some relation to the overall theme or idea.

Form of the play: *Hamlet* has a definite form. The whole play falls into three movements and abides by the rules and regulations of dramatic form with a beginning, a middle and an end.

First Movement—An act of Exposition: The first movement is an act of exposition. It exposes the murderer, the villainy of the murderer and the duty of an avenger. It may even be called the Ghost's Act for the ghost predominates it and it is through this supernatural power that everything is exposed and revealed to the avenger as well as the audience. It lays the foundation of the revenge to be taken by the next of kin of the murdered person. It also presents Claudius as the 'mighty opposer' of Hamlet. The domestic life of Polonius is portrayed in contrast to the royal and political life. Thus the Polonius family is linked to the main action. Finally it voices the secondary theme, "Frailty, thy name is woman." There is a proper link between the first and second movements:

the first movement ends with Hamlet's realization of his duty to avenge his father's death as well as his inadequacy:

The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

The Second Movement. In the second movement we find the development of the personality of Hamlet, the full exposition of the secondary theme, and Hamlet's tragic errors. Hamlet shows a gradual development in character. He feigns madness to find out the truth and enacts the 'Mouse-trap' play to confirm Claudius' guilt. The play confirms the king's guilt. In spite of that Hamlet is inactive due to irresolution. With Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia in the nunnery scene where he condemns her 'frailty' and advises her to join a convent, and his interview with his mother in the closet scene where he condemns his mother's 'frailty' and awakens her sleeping conscience, the secondary theme "Frailty, thy name is woman" comes to a climax. Hamlet delays in his action of avenging the murder. He refuses to kill Claudius at prayer, and kills Polonius on an impulse. This error of Hamlet accounts for his journey to England. Furthermore, by killing Polonius Hamlet who has to avenge his father's death becomes a victim of revenge by another son, for killing a father.

Third Movement—the crisis of the action. In the third and final movement the action comes to an end. Laertes wants to avenge his father's death and is misled by Claudius into adopting foul means to kill Hamlet. Meanwhile a change occurs in Hamlet's character. After his escape from the pirates, Hamlet returns to Denmark, as a wiser, more mature and truly philosophic man. The short scuffle in the graveyard leads immediately to the fencing match and hastens the end of the action. The action of the play comes to an end with the death of almost all the important characters except Horatio and Fortinbras.

Thus there is a gradual development in the progress of the plot. Hamlet, a witty and energetic genius deteriorates in character as the play progresses, but regains his lost balance of mind with an added strength at the end of the play before he dies.

The role of chance. Chance plays an important role in the life of Hamlet. Some critics are of the views that the role of chance in the play operates within a larger design. Most of the events which move the action forward happen by chance—the players' arrival, killing of Polonius, the attack of Hamlet's ship by the pirates' vessel and Hamlet's return to Denmark, and the arrival of Fortinbras in the last scene to maintain order in the closing of the scene and action. Some people object to this use of chance. But we must admit that the chance happenings are plausible, never improbable.

Conclusion. In *Hamlet* there are twenty scenes and every scene in it is a masterpiece. They are constructed in such a way that they perform several functions. They provide contrast between courtly and humble life and between tragic possibilities and humorous activities. They help to advance the story, to create and resolve mystery and tension. They show the development of characters

and allow individuals to travel from Denmark to Norway, Poland to England, from the court to the countryside. The division of the play into scenes also helps to give the impression that time is passing. Finally it encourages the audience to contrast the prompt actions taken by Fortinbras and Laertes with the delayed action of Hamlet. In brief, the construction of scene itself gives an impression of a coherent plot.

Thematic coherence and structural unity: *Play-within-the-play* and subplots contribute to over all unity. *Hamlet* is organized about the crime which is already past when it begins but which is re-enacted in its central scene, and this re-enactment is plausibly motivated by Hamlet's thought that the Ghost may be a deceiving spirit. The fundamental problem in *Hamlet*, if the play is to be revealed as a coherent dramatic design, is to find a relation between Hamlet's task of revenge and the universal mysteries of man's being which occupy his mind. In the plot of a son's revenge Shakespeare found the basis of a structure linking beginning, middle, and end. As Harold Jenkins points out, "An exposition opening with the ghost of the father already dead and then presenting his successor has its tremendous climax in the revelation of the murder to the son, who accepts the charge of revenge. In the big central scene the murder is not once but twice re-enacted on the stage and the murderer confronted with his crime. But as this also alerts him to the threat of vengeance, it precipitates counter-plots which lead to a catastrophe in which the hero at length achieves revenge at the moment of his own death. In the three ceremonial court scenes in which at the beginning, middle, and end, son and uncle face one another in mutual but undeclared hostility, there is a kind of theatrical symmetry.

What Shakespeare stresses from the first is the bond between Hamlet the son and his father. An antithesis between the brother kings—the senior Hamlet and Claudius—is part of the moral and dramatic structure. The situation in which Hamlet finds himself before he as yet knows anything of the murder is one in which the god-like man is dead and supplanted by the beast-like. The very vocabulary of Hamlet's speech beginning "O that this too too sullied flesh" (Act I. Sc. ii) with alternating words like 'angel' and 'celestial' with verbs of animal connotation suggests a descent from heavenly embraces to bestial feeding as far as Hamlet's mother is concerned. This descent from the heavenly to the bestial extends to the whole state of Denmark which has become "rotten", an unweeded garden. Hamlet's task, when placed in the widest moral context, is not simply to kill his father's killer but by doing so to rid the world of the satyr and restore it to Hyperion. With the appearance of the Ghost a second time, the structure of the action emphasizes that the 'command' that made the climax of the exposition has failed to be performed.

It is a principle of Shakespeare's dramatic art to combine his plot with sub-plot which will repeat or contrast with it. And his exposition accordingly has been ready with other sons besides Hamlet. Fortinbras—son of a dead king

and nephew of a reigning king—invites obvious comparisons with Hamlet. The other son is Laertes. Fortinbras contrasts with Hamlet as a man of action; Hamlet realizes that he is neglecting his action.

Hamlet is not simply a tragedy of revenge in which the crucial deed has to be deferred until the end: it is a play about a man with a deed to do who for most of the time conspicuously fails to do it. The play-within-the-play, which re-enacts the murder and also contains an image of the Queen as an inconstant wife, is at the centre of *Hamlet*. After the play the King is shown confessing, if not repenting, his sin and the Queen is taxed with her sin. Hamlet's verbal onslaught on his mother after the play balances his denunciation of Ophelia before it. In the central sequence the movement of events intertwines the two actions of revenge and marriage and brings them to their crises together.

The meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia simultaneously tells Ophelia that Hamlet will not marry, the King that he *will* revenge. What one crisis means for Ophelia a later act will show. In the other, just when revenge brings its threat to a climax as the King is confronted with his guilt, it begins to recoil upon itself. Hamlet has his moment of triumph, which strengthens his grim resolve ('Now could I drink hot blood'), but his eagerness to kill the King is first paralysed in the prayer scene and then in the Queen's chamber frustrated by his killing Polonius instead. When the Ghost now suddenly returns and Hamlet stands convicted of neglect, the corpse of Polonius lies before them and the second revenge action is ready to begin. This, along with the fate of Ophelia, occupies most of the fourth act. The Fortinbras episode looks both ways: it closes that part of the play which emphasizes the inactive hero; but it simultaneously serves to introduce the counter-action which will present his opposite. 'Young Laertes', however, has apparently absorbed the fiery role originally envisaged for 'young Fortinbras'.

As the son of a murdered father Laertes is all the situation asks for. He appears indeed to have been conceived to exhibit, even to the verge of caricature, all that Hamlet as revenger might have been; and no soliloquy is needed to point the difference out. Here is a man whose resolution does not pale with thought. Hamlet knew 'the dread of something after death' and the 'conscience' that makes men 'cowards'; but Laertes consigns 'conscience' to the profoundest pit' of hell and says 'I dare damnation'. What we see of Laertes as revenger, unhesitant and violent, with neither awe nor scruple, careless both of the safety of the realm, and of his own salvation, makes Hamlet's deficiencies in his part such as we can hardly wish away. In the end both meet their deaths because Hamlet is too magnanimous to 'peruse the foils', Laertes is mean enough to take advantage of it.

What is rarely emphasized, yet is vastly important, is that the revenge of Laertes for his father involves Hamlet as its object. The hero charged with a deed of vengeance now also incurs vengeance. The situation of revenge is revealed as one in which the same man may act both parts; and the paradox of

man's dual nature, compound of nobility and baseness, god and beast, repeatedly placed before us in the words of the play and represented in its action in the contrasting brother kings, is also exemplified in the hero's dual role. The hero who is both punisher and punished finally kills the King only on receiving from Laertes his own death-wound. And unless we perceive the significance of Hamlet's guilty deed—the revenger of his father killing another man's father—it is difficult to see how the ending of the play can be understood.

In the dramatization of the Hamlet story, it is the role that determines the character, not the psychological make-up of the man that determines what he will do. So Hamlet has to become a different kind of revenger. Instead of the hero of concealed but unswerving purpose, celebrated for his courage and virtue, we have a hero who in seeking to right a wrong commits one, whose aspirations and achievements are matched by failures and offences, and in whom potentialities for good and evil hauntingly coexist. And this is what transforms the single-minded revenger into the complex representative of us all.

A hero whose tragic role it is to punish and be punished, to do evil along with good, might well be reluctant to perform it; that is not of course to say that Hamlet at the beginning of the play, as he mourns his father's death and his mother's marriage, can be prophetically aware that before the play is done it will be his destiny to kill Polonius and be killed by Laertes. But the play itself is aware of the destiny it is preparing for him and of that larger destiny of which the dual revenge becomes the symbol; and as the play shapes itself in the dramatist's imagination it is able to communicate to its hero a reluctance—not indeed to kill Polonius, which Hamlet does not show, but to live the life required of him in a world which seems dominated by evil, which he does show from the beginning. It is in this sense that it is possible to say that delay is inherent in the story. It is not merely that the story requires revenge to be deferred till the end but that it leads the hero towards a destiny which a man who aspires to virtue does not willingly accept. Such a destiny in a tragic play is best suited by a reluctant hero, and not the less so because it leaves him saying 'I do not know Why....'

What Hamlet shrinks from is not the act of vengeance but the whole burden of living. The questions we find him asking, as Shakespeare takes us into Hamlet's mind and imparts to him his own intellectual curiosity, concern not so much the nature of revenge as the nature of man; but they are questions which he is able, and indeed impelled, to ask by reason of what in his revenger's dual role he has become.

The 'nunnery' scene, as it is called, and indeed Ophelia's whole part in the play, has generally been misunderstood. The essential of her story is that she is the woman Hamlet might have married and did not. The dialogue with Ophelia only brings to the surface what has been in Hamlet's mind before, as the 'method' of his madness has been used to show. He has associated Polonius's

daughter with ideas of mating and breeding and the sort of life they forth.

Conclusion. The essential subject of *Hamlet*, suggested by and focused in the old story of a son's revenge, is, then, the intermingling of good and evil in all life. The world to which the hero's human destiny commits him is one in which Hyperion and the satyr are brothers, sprung from the same stock, which also lives in him. Seeing the satyr apparently triumphant, he is possessed by a sense of the all too fertile viciousness of the life in which his own life shares. It is a life in which he must, yet is reluctant to, participate. He longs for death, refuses marriage and procreation, his nature resistant to what nature wills. This is the fundamental conflict the play exhibits in Hamlet.

In the last act, there comes a change. Hamlet has lived all his life under death's shadow; and in the skulls the grave-digger throws up he sees quite simply the common destiny of men. It is a destiny he appears now to accept. In the final scene, just before the fatal fencing-match, he says:

If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not now, yet it will come, and adds 'The readiness is all'.

Revenge still has its ruthlessness, as witness what it does to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; but reluctance, now that he recognizes and submits to a universal order, is at an end. The question of 'to be' or 'not to be' is finally answered. In the final contest between the two sons avenging their fathers, each tainted with the very evil he would destroy, punish one another, yet die forgiving one another. With evil itself in the person of the King there is of course no reconciliation. The avenger who kills him when he has himself received his own death-wound at last fulfils his dual role. The plot and theme have finally been resolved in quite a masterly manner.

PLAY-WITHIN-THE-PLAY

Q. 4. What is the significance of the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*?

Or

"The play is the thing", says Hamlet. Consider the importance of the play-within-the-play. Why has it been regarded as the pivot of the dramatic action in *Hamlet*?

Or

"At the centre of all, within nutshell truths inside it, is the play-within the-play which re-enacts the murder. This also contains an image of the Queen as an inconstant wife." Discuss the dramatic importance of *The Murder of Gonzago* in the light of this statement.

Ans. Motive for enacting the play. Hamlet has been entrusted with the duty of avenging his father's death by his father's Ghost. He learns that his father has been murdered by Claudius. But he hesitates to execute the command of the Ghost. He has doubts about the genuineness of the Ghost and Claudius's sin:

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

He wishes to have strong proof before taking revenge and allows time to lapse until the arrival of the players. Their arrival inspires him with a sudden idea:

I'll have grounds
More relative than this. The play's the thing
Where I'll catch the conscience of the King.

He conceives of the plan of staging a play to put Claudius on trial.

Preparations for the play. Hamlet receives the players with enthusiasm and plans with them to stage a play called 'The Murder of Gonzago,' with some modification in the speeches. On the day of staging the play Hamlet prepares the players well in advance to make the play a great success. He advises them to "suit the action to the word, the word to the action" so that they would not "overstep the modesty of nature", for the aim of a play is to hold the mirror up to nature. He then seeks the help of Horatio, to whom he has already revealed the secret of the Ghost's revelation, to watch the King's feelings while the play is staged. Thus he advises him:

Give him needful note,
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,
And after we will both our judgements join
In censure of his seeming.

Thus he prepares the players, Horatio and himself to 'catch the conscience of the King'. The play is to be the mainspring for further action. The King, the Queen and the courtier are invited to see the play.

The dumb-show, the dumb-show is the prelude to the actual staging of the play. Hamlet chooses to sit at Ophelia's feet rather than next to the Queen, partly to encourage the idea that his madness is caused by disappointed love, but mainly because he could not watch the King's face if he sat next to the royal pair. Hamlet plays the part of the commentator too. The dumb-show is the first part of the King's ordeal. The dumb-show itself represents very closely the crime of Claudius. Yet it is surprising that he does not betray his feelings. Some critics feel that Claudius, being lost in his conversation with the Queen, missed the dumb-show. Certain other critics feel that Claudius does see the show, but he hopes that it is only an unlucky coincidence that 'The Murder of

Gonzago' resembles his own crime or he naturally suspects that the choice of the play is deliberate and knows that Hamlet is watching his reactions. As the remarks about second marriages, which he has heard, are grossly offensive, he pretends not to have noticed them. The dramatic importance of staging this dumb-show is that as the play is stopped before the end. Shakespeare, in order to inform the audience of the full plot, uses the dumb show for the purpose.

The actual play: The dumb-show is followed by the actual play. The Murder of Gonzago with its deliberately artificial style, full of repetitions and circumlocutions enables us to concentrate on the real drama which is being enacted, with Hamlet's eyes riveted on his uncle's face with the King trying hard not to show by his face what he is feeling. The words of the Player Queen emerge with dreadful clarity from the surrounding verbiage:

In second husband let me be accurst!
None wed the second but who killed the first
.....
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed.

Hamlet by his interjection makes it certain that the point shall be understood: "That's wormwood, wormwood"... "If she should break it now!"..... "O, but she'll keep her word."

Claudius's guilt is confirmed. After the exit of the Player Queen, Claudius appears to be cowed. Hamlet's assertion that the play is titled 'The Mouse-trap' is a veiled threat of which the King is perfectly aware, especially as 'mouse' is his term of endearment for Gertrude. When Lucianus enters, Hamlet's comment that he is 'nephew to the King' is taken as another threat, and Claudius suspects that Lucianus's lines are written by Hamlet himself. Claudius watches for the second time the re-enactment of his crime and is about to reveal himself, and when Hamlet gives a last twist to the knife by explaining, 'You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife,' the King rises, 'frighted with false fire'. The Ghost's story is confirmed.

The consequences of enacting the play. By enacting the play Hamlet has confirmed the Ghost's story, but at the expense of revealing his own knowledge to the King. His own fate is sealed unless he follows up his victory. The victory is imperfect, in any case, because Hamlet's behaviour during the performance, as well as the apparent gross lack of the taste in his choosing a play with such a theme can allow the King to cover up his guilt with a show of anger. On the other hand, Hamlet is extremely happy at having discovered the truth. Now he gives more weight to the words of the Ghost. He says to Horatio, "O Good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound". He intends to act immediately and reveals his fury:

Now could I drink hot blood
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on.

Thus the situation leads to the crisis or turning point of the play. Hamlet has to act now. But when he gets the opportunity to carry out his work, he fails to act as he finds Claudius at prayer. In his soliloquy he justifies his lack of action by saying that if he kills Claudius who is at prayer, his soul would enjoy the pleasures of heaven, instead of suffering the tortures of hell.

Dramatic significance of the play-within-the-play. The Gonzago play puts both Claudius and the Ghost on trial, the former for 'fratricide' and the latter for its 'honesty.' Hamlet's doubts are removed. Still he hesitates to act.

- ② Hence this play emphasises Hamlet's procrastinating nature. Hamlet is inspired by the play with greater desire to act but it fails to have the effect to make him act. It only shows him as a 'pigeon-livered' man who shrinks from action on moral grounds. To Wilson the play-scene is undoubtedly central to the structure of *Hamlet*. It allows Hamlet and Claudius to know exactly what the other feels.
- ③ It is a climax and a crisis, and the pivot of the action in *Hamlet*. Now Hamlet has no excuse for delay; Claudius will set forth his own machinations to destroy Hamlet: and with the unseen hand of fate, Hamlet will grow to self realization.

- Hamlet a mouth-piece.** This play-within-the-play further helps the
- ① dramatist to reveal his own theories of play-acting. Hamlet acts as a mouth-piece of Shakespeare, through whom he expresses his ideas of play-acting and
 - ② shows his contempt for the contemporary actors. To Shakespeare, the aim of drama is to hold the mirror up to nature, with the actors not indulging in extravagant passions. They should "suit the action to the word, the word to the action, and should not "overstep the modesty of nature". This piece of advice given by Shakespeare through Hamlet shows Hamlet at his best. He is playing the part of Deputy Providence, plotting, arranging, baiting the trap etc. His
 - ③ making fun of Ophelia, his darting sarcasm at his mother and playing the part of a Chorus, his mocking the King, all show his versatile genius.

- Conclusion.** Act III, Scene II thus has a dramatic significance which cannot be ignored if we are to understand the thematic issues of the play. The play-within-the-play serves to emphasise that Hamlet is not the traditional
- ② revenge play hero—after the Ghost's words have been confirmed he yet spares Claudius life because the King is praying. The problem is that Hamlet sees himself as one who is to ensure the victim's punishment in the next world also. He is overestimating his role, and it is only towards the end that he will truly understand that man must accept certain conditions and act within them readily. However, it would be wrong to consider the scene the central act and the crisis of the play. It is important as far as bringing Claudius and Hamlet to a full awareness of one another's true nature. From this point there can be no averting the revenge or the tragedy.

DRAMATIC RELIEF OR INTERMINGLING THE COMIC WITH THE SERIOUS IN *HAMLET*

- Q. 5. Shakespeare seldom adhere to what classicists call 'the purity of genres'. How does he mingle the comic and the serious in the tragedy of *Hamlet* and to what effect?

Or

Critically examine how far Shakespeare was justified in introducing comic elements in a tragic play with reference to *Hamlet*.

Or

The intermingling of the comic and the serious gives to Shakespeare's plays a broader vision and heightens the dramatic tension. Do you agree? Discuss with reference to *Hamlet*.

Ans. Introduction. The classicist believes in what we call 'the purity of genres'. Hence the classical dramatist either wrote a comedy or a tragedy; he never mixed the comic and the serious. However, life is not purely comedy or tragedy; it is a mixture of laughter and tears. Shakespeare's aim was to hold the mirror up to nature—as Hamlet declares the purpose of a play to be. Hence he violated the classical theory and mingled comedy with tragedy. All his tragedies have a tinge of comedy. In *Macbeth*, for instance, we have a comic element in the person of the Porter. In *King Lear*, we have the Fool. In *Othello*, though we do not have any comic element as such, yet we have some light-hearted conversation between Desdemona and Emilia. In *Hamlet*, we have a number of comic elements.

Purpose of the comic elements. The mixture of comic element in a tragic theme serves various purposes. The comic element in a tragic play serves to relieve the tragic tension of the play. Thus it offers dramatic relief. Secondly earthly life is a blend of both happiness and sorrow. Nobody is blessed either with happiness alone or with sorrows only. Hence a blending of both comedy and tragedy makes the play more realistic. Finally it heightens the tragic effect of the play.

Threads of the comic in *Hamlet*. Four distinct elements of comedy may be found in *Hamlet*.

