THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXTRAVAGANCE, MEDIOCRITY AND FIRE IN "HAMLET"

by

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This thesis views _Hamlet_ as a complicated ritual of purge where the Prince is stirred not only to avenge his deceased father, but also to vindicate his country's soiled reputation and his own "wounded name". It sees in the drama tension generated by two contrary styles of life, Extravagance and Mediocrity. The conflicts between the two styles are resolved in a mixed mode.

The conflicts between Extravagance and Mediocrity are really between forms of dis-position and distemper on the one hand and modes of balance and good temper on the other. In the first chapter, I explore the connotations and patterns of Extravagance and Mediocrity to show that Hamlet aspires to follow the "modesty of nature" although he does waver between excess and deficiency. The second chapter shows that the dis-position and distemper are reflected in the disease imagery of the play and also in the elemental distribution in character and setting. Renaissance microcosmography linked man to the cosmos because they were both

worlds "made cunningly of elements" and the "sickness" of the one was reflected in the "sickness" of the other. The numerous elemental images mark an ascendancy of heat and contain a nucleus in fire. My third chapter shows how fire acts as force of distemper and cure in Hamlet by signifying either the "sickness" of Extravagance or the "cure" of Mediocrity. From one point of view, the ritual can be seen in terms of an expanded metaphor of "explosions" with "shots" arranged around Hamlet and Claudius. The drama speeds to an "upshot" and in the fourth chapter, I show how the ritual of purge is finally effected through catastrophe and at the cost of the hero. The material destruction and the memory of pain and evil linger on but the play offers the spiritual comfort of Mediocrity as the Extravagances are extinguished or controlled.

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INTRODUCTION

It is possible that every critic has his own favourite reading of Hamlet. The play has been interpreted in many ways ranging all the way from a view of it as a drama of revenge to a view of it as a drama of consciousness. It has drawn its share of psychological analysis, theological interpretation, and sheer textual scrutiny. What, then, remains to be said? Simply that no single reading could ever hope to exhaust the play's ambiguity or richness, although a new reading could explore the play in a different way and reveal further patterns in its ritualistic framework.

My thesis is not a definitive interpretation of the play but offers an approach to the drama as a complicated ritual of purge containing two contrary styles of life which are resolved in a mixed mode. The thesis is a study of certain thematic, figurative, and imagistic patterns that recur in Hamlet and grow out of the conflicts between the contrary styles of life which are either extravagant or medial (balanced). I have isolated and regrouped these patterns from others in the play, in order that I might pursue my analysis more profoundly and incisively.

My work comprises four chapters. In the first chapter, I concentrate on the connotations and patterns of extravagant dis-position (a radical upsetting of position or condition) and distemper in character and setting. The dis-position (distinct from disposition or inclination, temperament, arrangement, aptitude) is caused by transgressions of the characters which imply a radical change of position. The dis-position is a result of stepping out of bounds, regions, spheres of propriety, and is accompanied by "sickness" or distemper in character and setting. The "sickness" indicates an excess or deficiency of some sort in microcosm and macrocosm. In this chapter, I show that there are also medial patterns of behaviour, thought, and feeling and the conflicts between the extravagant and medial patterns generate the tension in Hamlet. The Prince, like other characters, is involved in a soul-struggle and he can only vindicate his "wounded name", the memory of his father, and the reputation of Denmark by a medial purging of extravagant forces.

The patterns of Extravagance and Mediocrity have an intense reflector in the disease imagery of the play and are also signified by elemental images in character and setting. Denmark is "diseased" and the "sickness" is indicated by the

elemental distemper. The second chapter passes quickly from the disease imagery to the elemental patterns which show microcosmographic distemper. Other critics have already researched the disease imagery in Hamlet and I have chosen to concentrate on the dramatic implications of microcosmographic patterns. I have used popular Renaissance theories of microcosmography, particularly those of Elyot and Thomas Newton, two writers whose works had several printings in their time. Such background material helped to reveal the implications of elemental Extravagance and Mediocrity. Because all men have a link to the cosmos by virtue of an elemental fundamentality, the distemper of characters is reflected in the distemper of the setting.