(i) *The humour provided by Polonius:* Polonius, the garrulous old fool with an element of the knave in him is regarded as a comic character in the play, but it is by no means certain whether Shakespeare intended him to be so. He has a worldly wisdom which is shallow and superficial and this is vividly seen in his advice to his son who is leaving for France. He advises him to be familiar by honest means, to beware of quarrels, to dress carefully, to strengthen honest and reliable friendship, never to give vent to his feelings and opinions but to accept others' opinions, and to be true to himself, so that he may be true

to others. This speech of Polonius is an epitome of wordly wisdom but it has become an object of ridicule to others for it appears trivial and platitudinous.

Next we have his conversation with Reynaldo. He wants his servant, through whom he sends some paper and money to Laertes, to spy on his son's behaviour and his mode of life in Paris. He advises Reynaldo to adopt any means, even to charge Laertes with false charges, to elicit the truth from his friends. The method that he wants Reynaldo to adopt to find out Laertes's mode of life is amusing and his talk with Reynaldo makes the people laugh at him and his worldly wisdom. Polonius's love for his own voice and his manner of talking with long ornamental speeches often become objects of fun and laughter. He always declares that he wants to be brief in his speeches. But unconsciously he lengthens his speech and once it offends the Queen too. The Queen asks him to give her "more matter, with less art." Still he is lengthy and cannot cut short his speeches.

His skill of punning on the words too is amusing. He has a tendency to play on words and is ready to share his knowledge with anyone who is willing to listen. Hence when Ophelia says that Hamlet has been making "many tenders of his affection" to her, Polonius begins to play on the word "tenders". He says to Ophelia:

Marry, I'll teach you; think yourself a baby,
That you have ta'en these *tenders* for true play;
Which are not sterling. *Tender* yourself more dearly;
Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
Running it thus—you'll *tender* me a fool.

Even the royal people become a victim to his long ornamental speeches and playing upon words. When speaking to the Queen, he plays upon the word "mad":

Your noble son is *mad*:
Mad I call it; for, to define true *madness*,
What is't but to nothing else but *mad*?

Thus Polonius's manners and talk amuse the audience and provide a comic element to the play.

(ii) *The mordant wit of Hamlet.* Hamlet's wit most of the time finds expression in puns and quibbles. At times it seems as though quibbling is a habit of thought with Hamlet. It is part of Hamlet's malady that, while his power to act is paralysed, his intellect functions with unusual strength. When he lacks the capacity of prompt action, he tries to derive satisfaction by engaging in verbal duels. It is in such contests that we find examples to Hamlet's wit. His talk with the King is deliberately puzzling and provocative. When the King addresses him as "my cousin Hamlet, and my son", Hamlet in an aside says: "A little more than kin, and less than kind." When the King asks him "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" Hamlet replies "Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun." He speaks with the same tone of insulting humour to the Queen. When she finds fault with him, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much

offended", Hamlet answers, "Mother, you have my father much offended". The Queen immediately begs him to speak directly; "Come, Come, you answer with an idle tongue". To this Hamlet replies: "Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue." His wit scintillates us with a hard brilliance. After Hamlet has murdered Polonius, the King asks him where Polonius is. Hamlet replies: "At supper" The King is puzzled and asks: "At supper? Where?" And Hamlet replies: "Not where he eats, but where he is eaten; a certain convocation of politic worms are even at him". The King is provoked at his words and once again asks him where is Polonius. This time Hamlet replies: "In heaven. Send thither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th' other place (hell) yourself." He indirectly hints at Claudius's wicked nature and says the reward for his wicked nature is only hell and not heaven. He also teaches him the moral value of marriage. While bidding farewell to the King he addresses him as "dear Mother". When the King tries to correct him as "Thy loving father, Hamlet", Hamlet insists. "My mother—father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so, my mother."

Hamlet treats Polonius with contempt, playing before him the part of a lover turning mad through jilted love. He sharpens his wit at Polonius's expense. Polonius intends to test his madness and asks him. "Do you know me, my lord?" and Hamlet replies "Excellent well; you are a fishmonger." Hamlet pretends to be mad and enquires of him if he has a daughter. When Polonius says that he has one, Hamlet insults him saying: "let her not walk i' the sun; conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter may conceive:— Friend, look to it." This is how he refers to Polonius in front of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling clouts". He has great contempt for him and when Polonius says that he once acted the role of Julius Caesar and was killed by Brutus, this is how he makes fun of his boasting nature: "It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there."

With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet is at first friendly, but after worming out their secret, he is crafty, and occasionally, openly hostile. His sharp and cutting sarcasm begins with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's spying attitude. When Hamlet finds out that they have come to spy upon him Hamlet says: "You were sent for: and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour. I know the good King and Queen have sent for you." When Guildenstern asks, "Good, my Lord, vouchsafe me a word with you", Hamlet replies, "Sir, a whole history." Again when Guildenstern informs him of Claudius's sickness Hamlet tells him that this should be conveyed to the King's physician and not to him. When Rosencrantz tells him that his mother is surprised at his behaviour, then again he speaks in a comic vein: "O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother!" He then calls them a sponge "that soaks up the King's countenance, his reward, his

authorities." Not only these but more examples could be cited to prove the comic elements provided by Hamlet.

He is more cruel and obscene in his attitude towards Ophelia. He advises her to join a nunnery so that she may not become "a breeder of sinners." He satirises the feminine sex as: "I have heard your paintings too well enough: God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another; you jig, you amble and you lisp, and nickname god's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance." In the play-scene he makes witty remarks which are also obscene. He tells her that it is "a fair thought", "to lie between maids' legs", and when Ophelia questions: "Will 'a tells us what this show meant?" Hamlet replies: "Ay, or any show that you will show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means!" When Hamlet gives her a clear picture of everything that is staged, Ophelia appreciates his skill in interpreting: "You are as good as chorus, my lord." Immediately Hamlet replies: "I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying."

(iii) *The humour in the grave-digger scene.* The grave-diggers are the professed Clowns of the play and they provide a unique kind of humour in the play. The humour provided by the grave-diggers serves to lighten the tragic stress and strain caused by the shock of Ophelia's death. But their humour is not out of place. In keeping with the sombre spirit of the play, they jest about graves and corpses, bones and skulls. As they discourse on death they comment on growing in the most light-hearted manner: "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, he drowns not himself." Then the first grave-digger says there is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditches, and grade-makers," because "they hold up Adam's profession." He then puts forth a riddle to the second grave-digger. "What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the ship wright, or the carpenter?" He solves it himself "A grave-maker; for the houses he makes lasts till doomsday". When Hamlet and Horatio arrive the witty talks are intensified with more humour. Hamlet asks, "Whose grave is this, Sir?" the first clown answers, "Mine, Sir". When Hamlet tells him, "Thou liest in it", the grave-digger replies, "You lie out on't, Sir". When Hamlet asks for whom he is digging the grave, the grave-digger relies "one that was a woman, Sir, but rest her soul, she is dead."

(iv) *The humorous talk of Osric.* The conversation between Hamlet and Osric constitutes the final comic element in the play. Hamlet well understands Osric's pompous manner of speaking and use of inflated vocabulary. Hence he makes fun of him and calls him a "water-fly". Also he makes him nod his head to whatever Hamlet says, treating him as a fool. In Osric, Shakespeare satirises the affected language and euphemistic fashions of the Elizabethan courtier.

Dramatic significance of the 'comic' scenes. While Hamlet's wit is an indicator of his moods throughout the play, it also serves to highlight the disturbed mental state he is in. The scenes which highlight Polonius as a ridiculous character are so placed as to tone down the tension of an earlier scene or to prepare for the intensity of the scene to come. Many of the words used by Polonius or about him serve an ironic purpose and offer a grim kind of humour. The grave-digger scene is placed with superb imagination and skill where it is. It comes immediately after Laertes and Claudius have plotted Hamlet's death and before the final scene of the play in which Hamlet, we are now assured, is to meet his death. It affords the audience a view of a changed Hamlet whose musings on death are now more philosophical than bitter, more wise than confused. The clowns' comments exhibit a shrewd insight which is relevant to the context of the play's theme. Moreover, the tempo builds up from the trivial to a more serious level till the shock of Ophelia's death breaks upon Hamlet—and he comes face to face with the grim reality of death. And we the readers or the audience can appreciate the grim and tragic irony all the better.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL SCENES

Q. 6. Discuss the dramatic importance of the (i) opening scene; (ii) nunnery scene; (iii) closet scene. How has Shakespeare made these scenes effective in the context of the play *Hamlet*?

Ans. **Introduction.** In *Hamlet* there are twenty scenes and every scene in it is a masterpiece. The most celebrated of these are the opening scene, the nunnery scene and the closet scene. These scenes help to advance the story, to create and resolve mystery and tension. Further they show the development of character.

(i) **The Opening Scene:** The first scene of a play is always important; it must succeed in catching the attention of the audience. Coleridge says: "Shakespeare's opening scenes strike at once the key-note and give the dominant spirit of the play, as in *Twelfth Night* and in *Macbeth*—or finally, the first scene comprises all these advantages at once, as in *Hamlet*." The first scene gives the audience a number of facts, introduces the source of the action of the play, creates an atmosphere and excites suspense and curiosity.

Significance of the Opening Scene. The chief purpose of the opening scene in *Hamlet* is not to introduce characters but to create a suitable atmosphere for the emergence of the supernatural to expose the action of the play. It provides information—the King has died, the son of the former King has not succeeded to the throne and there is danger of an attack from Norway. It also establishes an atmosphere of intrigue and possible danger. It further introduces one of the principal characters, Horatio, a close friend of the hero, and reveals his scepticism. It provides a certain amount of background information on

Denmark and the court—neither the Kingdom nor the dead King is at peace. It makes room for the action of the play and prepares the audience to look forward to more excitement and strange events.

(ii) **Nunnery scene.** Hamlet receives the shocking revelations of the Ghost and sinks into melancholy. Hamlet puts 'an antic disposition' to execute the order of the Ghost successfully. The king and the Queen are amazed at his strange behaviour and the King wants to find out the cause of his madness. Polonius comes out with a plan to use Ophelia as a decoy. Ophelia falls in with the idea and meets Hamlet while Claudius and Polonius hide. Hamlet suspects Ophelia's attitude.

Significance of the scene. The scene itself is named by critics after Hamlet's repeated cry to his betrayed love to join a 'nunnery'. It throws more light on the characters of Hamlet and Ophelia. It brings to light the gentle, child-like, innocent nature of Ophelia, her love for Hamlet, her lack of understanding of her lover, her humble obedience to her father. Hamlet speaks harshly to her. Yet his love for her is seen in his very advice to her to join a nunnery and not to marry anyone else. It is the only love-scene in the play and the love ends at the end of the scene. It shows the shrewdness and cunning of Claudius. He is ready to adopt any means to safeguard his own life and reputation. In this nunnery scene Claudius is not convinced of Hamlet's assumed madness and immediately conceives plans to send Hamlet away from Denmark. Thus it enhances the action of the play. Thematically, Hamlet's words in this scene are of great significance. Hamlet is deeply affected by the evil and corruption he witnesses in the world. He is aware that he is part of it all and yet wants to leave it. Both his delay in revenge and his rejection of marriage show Hamlet's denial of his own nature, his refusal to act out the part that life purposes for him. It is significant that in the last Act, a wiser Hamlet repudiates his denial of loving Ophelia by asserting,

I lov'd Ophelia.

This is in keeping with the maturity of vision he develops by the end of the play, when he has understood that "the readiness is all".

(iii) **The Closet-scene.** Hamlet, by enacting the 'Gonzago play' is confirmed of Claudius's guilt. He is now in a mood 'to drink hot blood'. At this moment he receives a call from his mother to meet her in her closet. He prepares himself for the interview and chooses to "speak daggers but use none", for he wants to be "cruel, not unnatural." He meets the Queen and immediately rebukes her for her frailty and incestuous marriage. Alarmed by his words she cries for help. Polonius, who is hiding behind the arras, according to plan, to eavesdrop on their conversation reveals his presence and is slain by Hamlet. Regretting the action, Hamlet, however, continues with his accusations and the Queen's guilty conscience is pricked. She confesses her guilt of having given into base impulses and promises to be a secret friend of Hamlet. The Ghost makes its second appearance to whet Hamlet's desire for revenge against

Claudius. The Ghost is invisible to the Queen's eyes. Hence she thinks that Hamlet is speaking to the air and suspects his madness.

Significance of the scene: Hamlet 'speaks daggers to her, but use none,' not being able to entirely leave his mother alone "to heaven and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her." The scene marks the second appearance of the Ghost. This further emphasises Hamlet's delay in action. The Ghost is seen only by Hamlet. This indicates a close and intimate relationship between the father and the son and the Queen's inability to see it may indicate the lack of such close affinity between the mother and the son. It may also indicate that the Ghost is really an aspect of Hamlet's own mind, as he knows that he is delaying the true revenge. Above all, Hamlet's act of killing Polonius in this closet-scene hastens his trip to England on the very same night and drives poor Ophelia mad. By killing Polonius, Hamlet has become a killer himself and clearly the victim of another avenger. Poignantly enough, the punisher and the punished, the avenger and the avenger's victim now coalesce into the same character. The killing of Polonius makes the action look ahead. It is an act bound to have repercussions, as, indeed, it has.

TIME-SCHEME OF THE ACTION

Q. 7. Analyse the time-scheme in *Hamlet*. Was Shakespeare justified in his use of this 'double' time?

Ans. Introduction. Shakespeare paid less attention to working out detailed or coherent time-schemes for his plays. Though he gives hints to denote the passage of time, yet he does not stick to any ordered schedule. Shakespeare has handled this element of time-scheme with such skill and intelligence that when we watch the play we are conscious only of the movement of the plot and a vague passage of time and are unlikely to notice any tricks with time.

Dual-time in 'Hamlet'. Shakespeare employs an artistic device involving the use of two parallel time scheme, one real and the other dramatic in *Hamlet*. The 'dramatic time is used for reinforcing suggestions of quick movement'. But some argue that Shakespeare, 'who always wrote in a hurry and never blotted out a line', was deliberately careless in matters which were not likely to disturb his audience.

Analysis of the time of action. Dowden analyses the time of action thus: "The duration in the play presents difficulties. It opens at midnight with the change of sentinels. Next day Horatio and Marcellus, with Barnardo, inform Hamlet of the appearance of the ghost; it cannot be forenoon for Hamlet salutes Barnardo with 'Good even sir.' On the night of this day Hamlet watches and meets his father's ghost. The season of the year is perhaps March; the nights are bitter cold. The second act occupies part of one day. Polonius despatches Reynaldo to Paris, Ophelia enters alarmed by Hamlet's visit, her

father reads Hamlet's letter, the players arrive, and when Hamlet parts from them, his words are 'I'll leave you till to-night.' But before this day arrives, two months have elapsed since Hamlet was enjoined to revenge the murder, it was two months since his father's death when the play opened, and now it is 'Twice Two Months.' Next day Hamlet utters the soliloquy, 'To be or not to be', encounters Ophelia as arranged by Polonius, gives his advice to the players, is present at the performance of his play, and, night having come, he pleads with his mother, and again sees his father's spirit. Here the third act closes, but the action proceeds without interruption, the King inquires for the body of Polonius, and tells Hamlet that the bark is ready to bear him to England. We must suppose that it is morning when Hamlet meets the troops of Fortinbras. Two days previously the ambassadors from Norway had returned, with a request that Claudius would permit Fortinbras to march through Denmark, against the Poles. Fortinbras himself must have arrived almost with the ambassadors, and obtained the Danish King's permission.

In Act IV, Sc V, Ophelia appears distracted, and Laertes has returned from Paris to be revenged for Polonius' death. An interval of time must have passed since Hamlet sailed for England, an interval sufficient to permit Laertes to receive tidings of the death of Polonius and to reach Elsinore. In the next scene, letters arrive announcing that Hamlet is again in Denmark; before he was two days at sea he became the pirates' prisoner. On the day of the arrival of the letters Ophelia is drowned. Her flowers indicate that the time is early June. Ophelia's burial and Hamlet's death take place on the next day. Yet the time has been sufficient for Fortinbras to win his Polish victory, and be again in Elsinore, and for ambassadors to return from England announcing the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. We might obligingly imagine that the pirate ship conveying Hamlet to Denmark was delayed by baffling winds; but his letters are written after he has landed, and they describe his companions as holding their course for England.

Conclusion. The truth is, as stated by Professor Hall Graffin, "Shakespeare is at fault"; he "did not trouble himself to reconcile....inconsistencies which practical experience as an actor would tell him do not trouble the spectator."

III. CHARACTERIZATION HAMLET AS A TRAGIC HERO

Q. 8. "Hamlet is a character of extraordinary complexity. No simple formula can serve to solve his mystery." How is Hamlet made into a successful tragic hero by Shakespeare?

Or

"A different Hamlet might have killed his uncle on the strength of the Ghost's accusation, ascended the throne, married Ophelia, and lived happily ever after. But such a primitive hero was not likely

to be of interest to Shakespeare..." How does Shakespeare mould Hamlet as a tragic hero?

Or

Examine Hamlet as a tragic hero.

Ans. Introduction. Hamlet is the centre of action in the play. This is a play so dominated by one character that *Hamlet* without the 'Prince' is impossible to imagine. The play deals with his suffering and tragic death. The other characters in the play serve as foils to him. Hamlet's tragedy is a particular example of a universal predicament; action is necessary, but action in a fallen world involves us in evil. To attempt to shuffle off responsibility by refusing to act, or by shuffling off this mortal coil—by 'handing god back his ticket,' as Dostoevsky puts it—involves us equally in guilt.

An exceptional individual. Like other tragic heroes of Shakespeare he is also endowed with exceptional qualities like royal birth, graceful and charming personality and popularity among his own countrymen. "He is essentially a scholar and a thinker, and his noble brain conceives the finest thoughts. He has a high intellectual quality as Ophelia observes:

O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
Th' observed of all observers.

He is religious-minded and is very sensitive. In spite of possessing all these high qualities which rank him above the other characters the flaw in his character, named as 'tragic flaw' by A.C. Bradley, leads to his downfall and makes him a tragic hero.

The tragic flaw. The tragic flaw in the character of Hamlet is that he thinks too much and feels too much. He is often disturbed by his own nature of 'self-analysis.' He is for ever looking into himself, delving into his own nature to seek an explanation for every action, and giving vent to his own thoughts in soliloquies. Coleridge says that his enormous intellectual activity prevents instant action and the result is delay and irresolution. Bradley gives his own explanation for his delay and irresolution. According to the learned critic, he suffers from melancholia, a pathological state only a step removed from insanity. His thoughts are diseased thoughts. What is required of Hamlet is prompt action, whereas he broods over the moral idealism which leads to his delay in action. When he gets an opportunity to kill Claudius, he puts aside the thought because he cannot strike an enemy while he is at prayer. Again he allows himself to be taken to England although he knows well that the plan is part and parcel of Claudius's evil intent. Hamlet himself is fully aware of his own irresolution. A Macbeth or Othello in Hamlet's position would have averted the tragedy by swift action but even they could not have overcome the powers of cruel destiny.

Causes for inaction. Several causes account for Hamlet's inaction. By nature he is prone to think rather than to act. He is man of morals and his moral idealism receives a shock when his mother remarries Claudius after his father's death. Chance too plays an important part in shaping his character. Chance places him in such a position in which he is incapable of doing anything. He feels sad at his position and says:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

He becomes inconsistent and is no longer a person who reaches a conclusion only by reasoning. He cannot quite accept the role that nature has prescribed for him—that of a revenger—and thus he is unable to act quickly.

Conflict—internal and external: Like other tragic heroes Hamlet too has to face conflict, both internal and external. The internal conflict is between his moral scruples and the act of revenge which he is called upon to perform. Love of his father, the dishonour of his mother, and the villainy of his uncle prompt him to take revenge while his nobility, his moral idealism, his principles and his religion revolt against such a brutal act. The result is that, torn within himself, he suffers mental torture.

The external conflict is with Claudius—'the mighty opposer'—and the murderer of Hamlet's father. To Hamlet, Claudius is a smiling damned villain, a seducer and a usurper of his rights to Denmark's throne; he is one against whom he has to take revenge. The other external conflicts are with Laertes, his friend and the brother of his beloved Ophelia, with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, his former school fellows and friends but present enemies. Indeed Hamlet succeeds in overcoming his foes but only at a dreadful cost.

Character or destiny? Character is not the only factor that is responsible for the tragedy of Hamlet. External circumstances are also responsible for making Hamlet tragic hero. Shakespeare creates a feeling that there is a mysterious power in this universe, which is responsible for every small happening. The appearance of the Ghost and its revelation is a manifestation of Fate. Many of the things that take place in Hamlet's life are by chance but none of these is improbable. He kills Polonius by chance. The ship in which he travels is attacked by pirates, and his return to Denmark is nothing but chance. Gertrude drinks the poisoned wine, by accident, and dies. So fate in the shape of chance shapes the future of all characters including Hamlet. But the sense of fate is never so overwhelming as to cast character in shade; after all, it is Hamlet himself who is responsible for his tragedy.