My third chapter shows how the numerous elemental images, which express dis-position and distemper in the drama, have a nucleus in fire. It is fire that operates as force of bad and good temper in Hamlet by signifying either the "sickness" of Extravagance or the "cure" of Mediocrity. From one point of view, the ritual of purge can be seen in terms of an expanded metaphor of "explosions" with "shots" arranged around Hamlet and Claudius. The drama speeds to an "upshot" with the ascendancy of purging "fire" and the diminution of extravagant "fire".

The conflicts between Extravagance and Mediocrity are, in reality, conflicts between two contrary styles of life and the tensions arising out of this constitute the equilibrium of the tragedy. This is discussed in the fourth chapter where I underscore my view of Hamlet as a complicated ritual of purge. The numerous Extravagances delay the ritual and when the ritual is finally completed there is an irony. The purge is effected only through catastrophe and at the cost of the hero. The memory of pain and evil lingers on even as the Extravagances are extinguished or controlled.

Hamlet is a piece of theatre which automatically implies that its dramatic action should receive the major focus. However, this thesis is not a piece of theatre criticism. It does not seek to enlighten an audience of readers on technical dramaturgy, but it does aim at an interpretative study of patterns in the dramatic action. Its method ultimately seeks to corroborate the ritualistic pattern of purge and the technical labels (Extravagance, Mediocrity, dis-position, for example) are employed as aids to understanding the complicated ritual. Ultimately, of course, Hamlet transcends any critical scrutiny no matter how novel, painstaking, and thorough.

CHAPTER I

CONNOTATIONS AND PATTERNS OF EXTRAVAGANCE AND MEDIOCRITY

"the extravagant and erring spirit"--1.1.154.[1]

"in neither aught, or in extremity"--3.2.158.

Hamlet is a ritual of purge in which we are first introduced to problems of Extravagance before being shown the possibility of solving such Extravagance and effecting the necessary purge. The appearance of the Ghost introduces the idea of Extravagance in the ritual of purge and typifies the problem of transgressory movement.

The Ghost's appearance is fundamental to the aspect of the play as a revenge drama and is also a dramatic stylisation of Extravagance in the sense of a wandering out of proper bounds.[2] The Ghost escapes from its confines of sulphur and fire in order to intrude upon the human setting in Elsinore and carry with it a revelation of evil "disease" and an insistence on purge. It has wandered out of due bounds, and Horatio interprets its appearance as a form of usurpation or invasion: "What art thou, that usurp'st this time of night"

(1.1.46). Such an invasion is an Extravagance because the Ghost has wandered out ot its other-worldly region and has intruded upon the human world. Horatio, a scholar knowledgeable in affairs of the Spirit world, comments:

> I have heard,
> The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
> Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
> Awake the god of day, and at his warning,
> Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
> The extravagant and erring spirit hies
> To his confine. (1.1.149-150)

Horatio's lines on the Ghost link the ideas of the elemental fundamentality of the universe (earth, air, fire, water) and Extravagance in the sense of a wandering out of proper regions. The Ghost is expected to remain in its fiery confines but has moved out of the region proper to it and is guilty of Extravagance.