How Hamlet differs from other tragic heroes. Though he possesses all the qualities of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, yet Hamlet is different from the others. He is the only tragic hero who evokes the sympathy of the readers at all times. As Hazlitt puts it "The distresses of Hamlet are transferred by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it to himself as a means of general

reasoning. He is a great moralizer, and what makes him worth attending to is that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a common place pedant." If Lear is distinguished by the greatest depth of passion Hamlet is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality and unstudied development of character. To Coleridge, "Shakespeare intended to portray a person, in whose view the external world, and all its incidents and objects, were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet beheld external things in the same way that a man of vivid imagination, who shuts his eyes, sees what has previously made an impression on his organs." Hence the poet places him in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in. He rightly judged for Hamlet, after still resolving, and still determining to execute and still postponing execution, he should finally in the infirmity of his disposition, give himself up to his destiny and hopelessly place himself in the power and at the mercy of his enemies. Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the chief end of existence—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from or render us repugnant to action and lead us to think and think of doing, until the time has elapsed when we can do anything effectually. In enforcing this truth, Shakespeare has shown the fullness and force of his powers: all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive, human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve".

Hamlet a tragic hero of greater complexity than a traditional 'avenger'. What is the problem in Hamlet's character that he cannot act in the main concern, whereas he shows promptitude in other matters such as killing Polonius, sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death, and jumping on to the pirate ship to grapple with the pirates single-handedly? Hamlet's problem is the problem of the avenger, not just in terms of creating political and social repercussions, but also in moral terms of becoming involved in the every evil the avenger is trying to eradicate. This problem is especially great in the case of Hamlet who sees the whole of Denmark and the very nature of man as corrupted and rotten. He sees his task not simply as killing his father's killer but, by doing so, ridding the world of the satyr and restoring it to Hyperion. What Hamlet shrinks from is not the act of vengeance, but the whole burden of living. His questions—witness the soliloquies—concern not so much the nature of revenge as the nature of man; but these questions he is impelled to ask by reason of what in his revenger's dual role he has become. He is a hero whose tragic role it is to punish and be punished, to do evil along with good; as such his reluctance to act and become a part of the evil is understandable. The world to which the hero's human destiny commits him is one in which Hyperion and

the savior are brother, sprung from the same stock, which also lives in him. Seeing Claudius, the savior, apparently triumphant, he is possessed by a sense of the all too fertile viciousness of the life in which his own life shares. It is a life in which he must yet be reluctant to participate. He longs for death, refuses marriage and procreation (in rejecting Ophelia's love), his nature resistant to what nature wills. Thus, as Harold Jenkins points out, is the fundamental conflict in Hamlet. It is what gives complexity to his character and raises him to the stature of a Shakespearean tragic hero, much above the conventional Revenge play hero.

Growth and self-realization leading to greatness but unable to avert tragedy. In a tragedy the hero normally comes to the realization of a truth of which he had been hitherto unaware. Aristotle called it "a change from ignorance to knowledge". Shakespeare's tragic heroes indeed undergo a transformation, a growth in vision and understanding which makes them gain further nobility and stature, but this growth and its accompanying self-realization come too late to avert to the tragedy. Thus from the state of melancholy and depression that he is in at the beginning of the play when he sees Denmark as an "unweeded garden", Hamlet regains his composure to become a truly philosophical and noble soul by the end of the play. He had once been an ideal personality as Ophelia tells us: by the time of the final act of the play, he is before us with a greater stature than he ever had before.

The movement towards Hamlet's regeneration begins with his reflections on the player's speech about Hecuba: it advances further in the closet-scene, and it reaches its culmination in the grave-diggers' scene. In the churchyard scene we find Hamlet meditating on death. But death is not now something to be longed for as a release from the ills of the flesh, nor something to be shunned from the dead of what comes after. Born on the day that the grave-digger began his occupation, Hamlet has lived all his life under death's shadow; and in the skulls thrown up by the grave-digger he sees quite simply the common destiny of men. It is a destiny he appears now to accept. Just before the fatal fencing-match he says:

If it be now, 'tis not to come...if it be not now, yet it will come.

And adds "The readiness is all". Ready for the death which completes the universal pattern, he is also reconciled to the pattern of life which death completes. Hamlet has become aware of a supreme, if mysterious, design in the universe embracing all its apparent good and evil. Thus instead of lamenting that he was born to set right what was 'out of joint', he now asserts his faith in

a divinity that shapes our ends,

Rough-hew them how we will

Horatio's words—

Flights of angels sing thee to thy rest

command a man who, after questioning the meaning of creation, to accept a design in it beyond our comprehending, and who, therefore, after seeking to

withdraw from life through an abhorrence of all that is ugly and vicious in it, is finally—and tragically not until death approaches—content to live life as it is.

Conclusion. Shakespeare with his creative imagination and artistic skill could not make his Hamlet a conventional avenger. Hamlet has to become a different kind of revenger. Instead of the hero of concealed and unswerving purpose, celebrated for his courage and virtue, we have a hero who in seeking to right a wrong commits one, whose aspirations and achievements are matched by failures and offences, and in whom potentialities for good and evil hauntingly coexist. And this is what transforms the single-minded revenger into the complex representative of us all.

CHARACTER VERSUS DESTINY

Q. 9. What is the part played by Fate or Destiny in Hamlet?

Or

"In a Shakespearean tragedy the accent falls on human responsibility rather than on supernatural suggestion. Discuss with reference to Hamlet."

Or

"Character is destiny." Discuss the extent to which this statement applies to Hamlet.

Or

What is responsible for the tragedy of Hamlet—character or fate? Give a reasoned answer.

Ans. Introduction. Shakespearean tragedy presents the tragedy of a hero in terms of tragic flaw in the character of the hero. Shakespeare himself lays emphasis on this fact: "the fault, dear Brutus, lies in ourselves and not in our stars." Lear is a man of remarkable qualities but he lacks discretion and wisdom—the ability to distinguish between the right and the wrong, the just and the unjust. Othello is a great and noble man, but he is jealous and impractical and he falls. Macbeth is a brave and noble man but he is ambitious. His vaulting ambition overleaps itself and brings about his fall. Hamlet too meets with a tragic end because of his irresolute nature and inability to accept the role ordained by nature for him.

Character of Hamlet. Hamlet is a man of remarkable qualities. He is a noble-hearted scholar, an eminent soldier, 'the observed of all observers.' In spite of all these noble qualities he suffers from the fatal defect of indecision. He is reflective by nature and speculates over his actions. If he acts quickly, he does so on impulse. But it is not only his tragic flaw which accounts for his downfall; the external circumstances or the Supreme Power of Fate also plays an important role in the tragedy of the hero.

The role of Fate. If we are to believe only in the tragic flaw of a character what is to account for other happenings in the play? For instance, if we are to believe that Othello's jealousy is the cause of his downfall, what are we to say about the motiveless, evil designs of Iago? How are we to account for the three witches in Macbeth? Similarly, Fate has an important role in the downfall of the character of Hamlet. The very appearance of the Ghost strikes the note of some ominous power of Fate. It is Hamlet's fate that his father has been murdered by his uncle and his father's Ghost reveals the secret and lays the task of taking revenge upon Hamlet—a task which Hamlet feels inadequate to accomplish. The Ghost appears for the second time only to emphasise Hamlet's delay in carrying out his task. However, it is really the ominous atmosphere built up by Shakespeare rather than the Ghost itself which gives us a sense of supernatural power in the universe.

Chance or accident. Fate intervenes in the form of accident for it is mere accident that the ship in which Hamlet travels to England is attacked by the pirates' vessel and subsequently he returns to Denmark to meet his tragic death. It is fate that he has to end his life in Denmark and fulfil the Ghost's desire of avenging his father's death. Or else he might have gone to England never carrying out the entrusted task successfully. Again it is a fateful chance that Polonius is murdered by Hamlet and is to be avenged by his son. Thus the revenger becomes the victim of revenge; the punisher becomes the punished. It is an accident that Hamlet arrives at the graveyard, just when his beloved is to be buried; that Gertrude drinks the glass of poisoned wine which was meant for Hamlet and dies, that the rapiers get exchanged in the duel, and both Laertes and Hamlet die. However, though chance events are there, the over-all feeling we get on seeing *Hamlet* is that the tragedy is primarily due to character.

Tragedy mainly due to character: Character is destiny. Hamlet by nature is prone to thinking. He analyses his action and sees whether there is justice in it or not. This kind of brooding nature often restrains him from doing his action and he becomes less a man of action. His soliloquies are the best examples to prove his analysing nature. In these soliloquies he chides his delays in action. Still he is incapable of translating his thoughts into action. His thoughts become as futile as that of a dumb dreamer. He is fully aware of his vacillating nature and in every meditation he makes up his mind to be active in future, but when action is demanded he retreats.

Hamlet is not able to come to terms with life or death at the beginning of the play. That is why he regrets having been born to set the time right. He is reluctant to accept the role he is ordained to perform. He is torn between appearance and reality, between passion and reason, between what is expected of him and what his moral scruples revolt against. It is his mistake that he does not accept his position but seeks to escape from it. But by the end he realises that there exists a mysterious power in the universe. Thus he speaks of the divinity that shapes all things and observes: "The readiness is all." This is not a

passive fatalist's meek acceptance; but a mature mind accepting the necessity of acting without thinking too much.

Conclusion. It is in a way futile to argue whether *Hamlet* is a tragedy of character or a tragedy of fate. Both elements interact and produce the overall effect of tragic loss as well as glory of man.

THE PROBLEM OF DELAY

Q. 10. "What Hamlet shrinks from is not the act of vengeance but the whole burden of living." Discuss the problem of delay in *Hamlet* in the light of this statement.

Or

"Irresolution is the predominating feature of Hamlet's complex character." Trace the causes, characteristics, and consequences of this irresolution.

Or

What, in your opinion, are the reasons for Hamlet's procrastination in avenging the murder of his father?

Or

Do you think Hamlet delays his revenge at all? Give a reasoned answer in support of your opinion.

Ans. Introduction. *Hamlet* has been a source of endless speculation to critics and readers and the main interest has been almost exclusively fixed on the problem of delay; why does Hamlet delay carrying out the task entrusted to him by the Ghost?

Critics' views. Some critics like Werder argue that there is no delay at all. Werder, the German critic, says: "The piece (*Hamlet*) knows of no delay. It drives ahead in a storm", for the King is murdered even earlier than Hamlet and the reader can foresee. Critics like Stoll are of the opinion that if at all there is any delay it is Shakespeare's and not Hamlet's for they believe if Hamlet had killed Claudius at once, there would have been no play at all, and so the dramatist is bound to delay the hero's revenge. But Bradley strongly objects to these critics' views and says, "certainly there is delay. Two months elapse and Claudius still lives," the Ghost specifically appears in the closet-scene to whet Hamlet's blunted purpose. Hamlet himself realises that he is guilty of delay and irresolution:

How all occasions do inform against me,

And spur my dull revenge!

Goethe views Hamlet as "a beautiful, pure, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve that makes the hero, sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off, every duty is holy to him—this is too hard. The impossible is required of him—not the impossible in itself, but the impossible

to him. How he winds, turns, agonizes, advances, and recoils, ever reminded, ever reminding himself, and at last almost loses his purpose from his thoughts, without ever again recovering his peace of mind."

Even the critics who agree that there is delay, disagree about the cause of delay. Both internal and external causes account for Hamlet's delay. The internal cause is within his character, and the conflict between his moral scrupulous nature and the act of revenge. The external causes are the difficulties that he encounters.

The external causes. The external causes of Hamlet's delay are the physical difficulties in the situation. Claudius is not a weak king. He is a shrewd man who does everything to protect his life from unforeseen attacks. He is not only surrounded by courtiers but also strongly protected by his Swiss body-guards. Hence Hamlet would find it difficult to meet his enemy alone. Also he does not in the beginning have any strong proof of Claudius's guilt except for the Ghost's story. With this he cannot hope to win the people's help in deposing the king. Hence he gets enacted the play and the King's guilt is confirmed. However, the enactment of the play also puts Claudius on guard. The enemy takes the initiative and plots to do away with Hamlet. However, these external difficulties are not major hindrances: Hamlet himself does not speak as if there were external difficulties in the way of his killing Claudius. In Act III, Sc. III, when he sees Claudius at prayer, he postpones the idea of killing him for he wishes eternal damnation for the victim. He feels he should kill Claudius,

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game-swearing, or about some act

Again Shakespeare shows Laertes easily raising the people against the King. If Laertes could do that, Hamlet as a popular prince could more easily have raised the people against Claudius and seen to his destruction. Above all Hamlet gets the play enacted not to prove to the people Claudius's guilt but to convince himself of the Ghost's words. Hence the external difficulties do not account for his delay.

Internal causes. Internal causes which make Hamlet delay his action are within his own character. Some attribute the cause of delay to his cowardly nature which dares not act of fear for consequences. There is ample proof to show that Hamlet is not a coward and is capable of fearless acts of heroism in the face of danger and difficulty. Goethe describes Hamlet as "a beautiful, pure and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which makes the hero" and therefore he sinks beneath a burden which he cannot bear. This view of Goethe represents Hamlet as a weak, delicate, sensitive, nerveless creature unfit to be the hero of a tragedy. But the play does not show Hamlet as a weak hero. When the Ghost beckons him to follow it, Horatio and Marcellus try to restrain him. But he threatens them saying, "Unhand me, gentlemen. By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me." These brave, terrifying words do not

sound as if they come from a frail and weak person. Again he is no timid weakling when he speaks sarcastically and insultingly to Claudius and Polonius. He kills Polonius in an instant, sends his schoolfellows to their death, boards the pirate ship, returns to Denmark only to meet his tragic death, rushes on the king and kills him with the poisoned sword, forces him deliberately to drink the remains of the poisoned wine and seizes the cup from his friend's hand to prevent him from committing suicide. All these do not square with the sentimental, weak Hamlet of Goethe's conception.

It seems that to a certain extent Hamlet's delay is due to the conscience theory. Ulrich argues: "In Hamlet....we behold the Christian struggling with the natural man, and its demand for revenge in a tone still louder and deeper by the hereditary prejudices of the Teutonic nations." Most of the time he is torn between Christian scruples and the obedience to fulfil his father's desires. In his soliloquies he wishes to commit suicide. But he puts aside this thought on the ground of Christian ethic that committing suicide is a sin. Hence he blames himself: "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all." Some critics even point out that he delays partly due to the command of Christ. "Resist not evil" and the fear of the consequences of evil in the next world after death. But all this only strengthens the view that Hamlet is against murder. We notice, however, that Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius not on the grounds of a Christian spirit but because of a most revengeful thought that his soul should go to hell straight and not to heaven. In addition he feels no remorse at the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. So this theory also does not account for his delay.

Since the above given reasons do not account for Hamlet's delay, some feel that the cause of his delay is irresolution, which is due to an excess of thinking and reflection. The energy that should have gone out as action is spent in the process of cogitation. Coleridge analyses Hamlet's character and points out; "we see a great, an almost enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances under which he is obliged to act. Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve". What Coleridge has said is perhaps true to some extent, for Hamlet's soliloquies are full of thought and feeling, but after that instead of becoming a man of action, he becomes a man of no action, exhausted by the energy of his own thoughts and feelings. Hamlet confesses it:

And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought.

Thinking too precisely on the event is one aspect of Hamlet's delay. He broods unnecessarily over each and every action and is lost among his thoughts. E.K. Chambers diagnoses the delay in these words: "It is the tragedy of the intellectual, of the impotence of the over-cultivated imagination and the over-

subtilized reasoning powers to meet the call of everyday life for practical efficiency." It is true that his 'disgust' makes his life a burden. Hamlet receives a violent shock from his mother's over-hasty marriage. As a result of that he suffers from melancholia. At this time the Ghost reveals the secret of his father's murder and imposes upon him the duty of revenge of which he is incapable. The additional burden with the realization of his incapability to carry out the entrusted task successfully further weakens him and makes him a melancholic character. This consequence is a disgust with life, a longing to end his life and a wish not to have been born at all:

The time is out of joint! O cursed spite

That ever I was born to set it right!

His consideration of the world and its uses also changes:

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of this world!

Nothing in the world could entertain him and he loses interest in everything. He hates women and generalises their nature as 'frailty'. Thus his whole mind is poisoned because of his melancholy. Unnatural melancholy destroys the brain with all his faculties and disposition of action and thus results in his delay. Verity points out that feeling less Hamlet would have less inclination to act; thinking less he would have more power to act. The contest between these tendencies prevents action.

Delay related to the theme and subject. If, however, we analyse the action of *Hamlet*, we find the cause of delay linked to the theme of the play. The avenger's role is difficult, especially if he is a character like Hamlet. Hamlet is not merely concerned with the killing of his father's killer, in doing so he feels he must set right the decay in the world around him and in the heart of man. Shakespeare has endowed Hamlet and the action of the play with a complexity in the context of which the delay is understandable and, inevitably, has tragic consequences. Hamlet's world is a world of good and evil and Hamlet's error is his initial refusal to be involved in this world and life. His major question is "To be or not to be", to act and taint oneself in the evil one seeks to eradicate or to withdraw from action altogether. But the withdrawal from life does not solve problems; it only creates more difficulties. Hamlet is a character with potentialities of evil as well as good, as such he assumes a complexity lacking in the traditional revenge play hero. In his passionate impulsive manner Hamlet had in the earlier part of the play assumed an egocentric role—he must set everything right. Thus at a point where he might easily—indeed should have—killed Claudius, he forbears to do so because he wants the king to suffer in the next world also. He as an ordinary mortal should have done what opportunity offered without assuming a divine power of deciding whether another man deserves salvation. This is a mistake which proves the turning point of the tragedy; now the tragedy is inevitable.

The delay is inherent to the very story. It is not merely that the story requires revenge to be deferred till the end—this does not demand procrastination—but that it leads the hero towards a destiny which a man who aspires to virtue does not willingly accept. Hamlet is a tragic hero whose role it is to punish and be punished, and in this dual role he muses on the nature of man. He delays his action because he shrinks from the very burden of living. But in the final Act he is able to come to terms with life and death. He realizes that the "readiness is all". But the effect of the delay must inevitably take place.

Conclusion. The delay in revenge, then, is linked to the basic conflict in the play—how does a man who aspires to virtue partake of action in a world which unavoidably involves him in evil. Hamlet's delay rises from his blindness to the truth that there is

A divinity that shapes our ends,

Rough-hew them how we will.

Q. 11. "The responsibility for the failure of Hamlet lies "not with him, not with a blundering Shakespeare, but with the Ghost" (Dr. Richard Flatter)—Discuss.

Ans. Introduction. When most of the critics break their heads in attributing the cause of Hamlet's delay in killing Claudius to the nature of his character, Dr. Flatter tries to lay the responsibility neither on Hamlet's own character nor on Shakespeare's craftsmanship but squarely on the shoulders of the Ghost. It is true that the Ghost lays a fairly impossible task on Hamlet. But it is not the Ghost which is solely responsible for his failure; it lies within Hamlet's own character.

Consequence of the Ghost's revelation. The Ghost makes a shocking revelation of the murder of the previous king by Claudius and imposes upon Hamlet the duty of killing the incestuous murderer who has usurped the kingdom of Denmark. At the same time, it wants Hamlet to contrive nothing against his mother for she should be left to Heaven and the stings of her own conscience. This revelation and the duty imposed upon him come as a shock to Hamlet and affect his nature. He is much troubled by the various implications of the duty and his will to act is weakened. He becomes a melancholic character and broods over his actions in the process of which he loses the power of action.

His doubts. Hamlet has doubts about the honesty of the Ghost and the guilt of Claudius. Moreover he wants to know how much his mother is involved in this evil. Hence his attention, most of the time, is on Gertrude and not on Claudius. Finally he stages the play and Claudius's guilt as well as the Ghost's integrity is confirmed. Still he delays in his action.

The intervention of the Ghost. As soon as the play is over, Hamlet is called upon by his mother to her closet. Hamlet finds it the best opportunity to

induce her to confess her guilt. When he starts with his abuses and when he is about to receive the proper response, the Ghost intervenes. It comes to "what his blunted purpose" and thereby prevents him from proceeding further with his charges to find out her guilt. He is forced to give up the ideas of making Gertrude confess her guilt.

External difficulties. It is not only the impossible work which is laid upon Hamlet, nor his incapability to execute the entrusted duty, nor his flaw in his character which accounts for his failure but also external difficulties to a certain extent account for it. He kills Polonius inadvertently and gives a chance to Claudius, his antagonist to conceive plans against him. His two school-fellows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern spy upon Hamlet and thereby betray him. Hamlet has to overcome all these external difficulties to execute his duty. In spite of all this, he still prefers to be a justifier rather than an avenger and awaits the working of Providence.