The Ghost's extravagant movement causes a radical disposition in the first scene and there is a chain of events showing how the Ghost's Extravagance has a disquieting impact which spreads from character to character. The "quiet guard" of Francisco is shattered and reports of the Ghost's shocking appearance prompt Horatio's comment on psychological disposition:

> Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
> And will not let belief take hold of him
> Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us.
> (1.1.23-25)

Horatio is reminded of cosmic Extravagance in classical antiquity which also produced a dis-position:

> A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
> The graves stook tenantless, and the sheeted dead
> Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;
> As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
> Disasters in the sun: and the moist star,
> Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands,
> Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
> (1.1.114-120)

Like the Ghost, the corpses move out of their region and therefore produce strange, unnatural occurrences affecting the cosmos. The "sheeted dead" belong in graves; the Ghost in fire. Their Extravagances result in a "sick" world with disorder impinging upon microcosm and macrocosm. It is like the untuning of that string in <u>Troilus And Cressida</u> where discord follows cosmic Extravagance:

> when the planets
> In evil mixture to disorder wander,
> What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny?
> What raging of the sea? Shaking of the earth?
> (1.3.94-97)

Because of the Ghost's Extravagance, Horatio believes that fantasy supersedes reality and Hamlet admits to confusion and agitation:

> What may this mean,
> That thou, dead corse, again, in complete steel,
> Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
> Making night hideous; and we fools of nature
> So horridly to shake our disposition
> With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
> (1.4.51-56)

Hamlet's words suggest that the Ghost's Extravagance is a problem beyond the full understanding of man's mind. There is a natural limitation in men who are "fools of nature" if they suppose that spiritual problems cannot move beyond human comprehension.

There are fundamental questions raised by the Ghost's appearance. Has the Ghost moved out of Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory? Is its revelation reliable and valid, and just what effect will this have on Hamlet's chances as the next elective king or even on his disposition? Is it a daemon, a "goblin damn'd", or an "honest ghost"? What effect does its Extravagance have on Denmark?

The Ghost is imperceptible at ordinary times to the human senses: the guards only see it at night and Gertrude, in a later scene (3.4), does not see it at all. However, it is capable of making itself troublesome and terrifying. A "portentous figure" to Bernardo (1.1.109), the Ghost "harrows" Horatio with such "fear and wonder" (1.1.43) that he begins to "tremble and look pale". (1.1.53) In its supernatural "érring" it reminds us of the "Spirits from the vasty deep". (I Henry IV, 3.1.53) Can the Ghost be merely the disembodied soul of a deceased person -- the sort of Spirit we find in the Bible? In the New Testament we find "the spirits of just

men made perfect". (Heb.12:23) Hamlet is first informed that it is his father's spirit in arms and this makes the apparition an embodiment of his deceased father. (1.2.199-202) The Ghost has a complexion, an accoutrement, and a personality according to its witnesses. It appears "in the same figure, like the king that's dead" (1.1.41), with his "beaver up", "a countenance more in sorrow than in anger" looking pale yet constant in its gaze. (1.2.229-233) However, this testimony in itself is no proof that the Ghost is necessarily anything other than a daemon. Horatio's lines, it will be remembered, refer to spirits inhabiting elemental regions and have a parallel in Milton's Il Penseroso where we read

> of those Daemons that are found
> In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
> Whose power hath a true consent
> With Planet, or with Element. (11.93-96)

The Ghost is clearly out of a fiery element but since it appears as the spirit of a deified hero it could be operative as a spiritual being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men.

There is certainly substantial evidence to support a view of the Ghost as an apotheosised spirit mediating between divine and human worlds. Hamlet remembers his father as a god-figure. The deceased King is conjured up as a Mercury, an Hyperion, a Mars (3.4.46-49), and the battlement guards

recall King Hamlet's heroism. Indeed, the Ghost's Extravagance is particularly shocking and mystifying for it appears

> with that fair and warlike form
> In which the majesty of buried Denmark
> Did sometimes march. (1.1.47-49)

The Spirit's form recalls the heroic figure of King Hamlet:

> Such was the very armour he had on
> When he the ambitious Norway combated;
> So frown'd he once, when, in an angry parle,
> He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice. (1.1.60-63)

Yet an apotheosis does not explain wholly the Spirit's Extravagance in terms of a mediation between God and man. The Spirit could be a demon mediating between the devil and man.