Avenge the murder. Hamlet due to his procrastination and irresolution delays his action until the enemy takes the initiative. Claudius arranges the fencing match in which he plans for Hamlet's downfall. Hamlet is deceived and when he has only few minutes to live he stabs Claudius and justifies his action as well as Claudius's death. Thus he fulfils the duty at the cost of his own life. Hence Dr. Flatter is not quite right when he says that the Ghost is squarely responsible for Hamlet's failure.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HAMLET AND OPHELIA

Q. 12. Attempt a critical examination of the Hamlet-Ophelia relationship and its relevance in the action of *Hamlet*.

Or

Why does the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia break down?

Or

Bradley thought Shakespeare restricted his scope with Ophelia so that "too great an interest should not be aroused in the love story". Schlegel felt the figure of Ophelia to be "a beautiful dramatic luxury.superfluous" to Shakespeare's main design. What is your opinion?

Or

"One of the problems of the play of *Hamlet* is whether Hamlet really loved Ophelia at any stage and, if so, why he stopped loving her". Discuss

Ans. Introduction. The love story of Hamlet and Ophelia has some importance among the other problems of the play. Hamlet loves Ophelia. According to some critics, when he comes to know that Ophelia tried to

ceases to love her. Her disloyalty causes depression and overcome with passion he behaves cruelly towards her. She lacks the understanding power and her obedience deprives her of her love.

Hamlet's love for Ophelia. Hamlet loved Ophelia truly and sincerely. He probably fell in love with her when he was staying at Elsinore before his father's death. In his love letters he had addressed her in exaggerated terms of affection, just as a young man is likely to do in the first flush of affection. Ophelia too tells Laertes and Polonius, he "had importuned her with love in honourable fashion", and "had given countenance to his speech with almost all the vows of heaven."

Ophelia's love for Hamlet. Although she never declares her love in so many words, yet we know Ophelia's heart is entirely given to Hamlet for she had sucked the honey of his musicked vows and that his loss of reason has made her 'of ladies most dejected and wretched'. However, though she observes his depression, she fails to reason out the cause.

Causes for change in Hamlet's feelings. While both love each other truly and sincerely, what accounts for love's failure? To a certain extent, circumstances play an important part. Hamlet's father dies suddenly and Hamlet returns to Denmark to mourn his father's death. While he is still a mourner, his mother marries his uncle, who is described by the Ghost as 'that incestuous, and adulterate beast', even before "those shoes were old with which she followed his father's body." This incident is followed by the Ghost's revelation of the frailty of Gertrude towards her dead husband even when he was alive. Hamlet feels disgusted at this thought and transfers his feelings from his mother to all women and hates all womankind. He generalises: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" He looks upon Ophelia also in the same light and feels Ophelia can be no exception. Moreover the Ghost imposes upon him the duty of revenge and he feels the time are out of joint and he is called upon to set them right. The pressure of these circumstances and the realization of his incapability to carry out the task compel him to put aside all thoughts of love.

Ophelia betrays Hamlet. In Act I, Sc. III, We see both Laertes and Polonius with their 'worldly' wisdom suspect the intentions of Hamlet in courting Ophelia. Laertes considers it merely "fashion and a toy in blood". Polonius regards Hamlet's honourable vows of love as "springs to catch woodcocks," and as "brokers and mere importuners of unholy suits." They poison the mind of Ophelia with their suspicions. Polonius goes one step further and advises her to return to Hamlet his love tokens and reject his further courting. Ophelia does not possess the strength of character of a Rosalind or a Desdemona. Questioned in the presence of the Duke how a young Venetian girl could choose to love a black moor, Desdemona rises to the occasion and asserts the truthfulness of her love. She says: "I saw Othello's visage in his mind." She rejects a father to be faithful to her lover. Ophelia cannot do that because her nature is too soft and

tender. She carries out the instructions of her father with utmost obedience. In the nunnery-scene she rejects his love:

My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longed long to redeliver
I pray you now, receive them.

Ophelia's incapability to understand Hamlet's feelings. Some critics feel that when he meets her in her closet, Hamlet must have come there to seek consolation from his beloved and support and help in the great crisis of his life for he has just learnt terrible things about his uncle and his mother. His strange appearance frightens her. Instead of questioning Hamlet about his behaviour, and gently drawing from him the secret cause of his sorrow, Ophelia remains mute, and after he goes away, she runs to her father and reports what has happened. She fails to understand the situation and the feelings of Hamlet.

Hamlet's love weakness. Hamlet is melancholic by nature. His mother's hasty marriage and the Ghost's revelation along with the duty imposed upon him to which he is incapable of, deepen his melancholy and deprive him of his balance of mind. He becomes depressed and disgusted with life. The uses of the world seem to him "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable". Love is no longer, says Bradley, "an absorbing passion, it does no longer occupy his thoughts".

Hamlet overhears the conversation. Some critics point out that something must have happened for Hamlet's harsh attitude towards Ophelia in the nunnery-scene. Prof. Dover Wilson explains that Hamlet's entry in Act II, Sc. II is timed so as to make him over-hear the plot hatched between Claudius and Polonius to use Ophelia as a decoy for ascertaining the truth of Hamlet's madness. Polonius says to the King:

At such a time, I'll loose my daughter to him,
Be you and I behind an arras then,
Mark the encounter.

Having heard Polonius's words, Hamlet comes to the conclusion that Ophelia is a willing tool in the hands of her father. This explains his utter contempt for Ophelia, and the shocking vulgarity of the nunnery-scene becomes the natural consequence of the unfortunate situation. When Ophelia carries out the instructions of her father and plays the part of a decoy against her lover, Hamlet suspects she is being used as a decoy. To test her honesty and innocence he questions her about her father's whereabouts, and she lies. This strengthens his suspicion and he puts on 'an antic disposition' to deceive the eavesdroppers. His disgust over women also deepens and in the nunnery scene he reveals his contempt for Ophelia.

Hamlet's changed attitude. Ophelia's betrayal and her willingness to act as decoy bring about a marked change in Hamlet. He has lost all his love for Ophelia and when he gets opportunities in the play scene and the nunnery scene he shows his contempt and disgust for her. Even before this, Hamlet's attitude to her has completely changed. He calls Polonius a "fishmonger", and

his question "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing Carrion.....Have you a daughter?" is equally profane. He uses very cruel language to Ophelia and his remarks are full of sexual innuendoes. In the nunnery scene he is very offensive. He cries out to her "Get thee to a Nunnery". He hurts Ophelia because he feels that she has hurt him.

Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia in keeping with his view of life. An interesting and perhaps most acceptable view of Hamlet's feelings for Ophelia is that it is part of his rejection of life itself. Unable to bear the 'burden of life', Hamlet turns his face from that emotion, basic to life, namely, love. Hamlet as a play is concerned not only with the task of revenge but also with the universal mysteries of man's being—the questions which occupy the hero's mind. Hamlet feels it is his incumbent duty not merely to kill his father's killer but also to set right the time which is "out of joint". The world is corrupt, an "unweeded garden", in his eyes at the beginning of the play. The two actions which are of equal importance in the play are those of revenge and marriage. For not only is Hamlet depressed by the revelation that his father has been murdered by his uncle who now sits on the throne of Denmark, but he is also horrified at his mother having married this 'satyr'. The nunnery-scene assumes a fresh significance in the light of this view. Hamlet declares:

I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already—all but one—shall live; the rest shall keep as they are.

These words simultaneously tell Ophelia that Hamlet will not marry, and the King that he will revenge—note "all but one—shall live". Ophelia is the woman Hamlet might have married and did not. There is no doubt about his love for her or his endeavours to woo her as we learn from the final act. However, after the Ghost's revelations especially, Hamlet is sharply aware of the corruption in the world and even more conscious of his own part in this world. One should not miss what Hamlet says about himself—he is one "crawling between earth and heaven" with unrealised "offences at my beck". With the example of his mother, who has made "marriage vows as false as dicers' oaths", it is not difficult to see why he should reject marriage with Ophelia. Even more than this, he is horrified that she has valued his love. In his state of mind he cannot bear the idea of the procreation inevitably associated with marriage for what will be bred will be "sinners". Hamlet wishes to have no part in a world where he sees fertility manifesting itself in vile forms of life—weeds, mildew'd ear, maggots. Thus Hamlet denies his own nature, declining to act out the part that life purposes for him. Thus he consigns Ophelia to a nunnery where she will breed no sinners but preserve her virginity. It is only in the final Act that Hamlet, with his maturity of vision about the divinity that shapes our ends, admits

I love'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum

But for the fulfillment of love and marriage it is now tragically too late.

Conclusion. Bradley felt that Shakespeare restricted his scope with Ophelia so that too great an interest should not be given to the love story. Schuking even felt that the Hamlet-Ophelia affair is superfluous to the design of the play. But Shakespeare's sub-plots never distract from the main plot; they serve to highlight or illumine the central theme. In this context Harold Jenkins observes: "Hamlet's revulsion from love and marriage and from whatever would perpetuate a loathed life is the obverse of that wish for release from life's ills which opens his first soliloquy and has its fullest expression in the soliloquy which the meeting with Ophelia interrupts. His own nature of man, including bestial lusts and lethargies as god-like reason, mingles good and evil; and he is placed in a situation—his ideally virtuous father destroyed by a wicked brother who is now in possession of his kingdom and his queen—which shows evil prevailing over good. So although he sees the nobility of man, the beauty of women, the majesty of the universe, what his imagination dwells on is the quintessence of dust, the reason unused, the mutiny in the matron's bones, the nasty sty, the prison. His vision of the world may be said to exemplify the process which a famous speech of his describes whereby 'some vicious mole of nature' in a man extends itself in the general view till 'all the noble substance' is obscured. Hence he can only tell Ophelia, to go to the nunnery.

CONTRAST OF CHARACTERS HAMLET, HORATIO, LAERTES, FORTINBRAS

Q. 13. Write a critical note on the contrast of characters in *Hamlet* with special reference to Hamlet, Horatio, Laertes and Fortinbras.

Ans. Introduction. The aim of drama is to create characters of different types and to expose their actions in the changing circumstances of life. A dramatist's genius at best is revealed in the treatment of characters. In this respect, Shakespeare surpasses his contemporaries and his genius is inexhaustible. Never are two characters alike in his plays. *Hamlet* is centred round the destiny of the Prince of Denmark. He is brought in contrast with several other characters to intensify his tragic character as well as emphasise his growth.

Horatio as a foil to Hamlet. Perhaps the most delightful contrast in *Hamlet* is the contrast between Hamlet and Horatio. Like Hamlet, Horatio is noble, sympathetic, scholarly, understanding and intellectual. In short, Horatio appears to be like Hamlet on many counts. Hamlet admires him, a pure and noble soul like himself. There exists a natural affinity of souls between the two young men. Hamlet's description of Horatio is the best comment on Horatio's character:

For thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;

A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Has ta'en with equal thanks, and blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please.

These very lines bring out the contrast with Hamlet. While Hamlet is sometimes quickly moved to impulsive action, and yet is inactive in executing the main duty of revenge, Horatio follows a golden mean of thought and action. Horatio is a man of endurance and not passion's slave. He is calm and serene, and remains a cheerful and happy person even when encountered with troubles and difficulties, whereas Hamlet is subject to ungovernable fits of passion. Overwhelmed with surge of passion that passes over his mind like a tempest, he seems to lose self mastery or even self-consciousness. Thus Horatio in many ways is a contrast and counterpart of Hamlet.

Laertes as a foil to Hamlet. While Hamlet and Horatio are in some respects complementary in character, Laertes is a complete contrast to Hamlet. Hamlet is a far more impressive figure than Laertes. The many-sidedness of Hamlet is not to be found in Laertes. Hamlet's nobility and generosity are absent in his opponent. Laertes wants in delicacy and refinement. Shakespeare intentionally creates a situation in which Hamlet and Laertes are placed in a contrasting position. Hamlet's father is murdered, so is the father of Laertes. Laertes is a man of action. Unlike Hamlet, he has no scruples and needs no evidence to support his course of action. This is clear from his readiness to believe that Hamlet is responsible for all the tragic events that have taken place at the court during his absence; he is willing to go further than the king to make sure that Hamlet is killed in the fencing match. Hamlet on the other hand, goes for evidence and even when he 'catches the conscience of Claudius', he hesitates to act, think and procrastinates. The vehemence of Laertes is in clear contrast with the speculations of Hamlet. He is ready to murder Hamlet in a church and defy damnation. Laertes by foul or fair means, wants to avenge his father's death. In fact the injury suffered by Hamlet is far greater than that of Laertes. And what Laertes could do in getting the support of the Danes, Hamlet might have done with greater ease and surer success against Claudius. But he does not attempt it. Laertes, unlike Hamlet who in spite of his fewer obstacles neglects every opportunity, overcomes every obstacle and uses every opportunity. With Hamlet revenge is a religious duty; with Laertes it is a matter of honour only. And what a contrast there is between the murdered fathers; the one

A combination, and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man.

The other a "foolish, prating knave," a ridiculous, tedious, prying self-complacent sinner.

Fortinbras as a foil to Hamlet. Fortinbras is another character who presents a vivid contrast to Hamlet. Fortinbras is a son who initially sets out to avenge his father's wrongs; he is the nephew of the reigning king of his country; the similarity to Hamlet is obvious, but in character he is a contrast. Fortinbras is a man of action whereas Hamlet is a scholar and philosopher. He is an ardent militarist and is never at ease and happy unless he is occupied with some campaign or the other. Hamlet perceives and admires his promptness in action. "Examples gross as earth, exhort me," says Hamlet,

Witness this army, of such mass and charge,
Let by a delicate and tender prince;
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed,
Makes mouths at the invisible event;

Fortinbras furnishes Hamlet with an example. He is ready to risk the life of twenty-thousand men along with his own for the sake of honour. It is this campaign of Fortinbras that sets Hamlet thinking again about his neglect of his duty in avenging his father's death. Since he is honest and prompt in his dealings he is honoured with much more than his expectation and lives to restore the lost paradise; but he is also a straightforward character as compared to Hamlet who is a complex character. Dowden gives a vivid picture of Fortinbras: "With none of the rare qualities of the Danish prince, he excels him in plain grasp of ordinary fact. Shakespeare knows that the success of these men who are limited, definite, positive, will not do dishonour to the failure of the rare natures to whom the problem of living is more embarrassing, and for whom the tests of the world are stricter and more delicate."

OTHER CHARACTERS

Q. 14. What opinion have you formed of Claudius and Gertrude?

Ans. Refer to character sketches of Claudius and Gertrude in chapter 2, 'Introduction to *Hamlet*.'

Q. 15. Do you think Ophelia is superfluous to the action of *Hamlet*? Give a reasoned answer.

Ans. Refer to character sketch of Ophelia in Chapter 2. Also refer to Answer to Question 2 in this chapter.

Q. 16. What is the role of Polonius, Osric and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in *Hamlet*?

Ans. Refer to character sketches in Chapter 2.

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT: THE GHOST IN *HAMLET*

Q. 17. Critically examine the role and dramatic significance of the Ghost in *Hamlet*.

Or

"In *Hamlet*the Ghost plays an essential role in the plot".

Discuss.

Ans. Introduction. Belief in the supernatural and wonder at the inexplicable mysteries of death was largely shared by people during the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare makes effective use of these popular superstitions and beliefs of his time. But the most wonderful thing about Shakespeare was that, unlike his contemporaries, his use of supernatural agencies was neither crude nor gross, nor was it extraneous to the action, a mere object of horror brought in to create sensation. To Moulton, "Supernatural agency has a place in the world of Shakespeare. Among the forces of life, it has no power except to accentuate what already exists: but it has great power to illuminate life for those who are life's spectators. Shakespeare's supernatural agencies are what Banquo calls them—instruments of darkness: of no significance except in the hands that consent to use them". In *Hamlet*, the supernatural appears in the form of the Ghost. The Ghost in *Hamlet* has at least a three-fold dramatic significance. It contributes to the general tragic atmosphere of the play, motivates the entire action of the play and finally it shows up the characters and drives home a certain moral effect.

The supernatural atmosphere. The first thing that a dramatist should do when introducing the supernatural is to create the necessary atmosphere which makes it possible and plausible. Such an atmosphere is provided in the early part of the opening scene. It is a cold and dark night and Francisco is 'sick at heart'. The Ghost had appeared to them two nights in succession. It was a dreaded sight. Marcellus describes it:

Thus twice before, and jump at this dead hour
With martial stalk hath gone by our watch.

Horatio, the sceptic does not at first believe his friends' words. He attributes it to their "fantasy". Marcellus comments on Horatio's scepticism:

Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us.
Therefore I have entreated him along with us to
Watch the minutes of this night,
That if again this apparition come,
He may approve our eyes and speak to it.

Horatio comes with Marcellus to witness the appearance with his own eyes and they with bated breath wait for the apparition.

The chilly and dark night along with the talk about the Ghost creates an atmosphere of tension and fear.

The appearance of the Ghost. Horatio reveals his disbelief: "Tush, tush, 'twill not appear." When Barnardo begins to describe his experience, the Ghost

makes its appearance. It is the Ghost of the late King of Denmark. It comes clad in armour and has the same

...fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march.

The appearance of the Ghost "harrows Horatio with fear and wonder", and he accepts the fact that it resembles the late King in every respect. Horatio trembles and looks pale with fear. When he tries to talk with the Ghost, it disappears with an offended look. It reappears after some time. Horatio again urges the Ghost to speak. When it is about to open its mouth the cock crows and the Ghost disappears.

Significance of this appearance. We get a complete picture of the Ghost and its strange behaviour. These erring spirits are free to wander about in the darkness. But when the cock crows heralding the dawn, wherever they are, 'in sea or fire in earth or air', they hurry back to their prison-houses. This first appearance of the Ghost has a terrifying effect on the readers. The real appearance of the Ghost on the stage fills the audience with fear and wonder. We are kept in suspense about the purpose of the Ghost. It creates an atmosphere of mysterious forebodings also.

A symbol of ill-omen. When Horatio describes the appearance of the Ghost in the late King's manner, he accepts

Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated;
So frowned he once, when, in an angry parly,
He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
'Tis strange.

Horatio, the sceptic who disbelieved in the existence of the Ghost, after witnessing its appearance believes in its forebodings. He explains his fearful experience as:

In what particular thought to work I know not;
But, in the gross and scope of my opinion,
This bodes some strange eruption to our state.

To support his views, he refers to the supernatural things that occurred before the death of Julius Caesar. Hence he senses some danger to the state of Denmark in the form of young Fortinbras. He gives an explanation for the war-like preparations that is going on in Denmark—because of the threat of war to Denmark. Horatio suggests that Hamlet should be informed of the appearance of the Ghost. They inform Hamlet of the haunting of the Ghost and Hamlet too believes in some calamity or evil about to befall.

My father's spirit in arms! all is not well;
I doubt some foul play..

The role of the Ghost. Hamlet sees the Ghost of his father and what he has all along felt about 'some foul play' proves to be true. The Ghost makes a shocking revelation. It reveals its identity and the secret of its murder. It tells

that Claudius had murdered his brother by pouring poison into his ear when he was asleep and then announced that the King died of the bite of a serpent. He then usurped the Kingdom and seduced his mother. It further imposes upon Hamlet the duty of avenging his father's death and advises him:

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.

Thus the Ghost motivates the entire action of the play. It is solely through the Ghost that an unsuspected murder is brought to light, and the subsequent course of action owes its motive-power to the foul fratricide thus revealed. Verity points out: "Without the Ghost's initial revelation of truth to Hamlet, there would be no occasion for revenge; in other words, no tragedy of *Hamlet*."

The importance of the Ghost. The main theme of the play is revenge. The motive for this revenge theme is provided by the Ghost. The awful revelation of the Ghost forms the source of the tragedy and the spring of the action. Thus the supernatural is made the starting point of the play, even as the supernatural soliciting of the Witches becomes the starting point of *Macbeth*. In both cases, it is the hand of the supernatural that sets in motion the machinery of the plot. Without the prophetic greetings of the Witches, there is no *Macbeth*. Without the initial revelation of the Ghost there is no *Hamlet*. The revelation of the Ghost intensifies the horror that Hamlet felt at the over-hasty marriage of his mother with Claudius. The foul play that Hamlet suspected becomes a reality, and he is charged by the spirit of his dead father to avenge his father's murder of which he is incapable. The duty thus imposed on Hamlet, and his failure to carry it out in proper time form the substance of the tragedy.

The Ghost's appearance accounts for two other important developments in the play. Hamlet's mind is occupied with the thought of the Ghost's reality. To confirm the truth of its words and to carry out the entrusted task he at first instance, puts on 'an antic disposition', and then he gets enacted the 'Mouse-trap play to "catch the conscience of the King."

The Ghost speaks of the horrors of its prison-house, but it is forbidden to reveal what they are for the 'eternal blazen' is not for mortal ears. Shakespeare combines classical and Christian concepts with the popular superstitions of his age and country and by his own imaginative power creates a picture of wonderful awe and impressiveness.

The Ghost's second appearance. In the Ghost's first appearance, Hamlet is given the duty of avenging his father's death. Due to his irresolution and procrastination he delays in his action. Hence the Ghost makes its second appearance in the closet-scene, when Hamlet is talking with his mother, to 'whet his almost blunted purpose'. But the Ghost is invisible to the Queen and hence she interprets Hamlet's action:

This is the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.

Thus the second appearance not only emphasises Hamlet's delay in executing the Ghost's order but also Gertrude's conviction about Hamlet's madness. Verity says that the Ghost's second appearance hastens the denouement by whetting Hamlet's blunted purpose and, "exciting in him, through the bitterness of self-reproach, a mood of increased desperation which alarms Claudius and stimulates him to bring matters to a speedy crisis."

Is the Ghost subjective or objective? The question whether the Ghost is a subjective or an objective entity still remains an unsolved problem like many other problems in *Hamlet*. In *Macbeth* the Ghost of Banquo is clearly subjective, because it appears only to Macbeth and to no one else in the large gathering. In *Julius Caesar*, the Ghost of Caesar appears only to Brutus. There is a rational explanation why ghosts appear only to some persons and not to others. But this distinction is not clearly maintained in *Hamlet*. In the beginning Hamlet, Marcellus, Barnardo, and Horatio see the Ghost. They have occasion to observe and even to address it. It is not the hallucination of a single individual. It is objective and has a "real existence outside the sphere of hallucination". But this view which is justified in the beginning is contradicted when the Ghost makes its second appearance in the closet-scene. Hamlet sees the Ghost as he did formerly, but to Gertrude it is invisible. If the Ghost here had also an objective reality, it should have been seen and heard by the Queen also. Either the Ghost is real, or it is a product of Hamlet's fancy. If it is a product of Hamlet's fancy other people could not have seen it and heard it simultaneously. If it is real, while others can see it why can Gertrude not see it? It is still an unsolved problem. Some critics aver that the Ghost not being seen by the Queen has its moral, suggesting that the woman has strayed so far from the path of honour that she is unable to receive spiritual vision. Further it indicates that there is a close and intimate relationship between father and son, and therefore Hamlet alone is admitted to the inner secrets; it illustrates also the lack of any such close affinity between Hamlet and his mother.

Symbolic significance of the Ghost. The Ghost has also great symbolic significance. "It diffuses an atmosphere of awe through which the tragedy looms more impressive. It is a reminder of the existence and immanence of the more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our daily philosophy; a warning that at all times, but most in its lapses, humanity has to reckon with not flesh and blood alone but principalities and powers of the unseen world. The Ghost, we feel, is a representative of that-hidden ultimate power which rules the universe and the messenger of divine justice."

Conclusion. Shakespeare might or might not have believed in the supernatural but he certainly makes effective dramatic use of it in his plays. He not only gave his audience what they wanted; he was able to rise higher. It is a tribute to his unequalled dramatic gifts. Through the introduction of the Ghost of the dead king, Shakespeare creates a suitable atmosphere for unnatural deeds about to happen. "The Ghost indeed reminds us that even the greatest

earthly strength is still subject to the controlling influence of a spiritual power beyond the laws of man".

HAMLET'S MADNESS: FEIGNED OR REAL?

- Q. 18. Shakespeare never intended to represent Hamlet as mad, or half-mad, or verging on madness. What is your opinion? Give a reasoned answer.

Or

Critically examine the problem of Hamlet's madness and point out whether it is feigned or genuine.

Ans. Introduction. The problem of madness is perhaps the most maddening problem in *Hamlet*. The question is asked, 'Was Hamlet really mad, or did he merely assume madness?' Certain critics believe that Hamlet is really mad whereas certain other critics believe that Hamlet is only pretending to be mad. Even those critics who argue that Hamlet is pretending to be mad are not in agreement with each other about the motives of Hamlet in pretending madness.

The sound physique of Hamlet. Before the play begins Hamlet is clearly a sensitive and idealistic young man. He is a scholar, a philosopher and a poet too. He is gentle and genial to those below his station. He is a noble man who conceives the finest thoughts and has a high intellectual quality. We get a vivid picture of Hamlet as he was from the words of Ophelia:

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
Th' observed of all observers.

This shows that Hamlet was once a master of his own self and had full command over his mind and senses. But we do not see the normal Hamlet in the course of the play, just as we do not see the normal Macbeth in the course of that tragedy. After his mother's hasty marriage and the Ghost's revelation, Hamlet's "noble and most sovereign reason" is all out of tune and harsh. The observed of all observers is quite, quite down and the noble mind is overthrown.

Hamlet's madness considered real. Some critics are of the opinion that under the pressure of these two circumstances—his mother's hasty marriage, and the Ghost's revelation—Hamlet loses his reason. When he appears for the first time in Act I, Sc. II he is not in a normal state of mind. More than the sudden death of his father, his mother's 'frailty' shocks him and this produces in him a disgust for the affairs of life, an apathetic and moody inclination to put an end to his misery by self-slaughter. After the Ghost's revelation, he sinks into a morbid state of mind, so that he finds no interest at all in the world or mankind. The goodly earth appears a "sterile promontory." The bright

firmament appears only a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." Man delights him not, nor woman either. This state of mind is very near insanity. Ophelia's description of Hamlet to Polonius when he called on her in her closet further strengthens the idea of madness to be real. She discloses:

Lord Hamlet, with all his doublet all embraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport,
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors

She adds that Hamlet in such an appearance took her by the wrist, and holding her hard, scrutinised her face and raised a sigh so piteous and profound as if it did seem to shatter all his bulk. This description gives Polonius the idea that "the very ecstasy of love" is the cause of the present condition of Hamlet, for under her father's instructions and advice Ophelia had returned his gifts and had refused to meet him.

The conversation between Hamlet and Polonius in Act II, Sc. II, is also quoted to support the theory that Hamlet is really mad. He calls Polonius a fishmonger and further insult him with his remarks on his daughter, Ophelia:

"Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive, friend, look to it." His talk with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on the honesty of the world; his talk with Ophelia in the nunnery-scene in which he insults her and advises her to join a convent to escape breeding sinners and his obscene talk with her in the play-scene,—all are taken to prove him to be a man who has lost reason. Ophelia herself says: "O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!"

Another instance quoted in support of the view of Hamlet's madness being real is Hamlet's act of killing Polonius. When he is having an interview with his mother, he hears the words 'help' from behind the arras. Not knowing the identity of the person who is hiding there he takes it to be Claudius, and draws his sword and kills the person. Only afterwards does he find out it is Polonius. But with least remorse he remarks:

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell;
I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune,
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.

Had he been in his real senses, he would not have acted in this heartless manner.

Finally, his strange behaviour at Ophelia's funeral is supposed to show the genuineness of his madness. When he sees Laertes leaping into Ophelia's grave, he too follows him and they grapple with each other. Hamlet rages with fury, speaks ill of Laertes and warns him with danger of his life. The Queen tries to explain to Laertes the nature of Hamlet's outbursts of passion:

This is mere madness,
And thus a while the fit will work on him.
Anon as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couples are disclosed
His silence will sit drooping.

Above all in Act V, Sc. II, when Hamlet repents for his actions in the grave of Ophelia and he confesses to Laertes,
Who doest it, then? His madness: if't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction is wrong'd.

Thus the surest proof of Hamlet's madness comes from his own lips.

His madness is feigned. All the above given evidence does quite prove his madness to be real. There is more evidence that his madness is assumed, for he acts normally when he chooses to and in the presence of those with whom it is safe to do so. We agree with Deighton when he says, "in every single instance in which Hamlet's madness is manifested, he has good reason for assuming that madness: while, on the other hand, whenever there was no need to hoodwink anyone, his thought, language and action, bear no resemblance to unsoundness of intellect." He talks rationally and shows great intellectual power in his conversations with Horatio. He receives the players with kind courtesy and his refinement of behaviour towards them shows that he is not mad.

In the first Act we are told by Hamlet himself that he is going to feign madness to carry out his entrusted task of avenging his father's death successfully.

As parlance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on.....

In his talk with Polonius, where he calls him a "fishmonger" and insults him further with satirical remarks, Polonius observes:

Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.

However, as he is fool he is deceived by Hamlet's feigned madness and he comments:

How pregnant sometimes his replies are: A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of.

Then there is Claudius, the shrewd man, who suspects the authenticity of Hamlet's madness. When Polonius reveals 'the very ecstasy of love' as the cause of his madness, Claudius after observing Hamlet says in Act III, Sc. I:

Love? his affections do not that way tend;
Nor what he shake, though it lack'd form a little,
Was not like madness.

So Claudius strongly suspects, as we all do, that Hamlet's madness is feigned and not real.

The next to suspect the real nature of his madness is his own school fellows Guildenstern and Rosencrantz. Guildenstern finds 'a crafty madness' in him and Hamlet himself reveals the truth to them:

I am but mad north-north west: When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand saw.

Hamlet enacts the "Mousetrap" play to confirm Claudius' guilt. He asks Horatio to watch Claudius and the players leave the hall, he discusses with Horatio about the whole thing and expresses his feelings and views of Claudius and his future plans of avenging the murder. This does not sound like a mad man's action but that of a normal man. Only a man of wisdom could plan everything systematically and arrive at the expected conclusion. The fact that he wants to let the King betray himself would sufficiently strengthen the view that he is not only sane but also wise and cunning.

Hamlet's interview with his mother. Hamlet in the closet scene says:

That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat,
of habits devil is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on.

When he castigates his mother for her frailty and her wickedness, Gertrude's conscience is awakened. No madman's words could be so effective, for she confesses:

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

His coherent speech portrays him as a man of sanity with enormous power to bring about a change in the Queen.

For the third time he reveals the truth of his madness being feigned. When his mother says:

This is the very coinage of your brain,
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.

Hamlet replies:

Ecstasy;
My pulse as yours, doth temperately keep time,
And makes a healthful music; it is not madness
That I have uttered; bring me to the test,
And I the matter will re-word, which madness,
Would gambol from.

His soliloquies show a sane man. Granville-Barker points out: "when he is alone, we have the truth of him, but it is his madness which is on public exhibition." All of his soliloquies show his wisdom and deep thinking for they are coherent and logical. His reasoning and generalizations portray him as a scholar and a philosopher. The thoughts which he reveals in these soliloquies have a universal appeal and are remarkable for their poetic quality and excellence of language. Through his soliloquies we come to know about the inner Hamlet, his feelings for others, and his feeling for himself. He reveals his plans and

actions and acts according to them. The words, ideas and feeling expressed in these soliloquies cannot be those of a mad man.

His advice to the players. Hamlet's advice to the players on the art of acting is too sound to come from the lips of a madman. He advises them on how to act with quiet dignity and moderation. He advises them against extravagant gestures, and melodramatic exhibitionism. They should "suit the action to the word, the word to the action" and hold the mirror up to nature. Such an advice, by all means, comes from a sound man.

His sound sense. Hamlet's comments on Yorick the court jester's skull: "I know him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times"....and his generalisation, "Where are your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar,"....along with the comments on the other skull, which could have been the skull of a politician or a lawyer, are too full of sense and meaningful thought to come from an insane man.

His harsh attitude towards Ophelia. Hamlet loved Ophelia before the Ghost's revelation of his father's murder. Now the duty imposed on him by the Ghost of which he feels incapable and his mother's guilt have driven all thoughts of love away. In his rebellion against nature and in his want to escape the burden of life, he rejects Ophelia and tells her to go to a nunnery. When he learns that Ophelia has met with a tragic death, his true feelings come to life and being provoked by Laertes's action, he too leaps into her grave and admits his love. So these incidents cannot account for his madness being real.

Reasons for assuming madness. Dowden explains: "He assumes madness as a means of concealing his actual disturbance of mind. His over-excitability may betray him; but if it be a received opinion that his mind is unhinged, such an excess of over-excitement will pass unobserved and unstudied." Richardson too supports his view and says: "Harassed from without, and distracted from within, is it wonderful, if during his endeavour to conceal his thoughts, he should betray inattention to those around him; incoherence of speech and manner....Hamlet was fully sensible how strange those involuntary improprieties must appear to others; he was conscious he could not suppress them; he knew he was surrounded with spies; and was justly apprehensive, lest his suspicions or purposes should be discovered." To prevent these consequences, and at the same time to afford himself breathing time—for no plan of action immediately occurred to his mind, and he was always reluctant to perform actions—he counterfeits insanity.

T.S. Eliot argues that the "madness" of Hamlet lay in Shakespeare's hand; in the earlier play a simple ruse, and to the end, we may presume, understood as a ruse by the audience. "For Shakespeare it is less than madness and more than feigned." By pretending to be mad, Hamlet kept open the safety valve and could speak anything, and do anything, could insult and accuse anybody in order to relieve the pressure on his mind. This is what T.S. Eliot means when

he uses the words "more than feigned." The phrase means that such a pretence is psychologically inevitable and necessary, and is not a mere practical trick or a device of the old revenge play as critics like Stoll would have us believe.

Conclusion. To solve this controversy one shall have to resort to Bradley who goes to the root of the matter and says that Hamlet is not mad, he is fully responsible for his actions. But he suffers from melancholia, a pathological state which may well develop into lunacy. His disgust with life can easily assume the form of an irresistible urge for self-destruction. His feeling and will are already disordered, and the disorder might extend to sense and intellect. His melancholy accounts for his nervous excitability, his longing for death, his irresolution and delay.

VI. SOLILOQUIES IN HAMLET

Q. 19. Comment on the use of soliloquies in *Hamlet*. Select some of these soliloquies and critically examine their relevance in the play.

Or

What light do the soliloquies of Hamlet throw on his character?

Ans. Introduction. Soliloquies are used to reveal the inner mind of a character. There are occasions when a person cannot openly express the feelings in the presence of others. The soliloquy then becomes his useful device by means of which the dramatist lays bare before the readers the secret thoughts and feelings of a character while at the same time preserving it as a secret to other characters in the play. Through the soliloquy the dramatist reveals the development of the character and also the mental progress or deterioration in the character. Further it throws more light on other characters through the speaker's opinion of others. It also contributes to the development of the plot and tells of events which have happened off the stage. Some critics point out that this dramatic device is artificial and unnatural, but then so is drama which is only an imitation of life and not actual life. So such dramatic devices should be appreciated on their merits if they contribute to the interest and suspense of the play. Whether we accept the dramatic value of this device or not, we have to accept Shakespeare's skill in using it in his plays, especially in his tragedies. Shakespeare makes such an effective use of this device that if we were to remove the soliloquies from his tragic plays, the plays would be left the poorer.

The soliloquies of Hamlet. Hamlet's soliloquies stand out as essential pillars of the dramatic structure. Such 'Tragical speeches,' in which the characters give vent to their feelings, were accepted by Elizabethan audiences very much as, in later times, were the arias of grand opera in which the chief characters gave expression to their passions. A character given to speculative thought would be more prone to indulge in soliloquies than a man of action. Hence we find more soliloquies in *Hamlet* than in any of the other tragedies. In

these speeches Hamlet, with relentless sincerity, settles accounts with himself in thoughts that spring from the very depths of his being. There are a number of soliloquies in *Hamlet*, most of these by the hero and a few by other characters.

The first soliloquy (Act I, Scene II, Lines 129-159). Schucking says the first soliloquy is the most important of all for offering a clear understanding of Hamlet's character. The first soliloquy takes place after the King and Queen have commented on his brooding melancholy over the death of his father. They ask him to cast off his deep melancholy and Hamlet in this soliloquy gives vent to his grief that has been gnawing at his heart for quite a long time. More than two months have passed. Still Hamlet is mourning the death of his father. He deplores his mother's character. Not even two months have passed and even before "those shoes were old with which she followed his poor father's body", she has married a man who is much inferior to her old husband. Her over-hasty marriage, which he considers 'an incestuous affair' makes him believe that women are weak and inconsistent creatures; he generalises "Trail thy name is woman!" This "most wicked speed" of his mother plunges him into a mood of deep depression and loathsome disgust with the world and the affairs of the world.

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of the world!

He compares the world to an "unweeded garden" in which rank and gross things grow in abundance. He no longer wishes to live in such a world and wishes to have his "too too solid flesh" melt into dew. He wishes that if only God had not set his canon against self-slaughter. He could have killed himself to get rid of the persisting grief and the wicked world. This soliloquy reveals Hamlet's tendency to universalise an idea from a particular instance. This generalisation speaks of a philosophic mind which delights in speculating without the urge to action. This speculating nature accounts for his delay in executing the order of the Ghost for revenge. His generalisation reveals that Hamlet has lost faith in the goodness of human nature. It throws light on the character of Hamlet's dead father who was an affectionate husband and an excellent King. Hamlet's filial attachment towards his dead father is also revealed. It further makes us look down upon Claudius and Gertrude, their illicit relationship and incestuous marriage. Hamlet's reference to mythological characters portray him as a well-versed man in classical literature. Thus the first soliloquy itself paints a vivid picture of Hamlet's character which would account for his tragedy. His generalisation, world-weariness, apathy, disgust with life—all appear again and again in his soliloquies.

The second soliloquy. (Act I, Scene v, Lines 92-112). The second soliloquy occurs after Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost. It expresses the rude shock he has sustained. The Ghost has not only made shocking revelations but has also imposed upon him the duty of avenging his father's death. Hamlet determines to wipe out all other thoughts from his mind and to preserve only the Ghost's

commandment. He then deplors the villainous nature of Claudius as 'smiling damned villain' and the inconsistency of Gertrude as 'most pernicious woman.' Hamlet's determination to remember only the Ghost's words create an impression of active and ambitious Hamlet. But we are only deceived by his words, for the more he thinks the less capable he becomes of direct action. Here we see the student, the thinker, the pure youngman to whom villainy in worldly affairs is a strange phenomenon. This soliloquy introduces the element of revenge for the first time.

The third soliloquy. (Act II, Scene II, Lines 543-601). In this soliloquy Hamlet accuses himself for his delay in executing the Ghost's order. No one can be more harsh on Hamlet on the subject of neglecting his duty than Hamlet himself. For, having seen the emotion which the players can put forth about the death of Priam, a mere figure from the Greek legend of many centuries past, he cannot but ask himself what emotion the players would have expressed had they, like him, lost a father at the hands of a cruel and cunning murderer. He regards himself as "a dull and muddy mettled rascal" and "a rogue and peasant slave", for he has done nothing to avenge his father's death. He calls himself a coward and declares that he should act and not, "like a whore, unpack my heart with words and fall a-cursing like a very drab". He feeds his anger with wicked thoughts of his uncle as "a bloody, bawdy villain, remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!" so that he could execute the vengeance immediately. Thus at the end of the soliloquy we see him planning to enact the 'Mouse-trap' play to "catch the conscience of the King."

The plot makes further progress here. Hamlet is going to get the play enacted to confirm Claudius's guilt and test truth of the Ghost's on Claudius's treachery. This doubt regarding the honesty of the Ghost is totally inconsistent with his previous thoughts. A.C. Bradley emphasizes that "Hamlet's self-reproaches, his curses on his enemy, and his perplexity about his own action, one and all imply his faith in the identity and truthfulness of the Ghost. Evidently this sudden doubt, of which there has not been the slightest trace before, is no genuine doubt, it is an unconscious fiction, an excuse for his delay—and for its continuance." This soliloquy thus emphasises Hamlet's speculating and inactive nature. It reveals his self-contempt, but this disgust only leads to his inaction.

The fourth soliloquy. (Act II, Scene I, Lines 56-89). This is the most celebrated of soliloquies and occurs at the beginning of the nunnery-scene. Hamlet again reverts to the thought of suicide. Hamlet is torn within his mind. He does not know which he should choose—whether silently to suffer the cruelties of fate or to fight against the misfortunes of life. He reflects on the mysteries of life and death. He wishes to commit suicide for he thinks that in sleep he can forget all the evils of life. But what scares man and prevents him from committing suicide is the thought of the unexplored and unknown life

after death. The known, however bad it is, is not so terrifying as the unknown. The fear of this thought makes men cowards and

Thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought.

This soliloquy constitutes one of the finest poetic passages and a masterpiece that reveals the universal fear of death. Spoken in a moment of dejection and despair, this soliloquy gives us an insight into the character of Hamlet. It reveals Hamlet's cynicism, his melancholy, his irresolution and partly his conscience to avoid a controversy and his scrupulous nature. It further shows his speculative mind and his incapability for any premeditated or pre-planned action. Above all it emphasises his delay and to some extent shows the mental torture he is undergoing due to his incapacity.

The fifth soliloquy. (Act III, Scene II, Lines 379-390). When Hamlet is about to meet his mother he speaks this soliloquy. Hamlet is angry with his mother and his disgust with her makes him feel thus. He thinks it is the best time for him to 'drink hot blood' which even the day 'would quake to look on'. He wants to be cruel to his mother and to kill her. At the same time he wants to respect the Ghost's words and does not want to follow the action of Nero. But he determines to 'speak daggers' to her and wishes 'his tongue and soul in this be hypocrites' in that he will not use any daggers. This soliloquy throws light on Hamlet's refinement of nature, respect for his father's Ghost's words and his love for his mother.