In the Vulgate, the word daemonium or daemon applied to idols or gods of the heathen and to evil or unclean spirits possessing people. (Mt. 12:43-44) The notion of evil demons is also found in Shakespeare's Henry V where we note how they wander about in search of victims:

> If that same demon that hath gull'd thee thus
> Should with his lion gait walk the whole world,
> He might return to vasty Tartar back,
> And tell the legions 'I can never win
> A soul so easy as that Englishman's'. (2.2.121-125)

The witnesses in Hamlet are terrified by the Ghost and Horatio warns Hamlet of its possible demonic power:

> What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
> Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
> That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
> And there assume some other horrible form,
> Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
> And draw you into madness? (1.4.69-74)

Hamlet acknowledges the fact that the Ghost's appearance could bode either well or badly for him but is so struck by the Ghost's likeness to his dead father that he chooses to call it "King, Father, Royal Dane". (1.4.45) Once his initial shock and horror have diminished, Hamlet wonders about the Ghost:

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be the devil; and the devil hath power
> To 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. (2.2.574-579)

We are, therefore, left with a broad ambiguity regarding the Ghost's Extravagance and its soul-determining consequences. The Ghost has clearly wandered out of bounds -- out of either the flames of Hell or the fire of Purgatory. The reverberations of its Extravagance are felt early in the drama although we cannot yet confirm the nature of the Ghost or the validity of its testimony. We know that the Ghost is real to the witnesses and to Hamlet. We also know that by its extravagant movement it has caused a radical change in Elsinore. Hamlet can never be the same person after having encountered the Ghost and consequently Elsinore can never seem the same either.

The dramatic stylisation of Extravagance is underscored in the Ghost's revelation to Hamlet. The Spirit informs

the Prince about Claudius' acts of regicide and incest which have contaminated Denmark and caused a "falling-off" from virtue to vice. (1.5.34-57) It requests Hamlet to avenge his father's "foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25) and to purge Denmark of evil:

> Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
> A couch for luxury and damned incest. (1.5.82-83)

The implication in the Ghost's message is that the positions of honour and shame have been reversed with shame rising above honour. Claudius' "shameful lust" has seduced a "seeming-virtuous queen" and Gertrude's love has moved from an object of dignity to "decline" upon a wretch. (1.5.42-52) In such a message, the Ghost clearly underscores the idea of transgressory movement and position.

The revelation of an evil condition in Denmark and a persuasion to purge such a condition are two factors which contribute to Hamlet's own Extravagance. He shifts from a position of open wonder to a position of guarded confidence, and this is indicated in his dialogue with his comrades:

> There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark
> But he's an arrant knave. (1.5.123-124)

His friends do not apprehend his import and accuse him of "wild and whirling words" (1.5.133) which endorses the idea of Extravagance because it suggests to his friends a movement

that is awry: Hamlet's words are evidence to them of a mind and speech which spin out of control and rational meaning.

Extravagance in the sense of a wandering or shifting awry is also expressed at court. Fortinbras is a subject of vital concern because he threatens to move outside political boundaries and invade Denmark. His aggression is an Extravagance which enhances the spread of confusion and agitation in Denmark. Fortinbras wishes to avenge the death of his father by recovering the lands lost by him (1.1.102-104) but the Danes interpret his actions as an attempt to fracture the frame of political order. They are forced to make such frantic military preparations against him that it is not possible to "divide the Sunday from the week" (1.1.76). Values have changed position: military preoccupations have superseded Sabbath duty and Fortinbras causes several serious breaches in order. His illegal intrusion is a breach of degree and political boundary. By placing valor higher than discretion he inverts priorities.

The idea of extravagant position or movement continues with the example of Polonius. The king's chamberlain intrudes into areas outside his normal concern and loses his life in the bargain. He wishes to decipher the cause of Hamlet's "lunacy" (2.2.48-49) but his espionage is an Extravagance

which Hamlet identifies and warns against: "Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house." (3.1.132-133)

Within the castle at Elsinore, Extravagance is suggested by the imagery of motion. The connotation of Extravagance as wayward movement is sometimes expressed through metaphors of astral or geometric spheres which suggest that variant motion could cause problems in the human setting. In the Ptolemaic system, the heavenly bodies were thought to move in fixed concentric spheres centred around the earth. Any astral straying was a sign or result of great disturbance or disaster. Claudius, in explaining to Laertes why he could not check Hamlet's violence, employs a metaphor to show how variant motion would amount to an Extravagance. Gertrude, his queen, becomes his sphere of motion, and he, the star within that sphere:

> She's so conjunctive to my life and soul,
> That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
> I could not but by her. (4.7.14-16)

Just as the star is expected to operate in its proper sphere, so also is Claudius required to move within a sphere described by Gertrude. There is a certain inversion of values in this example because the male figure is shown to be bound to the female. Claudius has his sphere of motion tightly

bound to his queen's sphere. Elsewhere at court, Ophelia is cautioned that her sphere is not to be shared with Hamlet's. Polonius warns: "Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star." (2.2.140) The lovers must become distant, each moving within a separate sphere. Such a situation could find a parallel in <u>All's Well That Ends Well</u> where Helena speaks of her relationship with Bertram:

> he is so above me.
> In his bright radiance and collateral light
> Must I be comforted, not in his sphere.
> (1.1.81-83)

The circular pattern of Extravagance occurs elsewhere at court. According to Laertes' theoretical courtier-ethic, Hamlet's choice is supposed to be

> circumscribed
> Unto the voice and yielding of that body
> Whereof he is the head. (1.3.22-24)

Hamlet's circumscription is a delimitation and finds its etymological root in <u>circumscribere</u>, that is, drawing a line round an area. His sphere of action is fixed by his noble heredity and his degree as prince. Such circumscription would normally apply, in some form, to all courtiers and the play reveals how Polonius is circumscriptive. The old chamberlain moves in subtle strategic arcs whereby he can strike his targets without arousing their suspicion. He is extravagant in his strategy because instead of moving directly, he goes

about his business in circular fashion. His advice to Reynaldo suggests a method of spying on Laertes in Paris and contains metaphors of a circle and a bowling arc. The task is to seek information by "encompassment and drift of question" (2.1.10) or, in more concrete terms,

> with assays of bias,
> By indirections find directions out. (2.1.65-66)

Even in his conversation with Claudius and Gertrude, Polonius cannot obscure his circular movement -- a pattern that finds him moving from one sphere of activity to another with a firm sense of circumscription. "I went round to work," he states (2.2.138) trying to impress his audience with his diligent craft. Later, he offers counsel that Gertrude should "be round" with Hamlet (3.1.183) in order to determine the hidden cause of the Prince's grief.

There is a second connotation of Extravagance demonstrated by a surfeit or deficiency in character and setting, and the disruption of proper position figures even in this connotation. Extravagant passion disrupts order in Denmark and such passion is epitomised by Gertrude's over-hasty marriage to Claudius. Gertrude is guilty of a corrupt inclination to sensuality -- a movement towards a surfeit of lust. Her will is deficient in its ability to move her away from the custom of sensual excess. Hamlet implies this when he

admonishes her for dulling her conscience and feelings. Gertrude is described as a self-deluded sinner:

> What devil was't
> That thus cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?
> Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
> Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
> Or but a sickly part of one true sense
> Could not so mope.
> O shame! where is thy blush? (3.4.76-82)

Hamlet thinks that Gertrude does not worry about conscience or reputation, but is more concerned with the over-indulgence of her lower appetites. Hamlet describes the queen as a woman in whom the call of the blood is strong and untamed. He decries her change of facade. Her once extravagant grief, emblematically portrayed by copious tears at King Hamlet's funeral, has now converted into excessive sensuality. According to Hamlet, her appetite for love has turned into an appetite for lust. There had been a time when she doted on King Hamlet

> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on (1.2.144-145)

but now she has attached herself

> to feed,
> And batten on this moor [Claudius]. (3.4.66-67)

Consequently, this semblance of frailty disgusts Hamlet who envisions her excess of <u>eros</u> counterpointed by a deficiency of moral strength.