The sixth soliloquy. (Act III, Scene III, Lines 73-96). This soliloquy occurs on his way to meet his mother in the closet. He sees the King at prayer and gets an opportunity to kill him, an opportunity for which he has been longing so far. And yet he does not act:

Now might I do it pat, how he is praying.

And now I will do it. And so he goes to heaven;

Just at the moment when he should act, he begins to think. Claudius killed his father without even giving him any time to pray or repent for his sins and hence he must be paying the divine penalty for his deeds and sins. So Hamlet should also kill Claudius not while he is doing a good act like praying which would send him to heaven but when he indulges in some evil deeds like

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,

At game, a swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in't....

Such is his reasoning. Bradley says that this reasoning is now generally recognised as an unconscious excuse for delay, for his reasoning sounds unconvincing. Anyhow, as usual, this soliloquy too further emphasises his delay and procrastinating nature. This soliloquy forms the crisis of the play.

The seventh and the last soliloquy. (Act IV, Scene IV, Lines 32-66). Hamlet's failure to seize the occasion and put an end to Claudius, leads us on to this final soliloquy by a gradual process. From his talk with the captain,

Hamlet comes to know that young Fortinbras is prepared to risk his life and the lives of his twenty-thousand soldiers for the sake of his honour. This nature of Fortinbras again stirs up his revenge motive and his conscience pricks him as it does often. When young Fortinbras does all these things for the sake of honour, why has he not done anything when he has "cause and will and strength and means to do it." He tries to find out the cause for his delay:

Whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event—

He then thinks over the purpose of man's creation by God. If the aim of men is to sleep and feed, he considers them not more than a beast. He realizes finally that God has not endowed us with such "capability and god-like reason to fust in us unused." Hence he determines, "from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" In spite of this determination we see him inactive until the enemy takes the initiative. Thus this soliloquy too emphasises his irresolution and procrastination. What Hamlet philosophises in this soliloquy are universal truths and it strengthens his generalising nature. Even though his conscience pricks him and urges him to execute the revenge, the natural deficiency in him prevents him from prompt action.

The soliloquies of Claudius. There are three soliloquies of Claudius which throw more light on his villainous and wicked behaviour and we get a glimpse of his conscience which is still alive. His first soliloquy is exactly an 'aside' in which he reflects upon the heavy weight that lies upon his heart. This aside shows that the memory of the murder he has committed still haunts him and he is not at peace. So for the first time we come to know that his conscience is not completely dead. In the next soliloquy, we get a more vivid picture of his pricking conscience. The King, for the first time, repents for his sins and wants to pray to God to purge his sins. He kneels down to pray. But his guilty conscience would not allow him to do so. Through Claudius's soliloquies Shakespeare shows that Claudius is not a hardened criminal, but an ordinary man with no peace of mind on account of his evil deeds. In the third soliloquy he schemes to kill Hamlet in England through his sealed orders to the King of England. He plans a second murder even before he succeeds to come out of the guilt of his first murder.

The soliloquy of Ophelia. At the end of the nunnery-scene occurs Ophelia's soliloquy where she expresses her grief over the 'overthrown' condition of Hamlet and her own pitiful condition "of ladies most deject and wretched" for she is deprived of her love and her lover has lost his senses. This soliloquy throws more light on the character of Hamlet, as he used to be before his father's death and his mother's over-hasty marriage:

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
Th' observed of all observers.

It further throws light on his insanity—that such an "observed of all observers is quite, quite down!" and "the noble mind is over thrown."

Conclusion. Thus the soliloquies in *Hamlet* serve the dramatic purpose of revealing the hero's character. There can be little doubt that Shakespeare uses the soliloquy effectively and artistically in *Hamlet*. Nowhere does it seem out of place or palpably artificial. Indeed, in practically every instance, it appears inevitable and necessary. If *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark is the husk without the grain, the Prince of Denmark without the soliloquies will be an elusive shadow, a character without a personality. It will be noticeable that the soliloquies are also indicative of advance in action in the sense that they let the audience know what the next step is to be.

VII. WORLD AND MEANING OF HAMLET

- Q. 20. "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right." In these lines Hamlet both accepts and revolts against his mission. Discuss the world of *Hamlet* in the light of this.

Or

Hamlet has been called upon to assert moral order in the world of moral confusion. Discuss.

Ans. Introduction. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark is born 'to set right the time which is out of joint'. Being a Prince, it is his stately duty to see his country at peace and in order. But his fate deprives him of the right to the throne. Yet it imposes on him the duty of asserting a moral order in the world of moral confusion.

Premonition of rotten stage. The opening words "who's there?" of the play itself creates a suspicion that something is wrong. From the continuing dialogues we come to know that something is wrong at Elsinore. The words and feelings of the guards also reveal the tension that is prevailing in Denmark. Francisco is relieved at Barnardo's arrival and it is bitter cold and he is 'sick at heart'. Barnardo who takes the charge of the duty is frightened and a bit nervous for he asks Francisco. "Have you had quiet guard?" and asks him to send Horatio and Marcellus very quickly. These words of Barnardo sounds that of a frightened person who is afraid to stay alone. No soldier would be so scared to be alone unless there is the feeling of danger. At this critical moment the Ghost appears.

Its appearance at this dark midnight heightens the tension. When Horatio tries to talk to the Ghost it goes away offended. So Horatio suspects that the appearance of the Ghost foretells some danger to their country. The Ghost also looks offended. Hence he fears "this bodes some strange eruption to our state." Thus in the opening scene itself we get a glimpse of Denmark in utter moral confusion.

Hamlet's distress. We find distress and moral confusion not only in Denmark but in Hamlet's heart too. Hamlet is introduced in the second scene as a depressed man brooding over the death of his father and is disgusted at his mother's over-hasty marriage. In his soliloquy he expresses his feeling towards his mother's indecent action of marrying Claudius, who is in no way equal to her old husband, within two months of her old husband's death. This action of Gertrude makes him generalise "Frailty, thy name is woman!" Still he has no suspicion that his father has been murdered or his mother has committed adultery. But the very thought of his mother's second marriage has affected him so much that the whole world seems to him "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." He even goes to the extent of comparing the world to the Garden of Eden after the Fall of Adam and Eve. He condemns his mother's attitude of violating nature's law and the distortion of moral values.

Present condition of Denmark. Through Horatio's answer to Marcellus's question about the war-like preparations that is going on in Denmark we come to know of the physical disturbance and confusion that prevail in Denmark. But it is the Ghost which discloses the moral confusion of the land. The Ghost tells Hamlet about the murder and his mother's frailty. The Ghost's revelation comes as a shock both to Hamlet and to us. Even before the Ghost's revelation Hamlet senses some foul play and he hints:

My father's spirit in arms! all is not well;
I doubt some foul play.

Hamlet follows the Ghost to hear its revelation. Marcellus immediately observes: "Something is rotten in the State of Denmark." The Ghost discloses what is rotten in the land. It explains to Hamlet how his father was murdered by his uncle, and how that incestuous, the adulterate beast was able to win his mother's love and affection and seduce her. It further imposes on him the duty of avenging his father's death and requests him not to allow the royal bed of Denmark to be "a couch for luxury and damned incest." Hamlet in the succeeding soliloquy sees his mother as the 'most pernicious woman', and his uncle as the 'smiling, damned villain.' He is confirmed that at least in Denmark "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." Hamlet is born in such a land in such a situation 'to set it right.'

A state of moral confusion. Through the Ghost's revelation Hamlet gets a clear picture of the distortion of moral values. His mother who 'hanged on' her first husband "as if increase of appetite and grown/By what it fed on"; has committed adultery with a 'satyr-like man Claudius; 'the smiling, damned villain' has murdered his own brother, has married his own sister-in-law and has usurped Hamlet's throne. The land is now reigned over by Claudius, who spends his time in drinking and merry-making. He is corrupt and is assisted by Polonius, the Lord Chamberlaine in his evil doings. He is safely guarded by Swiss-guards and the whole court supports him. But Hamlet is alone without any supporters except Horatio. Hamlet's old school-fellows, Rosencrantz and

Guildestern turn spies to watch his movements. Hence Hamlet has to do double work. He has to avenge his father's death as well as to purify the evils of Denmark. He realizes his duty to be "their scourge and minister". At the same time he realizes his own incapacity to carry out the work successfully and remarks:

The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!

The Paradise. When we think about the present demoralised world we are reminded of the moral world which was ruled by Hamlet's father before his death. It was like a Garden of Paradise and was ruled by a god-like man, Hamlet's father, who had "Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself, an eye like Mars." He was very brave and met the threats of the elder Fortinbras in an open battle and slew him. It was a weeded garden with happiness and peace everywhere. Thus the world of Denmark was like a paradise before the senior Hamlet's death and before Hamlet's mother betrayed her husband. But now such a garden has become a garden of Eden after the fall of Adam and Eve. The serpent-like Claudius has tempted the 'Eve', Gertrude, who falls a prey to him and leads to the loss of the country's purity. Denmark thus becomes an unweeded garden, full of corruption, disloyalty, insincerity and wicked deeds. The martial and moral values are ignored and the garden is ruled by Claudius who meets the threats of young Denmark and Hamlet by policy, cunning and wicked agents. Though Hamlet was born to a Hyperion-like man still he feels he is the son of the whore-like Gertrude. He is called upon to set right the moral confusion of such a world.

Hamlet's role. Hamlet has got a vivid picture of the present condition of Denmark. He has to play an important role to avenge his father's death as well as to restore the old merits to his land, to bring back the old paradise into his country. The whole garden is overgrown with cankerous weeds that eat into the state of Denmark. His immediate task is to weed the garden and to plant new trees of happiness, peace and moral virtues. But the tragic flaw—"irresolution" and 'inaction' in his character—makes him a man of inaction. He delays in his action of avenging his father's death. When alone in his soliloquies, he calls himself a coward and chides himself for his delay:

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like very drab,
A stallion! Fie upon't, foh!

He spurs himself towards action with the wicked nature of Claudius,—'Bloody, bawdy villain remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain' to take vengeance against him. But he consoles himself to confirm Claudius's guilt for "he is very potent with such spirits". So Hamlet feels that

he should have strong grounds to prove his guilt and finds 'the play is the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.' By enacting the play, Claudius's guilt is confirmed. He makes up his mind to act and decides: "O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody." In spite of all these words, he is still inactive and delays his action. He gets an opportunity to kill Claudius, but he postpones that idea on the grounds that by killing him at his prayer his soul would go straight to heaven. He wants the murderer to suffer in both the worlds. Even though he has been enjoined to perform an important task he is incapable of doing it due to his procrastinating nature which accounts for his tragic death.

Conclusion. The tragedy of *Hamlet* arises because the Prince feels called upon to set right the very times and not just kill Claudius. The revenge motif symbolises the process of bringing moral order back to the state which has degenerated into an 'unweeded' garden. Hamlet cannot rely on the conventional code of the rotten society in which he lives, nor accept without thinking the crude imperatives of the revenger's ethic. He is wrung by the anguish of choice, because he knows that on him depends the fate of the kingdom to which he is rightful heir.

VIII. HAMLET AS A RELIGIOUS DRAMA

Q. 21. "Evil once started on its course, will so work as to attack or overthrow impartially the good and the bad." Discuss *Hamlet* as a religious play in the light of this statement.

Or

How far is it correct to regard *Hamlet* as religious drama?

Ans. Professor Kitto's view is: "Like a tragedy of Sophocles, *Hamlet* is also a religious play in the Greek sense. Sophocles wrote many revenge plays, and *Hamlet* shows striking similarities and differences. The similarity lies in this that a sinful deed is shown as leading to others. The difference is that Shakespeare portrays sin or evil as a spreading infection. *Hamlet* is not merely the tragedy of an indecisive mind; the Prince's delay is an effect and not the cause of the tragic motif in the play". *Hamlet* is not primarily a play about its hero and his indecision which accounts for his tragedy, it also portrays the tragic destruction of two families which cannot be accounted solely to Hamlet's indecision. The element of evil too has an influence in the disasters of the characters. If "there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow, there surely must be a special providence in the fall of character."

Crime means breaking the laws of God. When we go against God's laws and wishes we become sinner, Crime leads to crime and disaster to disaster, until the original impulse works itself out and the guilty get their deserts. *Hamlet* too is such a play which centres round the theme of evil or crime. The

play begins with the haunting of the Ghost on the battlements of Elsinore. It indicates that the 'time is out of joint' and 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark' and evil hangs over Denmark. The rotten state of Denmark is revealed by the Ghost of Hamlet's father.

The King who is the representative of God, and who is expected to show divine justice on his subjects, does the first crime of murdering his own brother to achieve the 'divine right of kings'. This crime which has taken place before the beginning of the play becomes the source of the deaths that take place in the course of the play. Claudius, the smiling damned villain who commits crime after crime is justified at the end by his tragic unexpected death at the hands of Hamlet.

But what accounts for Ophelia's death? She is exposed to corruption though uncorrupted and is unjustly destroyed as the evil encoils her. She is more or less an innocent victim to this situation though it could be said that she contributes to her own doom by her docile character.

Gertrude is the first to be tainted by Claudius. Though she is not responsible for the elder Hamlet's death and does not have any cruel motive yet the mad passion that swept her into the hands of Claudius condemns her to endure all its devastating consequences. Her son loses his reason, kills Polonius, denounces her in cruel terms. This change in Hamlet and her father's death drive Ophelia mad and she meets her death. Gertrude meets her death by the will of Providence for it is not preplanned but an unexpected death. She is left to heaven's justice.

The death of Polonius can be justified in two aspects. It is a sudden unpremeditated attack made by Hamlet and at the same time it is the will of Heaven. For Hamlet accepts:

For this same Lord,
I do repent; but Heaven hath pleased it so
To punish me with this and this with me.....

Though Hamlet can be blamed for his death yet Polonius deserves this death for his 'wretched, rash, intruding' nature.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were once friends of Hamlet but they give their service to a wicked King and to his guilty wife. They become the tools of Claudius and Gertrude and are much bound by them. Thus Guildenstern shows his loyalty:

But we both obey
And here give up ourselves in the full bent
To lay our service freely at your feet
To be commanded.

They are, to be true, commanded by Claudius to bring about the death of Hamlet. But Heaven wishes otherwise. Hence Guildenstern and Rosencrantz meet their doom. As Guildenstern admits:

The cress of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
What's near it with it;

the death of the elder Hamlet leads to the death of other major and minor characters. This truth accounts for these two baser characters' death.

Laertes, who is a noble young man, remains the last to be tainted by Claudius. Due to poor understanding, unguarded virtue and the evil suggestions of Claudius he falls to treachery and he realizes it at the time of his death:

I am justly killed with mine own treachery.

Now coming to the question of Hamlet's death, why must he be destroyed? His death cannot be accounted to his delay in destroying Claudius first. Providence has a hand in his death; hence it is inevitable and rightly justified. The providence which has a hand in the fall of a sparrow must have a hand in Hamlet's death. Hamlet is a noble young man endowed with the finest sense of propriety and susceptible of noble ambition. Yet he has his own faults—the principal one is his hesitation to carry out the revenge in time. But Shakespeare emphasises the fact that this one fault alone does not ruin Hamlet. Something else has a hand in his tragedy. The evil that prevails in Denmark inevitably destroys indiscriminately the good and the bad. The destruction of evil involves the wastage of good. Hence the man of reason becomes mad, loses his power of action and becomes impotent, his religion is dragged down to knavery and his excellence as that of Ophelia's virtue and beauty is brought to nothing by evil. Thus the evil let loose in Denmark continues to work by bringing about the deaths of eight persons until none is left.

Hamlet has always believed that heavenly justice will prevail among men: "Foul deeds will rise. Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes." Murder, though it have no tongue, "will speak with most miraculous organ." Nevertheless, man's perception of that divine revelation, and his role in aiding the course of justice are obscured by man's own corruption and blindness. Whenever Hamlet moves violently, he moves in error. Horatio, in summing up the play, speaks tellingly—of "accidental judgements, casual slaughter, and of 'purposes mistook/Fall'n on th' inventors' heads." The judgement applies to Hamlet as much as to Laertes. Hamlet has already realized that he must pay the price of heaven's displeasure for killing Polonius, just as Polonius himself has paid the price for his own meddling. "Heaven hath pleased it so/To punish me with this, and this with me." Such fitting reciprocity can be brought about only by the far-reaching arm of Providence. The engineer must be "Hoist with his own petard." In the light of these views David Bevington finds *Hamlet* a religious drama.

IX. STYLISTIC ISSUES USE OF PROSE AND VERSE IN HAMLET

Q. 22. Critically examine the use of prose and verse in *Hamlet*.

Ans. Introduction. Shakespeare has an unrivalled mastery over the English language. He makes effective use of words to express the wonderful variety of human feelings and thoughts. Prose and verse are given equal prominence in his plays. Generally verse is used where the emotion rises to a higher level, and prose is employed to lower the dramatic pitch.

Use of blank verse. The normal medium of Shakespeare's play is blank verse. The regular blank verse line is in iambic pentameter. A strict iambic pentameter has ten syllables with the stress falling on the even syllables. Shakespeare frequently varies the rhythm. He uses weak stresses to break the monotony of the regular pattern, and at times substitutes a trochee for the iambus and occasionally inserts lines of irregular length. Additional unstressed syllables are occasionally used to eke out the decasyllabic line. He rarely confines himself to the 'end stop' variety and writes run-on-verse. He usually uses verse for a highly poetic pitch of emotion. The soliloquies of Hamlet are all in verse. For instance the soliloquies beginning with "It is now the very witching time of night" and "To be or not to be" are in verse for Hamlet's mind is excited and thoughts are elevated in soliloquies and verse is then the proper medium of expression. Wherever there is a certain emotional excitement, the speech naturally runs into poetry. Thus the whole scene of Hamlet's interview with his mother is in verse; the King's prayer is in verse and Gertrude's description of Ophelia's drowning is in beautiful verse. Another curious specimen of verse is Polonius's advice to Laertes in Act I, Sc. III. It is a string of moral maxims and these moral maxims are generally expressed in a brief and pithy style. So the verse with its antithesis and clear-cut finish is quite suitable for the purpose.

The use of rhymed couplets. Occasionally Shakespeare uses rhyme also. But gradually he outgrows the use of rhyme. While there are two rhymed lines to every one of blank verse in *Love's Labour's Lost*, there are only two rhymed lines in the whole of *The Tempest*. In a play of the middle period like *Hamlet*, rhyme is used mostly for the purpose of denoting the termination of a scene. Examples of such usage may be found at the conclusion of Act I, Sc II, and Act II, Sc. II. It sometimes indicates the climax of a speech or a train of reflections, as at the end of Act I, Sc. VI:

The time is out of joint—O curs'd spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!

Hamlet's love letter is in rhyme. Shakespeare writes the play within the play in rhyme as he deliberately initiates the old rhymed tragedy. The songs of Ophelia and the grave-digger are also in rhyme.

The use of prose. Shakespeare's use of prose cannot be summarised in a few mathematical formulae. He employs prose mainly as the medium of pedestrian conversation, when he finds it desirable to lower the dramatic pitch. When a scene falls to the level of ordinary life Shakespeare reverts to prose as we see in the conversation with the actors in act II, Sc. II. Comic characters like the grave-diggers and persons in humble position like the actors in Act II.

sc. II, and the sailors in act IV, Scene VI, generally speak in prose. It is used for conveying messages and writing letters as that of Hamlet to Ophelia, Horatio and Claudius. It is sometimes used to break the tension that is likely to result after a very long Scene in verse, and also for the speeches made by insane people. One of the most celebrated poetic passages in *Hamlet* in Act II, Sc. II, is found to be in prose and not in verse. It is indeed an excellent example of the highest thoughts expressed in prose. Thus Shakespeare uses mere conversational prose and a prose that savours of a poetical quality as required and shows his perfect command over his medium of expression.

Use of appropriate language and style. Shakespeare differentiates the style of speaking of each of his major character, although in *Hamlet* this differentiation is not carried throughout with the same precision as in *Macbeth*. Polonius is given a style of speech in keeping with his personality of a pedantic councillor who has some wisdom of the world and delights in verbal conceits; to Claudius's words particular attention seems to have been paid, and these show him as a man of quick and lively intelligence, in spite of his capacity for evil.

Hamlet's own language stands apart from the others: he has the mind of a scholar, a satirist, and a melancholic poet; his scholarly approach is perhaps best illustrated in the Scene in which he and Laertes throw themselves into the grave of Ophelia; he can no longer tolerate the anaemic ranting of Laertes, and comes forward to show in his own cascade of rhetoric how the thing should be done, if indeed one wants to do it at all; in the speech which follows in Act V, Scene I, Hamlet so outdoes Laertes's phrase that they appear by comparison the puny products of an underfed imagination.