The upsetting of moral values is furthered by Claudius who does have a will strong enough to match his inclination but who values ambition more highly than moral innocence. Claudius' guilt exceeds his intent for repentance and he neglects both guilt and intent by falling a victim to deficient contrition:

> My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
> And, like a man to double business bound,
> I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
> And both neglect. (3.3.40-43)

There is enough in the King's behaviour to increase the distraction and dis-position in the land. While Claudius preaches balance and moderation in the passion of grief (1.2.87-97),his concupiscence and intemperance exceed the norm of moderation, and his swinishness soils the reputation of Denmark, so that the country loses its position of dignity previously held under King Hamlet:

> This heavy-headed revel east and west
> Makes us traduced and tax'd of other nations;
> They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
> Soil our addition; and indeed it takes
> From our achievements, though perform'd at height,
> The pith and marrow of our attribute. (1.4.17-22)

A habit such as Claudius' revel can over-leaven "the form of plausible manners." (1.4-29-30)

Denmark's corruption is a sign of Extravagance. The society of the land has been affected by rampant moral flab-

biness and foppish superficiality indicated by the "fatness of these pursy times" (3.4.153) and by Osric's "golden words" which are soon spent.(5.2.127-128) It is an age where "the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe." (5.1.132-133) The moral Extravagances of the royal couple have contributed largely to such dis-position and the rottenness in Denmark.

Dis-position spreads quickly and it does not take long for Hamlet (in the eyes of Ophelia) to fall from courtly virtue into an "ecstasy" [agitation](2.1.102) after the Ghost's revelations. The Ghost's excessive anger against Claudius reflects a deficient sense of Christian justice and generates an excess of passion in Hamlet. The Ghost's wandering out of its proper confines of sulphur and fire is prompted by its espoused quest for avenging honour and not by pure justice. While the Ghost advises Hamlet to leave Gertrude to the mercy of Heaven, it urges him on to purge Denmark of its lasciviousness; in other words, Hamlet can only attack Claudius directly but not Gertrude. (1.5.82-86) The Ghost does not balance its passion for revenge against divine justice. It moves out of purging fire and increases the perturbation of Hamlet. While cautioning Hamlet to "taint not" his mind against Gertrude, (1.5.85) the Ghost succeeds in tainting

the Prince's mind against Claudius. There is a disruption of normal operations in Hamlet's microcosm: his mind, heart, and sinews are affected and become "distracted" (1.5.97) while he plans to "put an antic disposition on." (1.5.172) His cannot be a just, temperate anger controlled by reason. Instead, it is a surfeit of passion that creates a sorry disposition in the Prince -- at least to Ophelia who had once thought him to be a paragon of courtly virtue:

> Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye,
> tongue, sword;
> The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,
> The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!
> (3.1.150-154)

The cure for dis-position wrought by Extravagance is a return to a proper position, a regular order, or a balanced element. Hamlet learns that the soul should be higher than reason for man cannot divine the answer to Nature's mysteries; (1.4.54-56) the Ghost must return to its confine because it is to be purged of its crimes committed on earth; and Fortinbras must learn to temper his "unimproved mettle" or his distemper will remain. The norms for proper position, order, and good temper are a due proportion between excess and deficiency -- a proportion between too much and too little of something. It is accordingly that Extravagance links up with

the idea of a Mean or Mediocrity, terms derived from Aristotle, popularised by Plutarch and Sir Thomas Elyot, and known to Shakespeare.[3] In The Merchant of Venice, Nerissa comments on the virtue of the Mean as a balance between excess and deficiency:

> ... they are as sick that surfeit with
> too much as they that starve with nothing.
> It is no mean happiness, therefore, to be
> seated in the mean. (1.2.5-8)

In this example, Nerissa presents the view that Extravagance can take two forms of "sickness" -- one involving a surfeit or fortune and another involving a deficiency of the same. The cure for such "sickness" lies in the power of the Mean.