Thus we find Shakespeare makes use of verse and prose with great discrimination and appropriateness.

IMAGERY IN HAMLET

Q. 23. Write a note on the imagery used in *Hamlet*, pointing out its relevance in the thematic context.

Or

Different patterns of imagery weave through the play to make the texture of *Hamlet* rich and meaningful. Critically examine some of these patterns of imagery.

Ans. Introduction. Surprisingly new possibilities of language are explored by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. Indeed, Hamlet's nature can only find expression in a wholly new language. This, as Wolfgang I. Clemens says, applies to the imagery in the play. It is Hamlet who creates the most significant images, images marking the atmosphere and theme of the play. Hamlet's way of employing images is unique in Shakespeare's drama. Hamlet's imagery shows

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us that whenever he thinks and speaks, he is at the same time a visionary, a seer for whom the living things of the world about him embody and symbolise thought.

Images conveying Hamlet's sense of reality. Hamlet's images exhibit a peculiar closeness to reality. His first monologue expresses the short space of time between his father's death and his mother's remarriage in terms of a series of pictures taken from real life:

A little month, or ere these shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears;

Or

Ere yet the salt of most rigorous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
Or a little later, addressed to Horatio,
the funeral baked meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.

These are no poetic similes, but keen observations of reality. Hamlet's images are mostly very concrete and precise, simple and, as to their subject matter, easy to understand. His images may not be beautiful, poetic magnificent, but they always hit their mark, the matter in question, with surprisingly unerring sureness. Hamlet is capable of scanning reality with a keener eye and of penetrating the veil of semblance to the very core of things.

The penetrating power of Hamlet's vision is revealed in his use of imagery that shows up the real nature of men beyond the walls raised by hypocrisy. Rosencrantz is pithily called 'sponge' that 'soaks up the king's countenance.' Hamlet's comparison of his father with Claudius is remarkable for the effective imagery bringing out the opposite qualities. Thus Claudius is:

a mildew'd ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother.

So Hamlet sees through men and things. He perceives what is false, and visualizes his recognition through imagery.

Images of mortality, instability, disease and poison. The sense of mortality in *Hamlet*—not simply taken to mean death, but also the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to—is conveyed to us in three ways. First there is the emphasis on human weakness, the instability of human purpose, the subjection of humanity to fortune—all that we might call the aspect of failure in human life. Hamlet opens this theme when he describes how from a single blemish, perhaps not even the victim's fault, a man's whole being may take corruption. Claudius dwells on it again when he tries to seduce Laertes into disposing of Hamlet by a trick. Time qualifies everything, he says, including love, including purpose. Fortune is the harlot goddess in whose secret part men like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern live and thrive. Horatio suffers the stings and arrows of the outrageous foe with composure as he is one of the blessed few

Whose blood and judgment are so well comingled
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please.

For Hamlet the task is of greater difficulty.

Next, and intimately related to the matter of instability, is the emphasis on infection and disease. The idea of an ulcer, says Caroline Spurgeon, dominates the imagery infecting and fatally eating away the whole body; on every occasion repulsive images of sickness make their appearance. A real event described at the beginning of the drama has exercised a profound influence upon the whole imagery of the play. The picture of the leprous skin disease, which is in the first act described by Hamlet's father, has buried itself deep in Hamlet's imagination and continues to lead its subterranean existence, as it were, until it reappears in metaphorical form. Hamlet's father describes in that passage how the poison invades the body during sleep and how the healthy organism is destroyed from within, not having a chance to defend itself against attack. But this now becomes the locomotive of the imagery; the individual occurrence is expanded into a symbol for the control problem of the play. The corruption of land and people throughout Denmark is understood as an imperceptible and irresistible process of poisoning. And, furthermore, this poisoning reappears as a leitmotiv in the action as well—as a poisoning in the "dumb show", and finally, as the poisoning of all the major character in the last act. Thus imagery and action continually play into each other's hands and we see how the term "dramatic imagery" gains a new significance.

The image of weeds, touched upon in the word "unweeded", is related to the imagery of sickness in Shakespeare's work. It appears three times in *Hamlet*. The Ghost says to Hamlet:

And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf....

In the dialogue with his mother, this image immediately follows the image of the ulcer:

And do not spread the compost on the weeds,
To make them ranker....

Images of rot, decay and corruption are especially numerous in the long second scene of the second act. There are, for example, Hamlet's remarks on the maggots which the sun breeds in a dead dog (II. Sc. II. 181), on the deep dungeons in the prison Denmark (II. Sc. II. 250), on the strumpet Fortune (II. Sc. II. 239), who reappears in the speech of the first player (II Sc. II 504) his comparison of himself with a whore, a drab, and a scullion (II, Sc. II. 599). Seen individually, such images do not seem to be very important. But in their totality they contribute considerably to the tone of the play.

But the chief form in which the theme of mortality reaches us, according to Maynard Mack, is as a profound consciousness of loss. Hamlet's father expresses something of the kind when he tells Hamlet how his "(most) seeming-

virtuous queen," betraying a love which "was of that dignity/That it went hand in hand even with the vow I made to her in marriage," had chosen to "decline/ Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor/To those of mine....O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!" Ophelia expresses it again, on hearing Hamlet's denunciation of love and woman in the nunnery-scene. Time was, the play keeps reminding us, when Denmark was a different place. The garden is unweeded now, and "grows to seed: things rank and gross in nature/Possess it merely."

Images of appearance and reality: 'act' 'show' and 'play'. The problem of appearance of and reality is central to *Hamlet* and written deep into its idiom. Thus there are images of apparel or clothes. In the world of surfaces to which Shakespeare exposes us in *Hamlet*, clothes are naturally a factor of importance. "The apparel oft proclaims the man", Polonius assures Laertes, cataloguing maxims in the young man's ear as he is about to leave for Paris. Oft, but not always. And so he sends his man Reynaldo to look into Laertes's life there—even, if need be, to put a false dress of accusation upon his son ("What forgeries you please"), the better by indirections to find directions out. On the same grounds, he takes Hamlet's vows to Ophelia as false apparel. This breach between the outer and the inner stirs no special emotion in Polonius, because he is always either behind an arras or praying into one, but it shakes Hamlet to the core. His mother's mourning is all clothes but in Hamlet's case appearance and reality are attuned.

A second pattern of imagery springs from terms of painting: the paints, the colourings, the varnishes that may either conceal, or, as in the painter's art reveal. Art in Claudius conceals. "The harlot's cheek," he tells us in his one aside, "beautified with plastering art,/Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it/ Than is my deed to my most painted word". Art in Ophelia, is more complex. She looks so beautiful—"the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia," Hamlet has called her in his love letter. But now, what does beautified mean? Perfected with all the innocent beauties of a lovely woman? Or "beautified" like the harlot's cheek? "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. Yet art, differently used, may serve the truth. By using an "image" (his own word) of a murder done in Vienna, Hamlet cuts through to the king's guilt, holds "as 'were, the mirror up to nature," shows "virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time"—which is out of joint—"his form and pressure."

The most pervasive of Shakespeare's image patterns in this play, however, is the pattern evolved around the three words, "show", "act", "play." "Show" seems to be Shakespeare's unifying image in *Hamlet*. Through it he pulls together and exhibits in a single focus much of the diverse material in his play. The ideas of seeming, assuming, and putting on; the images of clothing, painting, mirroring the episode of the dumb show and the play within the play; the

character of Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, Claudius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet himself—all these at one time or another, and usually more than once, are drawn into the range of implication flung round the play by "show."

"Act", on the other hand, is the play's radical metaphor. It distills the various perplexities about the character of reality into a residual perplexity about the character of an act. What, this play asks again and again, in an act? What is its relation to the inner act, the intent?

To this network of implications, the third term, "play", adds an additional dimension. "Play" is a more precise world, in Elizabethan parlance at least, for all the elements in *Hamlet* that pertain to the art of the theatre; and it extends their field of reference till we see that every major personage in the tragedy is a player in some sense, and every major episode a play. The court plays, Hamlet plays, the players play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to play on Hamlet, though they cannot play on his recorders—here we have an extension to a musical sense. And the final duel, by a further extension, becomes itself a play, in which everyone but Claudius and Laertes plays his role in ignorance.

Conclusion. Hamlet's imagery reveals his wide educational background, his versatile mind and his extraordinary range of experience. He can attune his imagery to the situation and to the person to whom he is speaking. The images that he expresses under 'antic disposition' have a function similar to the images of the fool in *King Lear*. The imagery in Shakespeare's tragedies often shows how a number of other images are grouped around the central symbol which express the same idea, but in quite other terms. Several degrees, as it were, of the metaphorical expression of a fundamental idea may be distinguished. Besides images which express a motif with the greatest clarity and emphasis, we find others which utter the thought in a veiled and indirect manner. An examination of the way in which the images are spread over the play, can reveal how subtly Shakespeare modifies and varies them according to character and situation.

X. GENERAL ESTIMATE OF HAMLET IS HAMLET AN ARTISTIC FAILURE?

Q. 24. T.S. Eliot considered *Hamlet* to be an 'artistic failure.' Do you agree with his opinion? Give a reasoned answer.

Ans. Eliot's criticism of the play. Eliot is of the opinion that more people have thought *Hamlet* a work of art because they found it interesting, than have found it interesting because it is a work of art. He even goes to the limit of calling it the "Mona Lisa" of literature, for in several ways the play is puzzling, and disquieting as none of the others is. Though *Hamlet* is the longest play Shakespeare has left in it superfluous and inconsistent scenes. In *Hamlet* both workmanship and thought are in an unstable position. Hence Eliot says "so far

from being Shakespeare's masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure."

Absence of objective correlative to Hamlet's emotions. Eliot says that the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that 'particular' emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked. The artistic "inevitability" lies in this complete adequacy of the external to the emotion; and this is precisely what is deficient in *Hamlet*. Hamlet is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disquiet is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison his life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with plot can express Hamlet for him. Any art form which cannot reveal to us a state of human consciousness, whether emotional or intellectual, fails in its object.

The artistic construction. Though the play is considered an artistic failure by Eliot, we find that the play has a definite form and obeys the laws of dramatic construction and is regarded as a well constructed play. The action of the whole play falls into three movements. The first movement exposes the crime and the culprit; the second shows the development in Hamlet's character and the enacting of the play to confirm Claudius's guilt, and his two tragic errors; the final movement brings the action to an end along with the deaths of Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius and Gertrude.

Hamlet a many-sided character. The character of Hamlet is the chief attraction of the play. The personality of Hamlet is as perplexing as an undetected murder. Hamlet is seen in the company of all the characters and this interaction intensifies Hamlet's character and his refinement of nature. He is contrasted with the obedient knee-crooking knaves, prying Polonius, smiling but villainous Claudius, sheepish Gertrude, poor, lovable and angelic Ophelia, Osric, faithful Horatio, Laertes and the strong-minded brave Fortinbras. In each character's company Hamlet retains a unique nobility. The audience and the readers too share his feelings. We laugh with him at Osric reprove with him Gertrude, curse with him Claudius, speak friendly with him with Horatio. He is at his best when he is with the players and the grave-diggers, the representatives of the common people and his witty and humorous nature is also revealed. He is kind to the kind and wicked to the wicked. Through his soliloquies we come to know more about Hamlet's own nature and feelings, his feelings about others and others' feelings for him. The development as well as deterioration in his character is brought to light through his soliloquies. His refinement of nature is

seen in his treatment of the players. He considers them as his friends and respects each player and his words.

The speculative man. Hamlet is a man who in the face of life and death can make no affirmation, and it may well be that this irresolution—which goes far deeper than irresolution about the performance of a specific act—this fundamental doubt, explains the great appeal of the play in modern times. Mr. James dismisses the play as “a tragedy not of excessive thought but of defeated thought”, and Hamlet himself is “a man caught in ethical and metaphysical uncertainties”. Hamlet is after all an intellectual man. His intellectuality, the working of his mind, is largely at the service of attitudes of rejection and disgust that are indiscriminate in their working. He is not inactive throughout. At times he is active but it is mainly due to his impulses. In the character of Hamlet, everyone is tempted to see an evocation not simply of Hamlet's world but of their own. Man in his aspect of bafflement, moving in darkness on a rampart between two worlds, unable to reject, or quite accept, the one that; when he faces it, “shakes” his disposition with thoughts beyond the reaches of his soul—comforting himself with hints and guesses.

Hamlet's madness. The problem of Hamlet's madness is as difficult to solve as that of his irresolution. Much has been written over Hamlet's madness whether it is real or feigned. Though this treatment of madness varies from that of the original story, it suits Hamlet in the circumstances and situation in which he is placed. It is the only device in which Hamlet could give vent to his feelings. He assumes madness. Still at times he seems truly mad. However, these contradictions add to the beauty of artistic quality rather than spoil it.

Hamlet-Ophelia relationship. Ophelia is meant to be used as a decoy to find out the cause of Hamlet's madness. But Shakespeare has made her the sister of the avenger of Hamlet to intensify the tragic effect. Hamlet's love for Ophelia is genuine but he suppresses it after his mother's hasty marriage for he has been enjoined with the duty of revenge, and has also a poor opinion of woman's fidelity.

Themes. *Hamlet* is much praised for Shakespeare's treatment of themes rather than for anything else. The main theme is revenge—son avenging the murder of his father. This theme depicts the character of the hero, the development or deterioration in his character; the success or failure in carrying out the work; the means he adopts to attain his aims etc. Hamlet has to avenge his father's death. His irresolution and procrastination make him delay in his action. He gets a play enacted to confirm Claudius's guilt. Claudius's guilt is confirmed; still he delays until the enemy takes the initiative. He fulfils the task at the cost of his own life. So evil is punished in the end but it involves the wastage of good also. This central theme is treated with elemental passions as well as secondary themes and gives profound aesthetic satisfaction to the audience.

Conclusion. Like other plays of Shakespeare this play too can be criticised on various grounds. Chance plays an important role in this play for most of the important incidents happen by chance. Hamlet's downfall and his tragic death is also mainly due to this chance. The relationship of Horatio to Denmark is also puzzling. He creates a feeling of both a friend and a stranger. Above all, the question of Hamlet's age is still a mystery. He appears to be eighteen at the beginning of the play but the grave-digger's words create an impression of his being thirty years old. But in truth none of these ‘problems’ bother us when we witness the play in the theatre. If there are loose ends, they vanish in the overall sense of mystery evoked by the atmosphere of the play. Far from being an artistic failure, *Hamlet* is a well constructed play which appeals to the imagination and intellect of the audience and reader alike.

THE ENDURING POPULARITY OF HAMLET

Q. 25. “The play *Hamlet* has on-stage action in God's plenty,” says Edward Hubble. Discuss the enduring appeal of *Hamlet* in the light of this statement.

Or

“It may indeed be called the tragedy of thought for there is as much reflection as action in it”. How does this aspect of the play give to it an enduring popularity.

Or

Critically comment on the enduring popularity of *Hamlet*. How far is it attributable to the character of its hero?

Ans. Introduction. *Hamlet* is one of the most popular and famous plays in the English language. It is one of the great tragedies written by Shakespeare, enduring through the centuries because of its mysterious appeal and the character of the Prince. John Bailey praising the play says: “There is no play which is read with such breathless eagerness, and the eagerness is not satiated by old acquaintance.”

The universality of the character of Hamlet. The character of Hamlet has universal appeal and significance. His figure, as Brandes puts it, “is one of the very few immortal figures of art and poetry... like Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and Goethe's *Faust*. Hamlet still lives in the hearts of many and is significant for his experiences in ourselves. He creates an impression that if we are to be kept in similar situations, we are likely to react to them in the same way in which Hamlet reacts to his predicaments. Hamlet is imposed upon with the duty of avenging his father's death. The awareness of his uncle's guilt and his mother's frailty change his whole outlook on life. Further he wants to verify these accusations. Even after the verification he hesitates to act. He is beset by universal questions on the nature of man and fate. Finally he is forced to kill

Claudius at the cost of his own life. Thus he becomes an epitome of human nature for everyone finds oneself in the character of Hamlet.

Plot construction. The play continues to entertain the people for there exists a co-ordination between character and plot. A perfectly shaped plot has a perfect ordering of events. It is not a play of events alone but also of characters. The characters account for plot development. The widespread appeal of this play lies in the skill with which Shakespeare weaves plot and character.

Universal theme. Yet another, perhaps the most important reason for the popularity of *Hamlet* is that it presents an experience which has a universal appeal and significance. The belief that 'there is providence in the fall of a Sparrow' and earthly objects are subject to this power appeals to all. Hamlet is placed in such a situation that he is impotent and his actions prove ineffective. Hamlet finds that men are not what they think are: the world is so mysteriously composed of good and evil and "there is a divinity that shapes our ends."

Mystery of life. *Hamlet* is the most contemplative of the plays of Shakespeare. Says Verity: "the play's meditative element is one of the factors of its popularity." The speculative questions that are posed by the play have a universal appeal and are of much interest to mankind. The problem "to be or not to be," the mystery of life "of something after death," the problem of evil and injustice, the disproportion between wrong-doing and punishment,—all these are resolved in the realization that 'there is a divinity that shapes our ends'; these are things that interest every man.

Immense variety. The immense variety of the play also accounts for its popularity. As Dr. Johnson points out, "In *Hamlet*, the scenes are interchangeably diversified with merriment and solemnity.....New characters appear from time to time in continual succession, exhibiting various forms of life and particular modes of conversation. The pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth, the mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness and every personage produces the effect intended, from the Apparition in Act I that chills the blood with horror, to fop in the last, that exposes affectation to just contempt".

A play of great scenes. *Hamlet* is a play of great scenes and every scene in it is a masterpiece. These scenes help to advance the story, to create and resolve mystery and tension. The scene in which Hamlet sees the Ghost or the one in which he talks to the Ghost creates an atmosphere of awe and terror in the most artistic manner. The nunnery scene, the play scene, the closet scene, the scene in which Ophelia sings mad songs, the graveyard scene, the fencing match which proceeds the final catastrophe are impressive and contribute to the overall thematic effect.

Poetry. An old woman complained that *Hamlet* was merely a string of popular quotations: nothing could more clearly speak for the play's popularity. Lines like

There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

are ever remembered by the people. The play is full of beautiful, poetic lines that have passed into the sphere of common everyday proverbs.

Conclusion. Stopford Brooke gives an account for the universality of *Hamlet* in a nutshell: "Hamlet is supposed to be entirely different, both in intellectual power and in strangeness of phantasy and feelings, from the common run of educated men, to be in a class apart. It is not really so, and one proof of that is that so many hundreds of thousands of men and women, when they listen to him, listen to their own souls. The thoughts he has, they have had; the imaginative dreams and fancies he expresses have passed through their minds. The questions he cuts to life, the questioning he has had about death, those he has about suicide when he is alone; the impatience he has with the troubles he is called upon to face, and the demands which they make upon him! The impulses under which he has to perform the demands and to battle with the troubles; the fading of those impulses as fresh thoughts occur to him and make him glad to forget them—are all common to millions of men and women who belong to the pensive, sensitive, imaginative, contemplative, idealising type of humanity which thinks rather than acts, is quiet rather than stirring, dreaming rather than practical; to whom the soul is more than the body, the mystic more than the material life. Wherever persons of that type exist, in poverty or in riches, among peasants or princes we find Hamlet, and they find themselves in Hamlet. And the owner of the play consists not in the mental apartness of Hamlet from the rest of the world, but in the amazing power of the poet who made him, who embodied in him the representation of one million people type of humanity, who made him so act, so speak, that he set before us not only the type, but almost all the variations within that type, almost all the main directions of their thoughts and feeling about the life of man. The thoughts Hamlet expresses are not of exceptional range or excellence. They do not set him on a pinnacle above to her men. They are, as thoughts alone, the ordinary thoughts of his type in cultivated youth with a turn for philosophy. What does make his thoughts apparently greater and deeper than those of other young men of his temperament is the noble passion of their clothing, the splendour of words."

Hamlet poses several unanswerable questions—and this symbolises, not loose ends in the play, but its unrivalled imaginative power. *Hamlet* is a 'problematic play' and in this fact lies its enduring appeal.

6 Symposium of Critics on *Hamlet*

HAMLET AS A REVENGE PLAY

G.B. Harrison: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—it seems almost profane to say it—belongs to the common and the popular type of the drama known as the Revenge Play, where the dramatic motive is not whether the avenger will achieve his object, but how and when. The interest of a Revenge Play was in watching the hero surmounting obstacle after obstacle until finally he reached his victim's heart; but while lesser dramatists laid physical obstacles in the way of revenge, Shakespeare puts intellectual.

HAMLET AS A TRAGEDY

Dover Wilson: *Hamlet* is the tragedy of a genius caught fast in the toils of circumstance and unable to get free. Shakespeare gradually unfolds to us the full horror of Hamlet's situation, adding one load after another to the burden he has to bear until we feel that he must sink beneath it. The apparition in the first scene warns us of some strange eruption that threatens the State of Denmark. The opening of the second scene shows us the Prince robbed of his inheritance by his uncle and mourning a beloved father whom his mother has already forgotten. Here is a matter for pathos, though scarcely for tragic issues. But Hamlet now steps forward and tells us what is in his heart, what overshadows his disinheritance so completely that he does not mention it. His mother is a criminal, has been guilty of a sin which grieves him deeply, makes life meaningless, and infects his very blood:

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew....

(Act I, Scene ii, Lines 129-159).

This soliloquy shows Hamlet's pre-occupation with his mother's hasty remarriage and his feeling of torment over what he considers to be incest. His mind is already weighed down by the anguish of the situation.

D.G. James: *Hamlet* is not a tragedy of excessive thought, it is a tragedy of defeated thought. Hamlet does not know; and he knows of no way of knowing. And he says: "Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all". The word "conscience" here not only carries its usual meaning (which is a command

SYMPOSIUM OF CRITICS ON 'HAMLET'

to do what is right), but also means "reflection and anxious thought". In his famous soliloquy, Hamlet is thinking of his duty (of revenge) in relation to a possible world to come. He finds it difficult to decide what is right, and he is uncertain of what happens after death. Conscience requires that we do what is right or wrong in these circumstances? Anxious reflection discloses no clear conviction: nor does it provide knowledge of the world to come. This is the moral and metaphysical uncertainty in which Hamlet finds himself. He does not know and cannot find out. Conscience makes demands; but it also provides no clear moral or metaphysical sense.

E.K. Chamber: *Hamlet* is the tragedy of the intellectual, of the importance of the over-cultivated imagination and the over subtilized reasoning powers to meet the call of everyday life for practical efficiency. Hamlet's tragedy is a particular example of a universal predicament: action is necessary, but all action in a fallen world involves us in evil. To attempt to shuffle off responsibility by refusing to act, or by shuffling off this mortal coil—by 'handing God back his ticket', as Dostoevsky puts it—involves us equally in guilt.

PLOT OF HAMLET

G.B. Harrison: The plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is neat, admirably worked out, symmetrical, and using the word in the Jonsonian—or complimentary—sense, 'artificial'. It is also highly improbable. A brother kills a king and marries the widow; and hence the king's son has double cause to hate the uncle and a filial obligation to avenge the dead. But, if the final vengeance is to be satisfactory, the son should also perish; and there must be an adequate cause for his father; and on that father's son too is laid the duty of vengeance; and by a supremely artistic device the double vengeance come to a point at the same moment.

CHARACTERISATION IN HAMLET

Dr. Johnson: Shakespeare is above all writers—at least above all modern writers—the poet of Nature: the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world.

Goethe: His characters are like watches with dial-plates of transparent crystal, they show you the hour like others, and the onward mechanism is also visible.

Hudson: Shakespeare conceived his person, not from their outside, but in their rudiments and first principles. He begins at the heart of a character, and unfolds it outwards, forming and compacting all the internal parts and organs as he unfolds it: and the development even because it is a real and true

development, proceeds at every step, not by mere addition or aggregation of particulars, but by digestion and vital assimilation of all matter that enters into the structure.

Coleridge: One of Shakespeare's modes of creating character is, to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then to place himself, Shakespeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds,—an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed: his thoughts, and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and a colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action, consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment.

HAMLET'S CHARACTER

Goethe: A beautiful, pure, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve, which makes the hero, sinks beneath a burden which it can neither bear nor throw off; every duty is holy to him,—this too hard. The impossible is required of him,—not the impossible in itself, but the impossible to him.

Schlegel: He (Hamlet) is, it is true, of a highly cultivated mind, a prince of royal manners, endowed with the finest sense of propriety, susceptible of noble ambition, and open in the highest degree to an enthusiastic admiration, of that excellence in others of which he himself is deficient. He is not solely impelled by necessity to artifice and dissimulation, he has a natural inclination for crooked ways; he is a hypocrite himself; his farfetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination.

William Hazlitt: The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be: but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings and forced from the natural bias of his disposition by the strangeness of his situation.

Walter Raleigh: What Hamlet does is of little importance; nothing that he can do would avert the tragedy, or lessen his own agony. It is not by what he does that he appeals to us; but by what he sees and feels. Those who see less think him mad. But the King who, in a different manner, has access to what is passing in Hamlet's mind, knows that he is dangerously sane.

SYMPOSIUM OF CRITICS ON 'HAMLET'

Dowden: Hamlet is called upon to assert moral order in a world of moral confusion and obscurity....All the strength which he possesses would have become organized and available had his world been one of honesty, of happiness, of human love. But a world of deceit, of espionage, of selfishness, surrounds him; his idealism, at thirty years of age, almost takes the form of pessimism; his life and his heart become sterile; he loses the energy which sound and joyous feeling supplies; and in the wide-spreading waste of corruption which lies around him, he is tempted to understand and detest things rather than accomplish some limited practical service.

Lewis. Hamlet is not an individual at all, but Everyman, haunted by the fear of being dead, and burdened by original sin.

S.R. Lowell: Hamlet, among all the characters of Shakespeare, is most eminently a metaphysician and psychologist. He is a close observer, continually analysing his own nature and that of others, letting fall his little drops of acid irony on all who come near him, to make them show what they are made of. Even Ophelia is not too sacred, Osric not too contemptible for experiment. If such a man assumed madness, he would play his part perfectly....If you deprive Hamlet of reason, there is no truly tragic motive left. He would not be a fit subject for the stage. We might have pathology enough, but no pathos. Ajax first becomes tragic when he recovers his wits. If Hamlet is irresponsible, the whole play is a chaos.

Coleridge: All that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.

Harold Jenkins: In Hamlet Shakespeare presents a revenger who is both ruthless and reluctant. As a revenger he must act, on behalf of outraged virtue, to restore a violated order, set right what is 'out of joint'. But the act he is impelled to involves him in evil of the kind which he would punish. As the ruthless revenger he exemplifies in his own person the evil which is inseparable from the good in human nature; as the reluctant revenger he can symbolize the good's abhorrence of it.

Verity: As Hamlet thinks too much, so he feels too much... and throughout *Hamlet*, the hero is shown us, if not as 'passion's slave', yet as a man with terrible capacities of feeling, one in whom emotions gains an ascendancy that at times upsets the whole equilibrium of his being...Feeling less, Hamlet would have less inclination to act; thinking less, he would have more power to act. Through the contest of these antagonistic tendencies his whole soul is tossed about in a restless activity of self-torture. In short there is a conflict between his emotion and reason. Because of this he hesitates and wavers. His tragedy is chiefly due to this conflict.

W.H. Clemen: Hamlet's imagery suggests some idea of his character. He is a keen observer of reality. He has a wide educational background. He is able

"to penetrate to the real nature of men and things" and he relentlessly break down "the barriers raised by hypocrisy". The idea of an ulcer, supported by that of poisoning, dominates the play in some sense. Both are used to explain Hamlet's feeling of being sullied by his mother's crime. The idea of Hamlet being a cloistered student or an impractical idealist is clearly incompatible with the picture of his mind as it emerges from study of his imagery.

HAMLET'S MADNESS

T.S. Eliot: Hamlet's madness is less than madness, and more than feigned....

Stopford Brooke: The fact is that Shakespeare never intended to represent Hamlet as mad or half-mad or verging on madness. He expressly made him a feigner of madness and when he wished to represent real madness and to contrast it with feigned madness, he created by the real madness of Ophelia, and did it with wonderful success.

Quiller Couch: Very few of us are without some little kink of the brain, some tendency to estimate this or that out of its due proportion in what the most of us allow to be an ordered universe. Still fewer of us perhaps shall never on our way through this transitory life be thrown off our balance by distress of mind or the shock of calamity.

Dowden: He assumes madness as a means of concealing his actual disturbance of mind. His over-excitability may betray him; but if it be a received opinion that his mind is unhinged, such all excess of over-excitement will pass unobserved and unstudied.

L.C. Knights: The disguise which he had adopted was not accidentally chosen. The subtlety of his intellect directed him to that tone of wayward sarcasm in which, while he appeared to others to be merely wandering, the bitterness of his soul might be relieved by the utterance of "wild and hurling words". But even in this disguise, his intellectual supremacy is constantly manifested.

Coleridge: His madness is assumed, when he finds that witnesses have been placed behind the arras to listen to what passes, and when the heroine has been thrown in his way as a decoy.

CLAUDIUS

Ulrici: The King himself is a mass of deception and hypocrisy; he is a practised actor, and the perfect master of his looks and movements, and of all his words and actions; his guilty designs are supported in every case by maturely-weighted and well-contrived plans.

Wilson Knight: Claudius, as he appears in the play, is not a criminal. He is—strange as it may seem—a good and gentle king, enmeshed by the chain of causality linking him with his crime. And this chain he might, perhaps, have

SYMPOSIUM OF CRITICS ON 'HAMLET'

broken except for Hamlet, and all would have been well. But granted the presence of Hamlet—which Claudius at first genuinely desired, persuading him not to return to Wittenburg—as he wished—and granted the fact of his original crime which cannot now be altered, Claudius can hardly be blamed for his latter actions. They are forced upon him. As a king, he could scarcely be expected to do otherwise.

John Danby: His (Claudius's) crime weighs heavily upon him and it is obvious that he is more tender-hearted than a king-slayer should be. When Polonius moralizes on hypocrisy, Claudius reveals his billiousness of conscience. Claudius's crime sickens him. His attempt to re-establish himself through prayer is sincere if unsuccessful. He knows the price of atonement, but his sick-will is incapable of paying it; he cannot shake off pride, he cannot relinquish the throne, and especially he cannot part with Gertrude.

LAERTES

Dowden: Laertes is the cultured young gentleman of the period. He is accomplished, chivalric, gallant, but the accomplishments are superficial, the chivalry theatrical, the gallantry of a showy kind. He is master of events up to a certain point, because he sees their coarse, gaudy, superficial significance....No overweight of thought, no susceptibility of conscience retard the action of the young gallant.

Ulrici: Laertes is the opposite and the pendant to Hamlet. The position of both is nearly the same. Laertes, too, has to avenge the death of a father and sister. His soul, however, kindles at once with passionate ardour. Rejecting all deliberation, his resolution bursts forth at once into action, and it is with difficulty that the persuasive eloquence of the King succeeds in restoring him to self-possession, and the adaptation of artifice and dissimulation.

GERTRUDE

Dowden: The timid, self-indulgent, sensuous, sentimental queen is as remote from true woman's virtue as Claudius is from the virtues of royal manhood.

Richardson: In the queen we discern the confidence of a guilty mind, that by the artifice of self-deceit, has put to silence the upbraidings of conscience.

Wood and Marshall: The queen is the instrument by means of which the crime is performed, rather than a criminal herself. She is a weak woman, but not consciously wicked or depraved. She is 'seeming virtuous', and no doubt has deceived herself till she came to imagine herself a very pattern of virtue.

OPHELIA

Mrs. Johnson: Ophelia—poor Ophelia! Oh, far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the briars of this working day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life! What should be said of her? for eloquence is mute before her! Like a strain of sad, sweet music, which we rather feel than hear—like the exhalation of the violet, dying even upon the sense it charms—like the snowflake, dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth—like the light surf severed from the billow, which a breath disperses: such is the character of Ophelia.

Lady Martin: The baby Ophelia was left, as I fancy to the kindly but thoroughly unsympathetic tending of country-folk, who knew little of "inland nurture." I think of her—sweet, fond, sensitive, tender-hearted, tended only by roughly-mannered and uncultured natures. One can see the sweet child with no playmates of her kind, wandering by the streams plucking flowers, making wreaths and cornals, learning the names of all the wild flowers in glade and dingle, having many favourites, listening with eager ears when amused or lulled to sleep at night by the country songs, whose words (in true country fashion, not too refine) come back again vividly to her memory with the fitting melodies, as such thing strangely but surely do, only when her wits have flown.

POLONIUS

Dr. Johnson: Dotage encroaching upon wisdom.

Hazlitt: Polonius is a perfect character in its kind; nor is there any foundation, for the objections which have been made to the consistency of this part. It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. Again, that he talks wisely at one time and foolishly at another, that his advice to Laertes is very excellent, and his advice to the King and Queen on the subject of Hamlet's madness very ridiculous. But he gives the one as a father and is sincere in it; he gives the other as a mere courtier, a busy-body, and is accordingly officious, garrulous and impertinent.

Coleridge: Polonius is a man of maxims...A man of maxims only is like a cyclop with one eye, and that eye placed in the back of his head.

Gervinus: The schooled courtier lacks not experience and observation, which he has carefully gathered and loquaciously gives forth; the self-conceit of emptiness is apparent in him, and with the same self-sufficiency he gives good precepts to his son, a lesson on human nature to his servant, and counsels to his king.

ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN

Kenneth Muir: They (Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern) are tweedledum and tweedledee.

SYMPOSIUM OF CRITICS ON 'HAMLET'

Wood and Marshall: They are typical of the class of men whose inclination are good enough, but who are without the force of character even to follow their own inclinations. They are so weak that they cannot even practice villainy with success.

GRAVE-DIGGERS

Dowden: The grave-diggers have a grim grotesqueness; each is a humorous jester in the court of death.

Schucking: The humour of the grave-diggers has nothing coarse or offensive in it, for though at first sight such objects as suicide, dead bodies, and graves hardly appear suitable for comic treatment, but there they take on a different aspect, largely because they are seen through the eyes of one who has lost all feeling of revulsion for what is horrible or sad in them.

THE GHOST

Richardson: The awful horror excited by the foregoing passage is accomplished by simplicity of expression, and by the uncertainty of the thing described. The description is indirect, and by exhibiting a picture of the effects which an actual view of the real object would necessarily produce in the spectator, it affects us more strongly than by a positive enumeration of the most dreadful circumstances. The imagination left to her own inventions, overwhelmed with obscurity, travels far into the regions of terror, into the abysses of fiery and unfathomable darkness.

Verity: Without the Ghost's initial revelation of truth to Hamlet, there would be no occasion for revenge; in other words, no tragedy of Hamlet.

Loreto Todd: The Ghost is...a traditional figure whose role was to urge the hero to avenge an evil deed.

HAMLET'S SOLILOQUIES

Verity: The dramatic purpose of the first soliloquy is to amplify that impression of Hamlet's character in general, and that insight into his present feelings, which we have gained from what has preceded. This purpose is important at this point because Hamlet is on the eve of revelation which will make or mar his whole life.

G.B. Harrison: Shakespeare made a distinctive use of soliloquies in *Hamlet*. Self-revelation in the conditions and conventions of the little Elizabethan theatre could best be accomplished by soliloquy. He (Shakespeare) had used soliloquy often enough but hitherto they were directly intended to convey to the audience a piece of information either that the speaker was playing a deceitful part or to let them know what was happening or about to happen or else to open set

pieces of declamation... In *Hamlet* for the first time Shakespeare elaborated the soliloquy to show a character exploring his own complex mentality. Such self-analysis was not entirely new in English literature. In the novels of the euphuists, the artificial ladies would meander off into soliloquies on love and duty for pages on end, but rather for the sake of pretty parallels of image and sentence than for any deeper psychological cause.

John Holloway: Hamlet's soliloquies are foremost in bringing the idea of his delay to our notice. But the stress on delay in the soliloquies also shows how Hamlet is preoccupied with his role, a role undertaken by him with what might almost be termed pre-ordained course and end. This is in fact constantly the burden of his soliloquies. "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (Act I, Scene II, Line 149); "from the table of my memory/I'll wipe away all trivial fond records" (Act I, Scene V, Lines 88-90); "What would he do/Had he the motive and the cue for passion/That I have? (Act II, Scene II, Lines 563-565); "Who would fardels bear,/To grunt and sweat under a weary life" (Act III, Scene I, Lines 76-77); "Now I could drink hot blood" (Act III, Scene I, Lines 393); "Now might I do it" (Act III, Scene IV, Line 73); "I do not know/Why yet I live to say: This thing's to do" (Act IV, Scene IV, Lines 43-44). In each of the seven soliloquies the idea is clear; Hamlet's life is one to be lived under the imposition of a great task, an imperious demand from outside. The soliloquies show him for a man taken up with the demands made upon him by that fact.

THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF HAMLET

Ifor Evans: The language of the tragedy (*Hamlet*) has never had the attention it deserves. For despite the crowded action, Shakespeare has had time to develop a self-conscious interest in words, and in the problem of language. This separates *Hamlet* from all the other great tragedies, for this, along with all its other qualities, is a tragedy of wit, where the turn of phrase and the quality of the vocabulary are treasured for their own sake. Hamlet, the Renaissance prince, is a philologist, as is Polonius....In *Hamlet*, the cunning is the interest in language brought to the service of the action and that while words are explored for their own sake, by some creative ingenuity of the characterisation so as to render it a natural and integral part of the conception.

Granville Barker: In *Hamlet* reiteration is lifted to psychological uses: Hamlet's reiterations are part of his mental idiom—the index of his obsession, abstraction, impatience or life-weariness: 'Mother, mother, mother!'; words, words, words'; 'very like, very like'; 'yours, yours'; except my life, except my life, except my life'; 'O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain'; And there is the more elaborated flinging-about between Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus and the Ghost of the 'swear....sworn....sworn....in faith....indeed'; and here the mutual

SYMPOSIUM OF CRITICS ON 'HAMLET'

ringing of the changes of emphasis and tone on the reiterated words is like the weaving of a spell.

In point of style the play stands midway between his early and his latest works. The studious superintendence of the poet over the development of his thought and imaginings, very apparent in Shakespeare's early writings, now conceals itself; but the action of the imagination and thought has not yet become embarrassing in its swiftness and multiplicity of direction. Rapid dialogue in verse, admirable for its combination of verisimilitude with artistic metrical effects occurs in the scene in which Hamlet questions his friends respecting the appearance; the soliloquies of Hamlet are excellent examples of the slow, swelling verse which Shakespeare appropriates to the utterance of thought in solitude, and nowhere did Shakespeare write a nobler piece of prose than the speech in which Hamlet describes to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern his melancholy.

James Spedding: The same close-packed expression, the same life and reality, and freshness, the same rapid and abrupt turnings of thought, so quick that language can hardly follow fast enough; the same impatient activity of intellect and fancy, which having once disclosed an idea, cannot wait to work it orderly out, the same daring confidence in the resources of language, which plunges head-long into a sentence without knowing how it is to come forth, the same careless metre which disdains to produce its harmonious effects by the ordinary devices, yet is evidently subject to a master of harmony, the same entire freedom from book-language and common place.

ON THE POPULARITY OF HAMLET

Stopford Brooke: Hamlet is supposed to be entirely different, both in intellectual power and in strangeness of phantasy and feelings, from the common run of educated men, to be in a class apart. It is not really so, and one proof of that is that so many hundreds of thousands of men and women, when they listen to him, listen to their own souls. The thoughts he has they have had; the imaginative dreams and fancies he expresses have passed through their minds. The questions, he puts to life, the questionings he has had about death, those he has about suicide when he is alone; the impatience he has with the troubles he is called upon to face, and the demands which they make upon him! the impulses under which he has to perform the demands and to battle with the troubles, the fading of those impulses as fresh thoughts occur to him and make him glad to forget them—are all common to millions of men and women who belong to the pensive, sensitive, imaginative, contemplative, idealising type of humanity, which thinks rather than acts, is quiet rather than stirring, dreaming rather than practical, to whom the soul is more than the body, the mystic more than the material life. Wherever persons of that type exist, in poverty or in riches, among peasants or princes, we find Hamlet, and they find themselves in

HAMLET

Hamlet. And the wonder of the play consists not in the mental apartness of Hamlet from the rest of the world, but in the amazing power of the poet who made him, who embodied in him the representation of one million-people type of humanity, who made him so act, so speak, that he set before us not only the type, but almost all the variations within that type, almost all the main directions of their thoughts and feeling about the life of man. The thoughts Hamlet expresses are not of exceptional range or excellence. They do not set him on a pinnacle above other men. They are, as thoughts alone, the ordinary thoughts of his type in a cultivated youth with a turn for philosophy. What does make his thoughts apparently greater and deeper than those of other young men of his temperament is the noble passion of their clothing, the splendour of words.

G.B. Harrison: Nevertheless, though not deep tragedy of the kind which utterly purges the emotions, *Hamlet* remains the most fascinating and interesting play in the English language, probably in all drama, and for most of us it has a strange quality—at each succeeding performance or reading it is somehow different. One never comes to the end of its novelties or of its depths.

Brandes: Three hundred years after his creation, Hamlet is still the confidant and friend of sad and thoughtful souls in every land. There is something unique in this. With such piercing vision has Shakespeare searched out the depths of his own, and at the same time of all human nature, and so boldly and surely has he depicted the outward semblance of what he saw, that centuries later, men of every country and of every race have felt their own being moulded like wax in his hand and have seen themselves in his poetry as in a mirror.

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