Hamlet implies the Mean or Mediocrity in all its illustrations of transgressory movement, surfeit and deficiency. When judging the first connotation of Extravagance, (i.e. movement outside of proper bounds) it is necessary to determine whether the wayward movement is too far from the proper area of motion. In the case of the Ghost's Extravagance, there is no doubt that the Spectre has moved too far out of its element of fire because when the cock crows this is a summons to the Ghost to return to its confine. (1.1.148-155) The Mean for the Ghost in terms of movement is the other-

worldly region of sulphur and fire. When the Spirit moves out of this region, it fails to complete its purgation because only the fiery region can absolve its crimes committed in the "days of nature." (1.5.9-13) In terms of the second connotation of Extravagance, (i.e. the excess-deficiency dynamic) the Mean for the Ghost is God's law of Justice. The Ghost shows excessive hatred and deficient mercy for Claudius. Although it knows that God is the supreme judge -- it warns Hamlet to leave Gertrude to the will of Heaven (1.5.86) -- it forgets this in Claudius' case and thereby reveals a moral Extravagance.

The Mean or Mediocrity functions implicitly. Claudius pretends an interest in moderation and balance: he states that he has balanced delight and dole "in equal scale" (1.2.13) and then chides Hamlet for bearing excessive grief that upsets his disposition:

> 'tis unmanly grief;
> It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
> A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
> An understanding simple and unschool'd. (1.2.94-97)

In other words, Hamlet is extravagant in his mental, emotional and volitional operations. However, Claudius fails to cure his own Extravagances. Feeling the guilt of his crimes, Claudius looks into his soul but does not have the strength

to make perfect contrition and relinquish his crown, wife, or ambition:

> But oh, what form of prayer
> Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder?'
> That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
> Of those effects for which I did the murder,
> My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
> (3.3.51-55)

There is no balance, then, between Claudius' guilt and his deficient contrition.

The Mean appears even in the cases of other pretenders to virtue like Laertes and Polonius. Although these men are guilty of Extravagances, they preach liberally on virtue, balance, and control. Laertes cautions Ophelia against the danger of <u>eros</u>:

> Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain,
> If with too credent ear you list his songs,
> Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
> To his unmaster'd importunity,
> Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
> And keep you in the rear of your affection,
> Out of the shot and danger of desire.
> (1.3.29-35)

Laertes' father is even more liberal in his advice:

> Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
> Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
> Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
> The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel,
> But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
> Of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware

Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Bear't, that th'opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy
judgement.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy: rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man
And they in France of the best rank and
station
Are most select and generous, chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
(1.3.59-80)

It is easy to recognise the emphasis on proportion, degree, moderation, and discretion in this speech, but often these are the very values that Polonius is most deficient in himself,as we shall note in due course.

The conflict between Extravagance and Mediocrity takes three forms in this drama: one form indicates characters who fail to look into themselves and recognise their Extravagances; a second type shows characters who look inward, see reality, and then move away from tempering their Extravagances; and a final type concerns characters who strive to find and retain balance in their psychomachy. It is possible to have characters shifting from the first form to the second but only Hamlet demonstrates the third form.

Polonius and Laertes demonstrate the first form of Extravagance. Although he is given adequate hints about his excesses, Polonius fails to attain self-awareness. He lacks the very qualities he praises in others. He finds the First Player's declamation "well spoken, with good accent and good discretion" (2.2.445) but his own speeches tend to be inflated and tiresome. Gertrude chides him for his circumlocution ("More matter, with less art" -- 2.2.95) and Hamlet indicates that he bears "a plentiful lack of wit." (2.2.198) He talks a good ethic: he warns against any "unproportion'd thought" (1.3.60) and makes integrity his Mean: "to thine own self be true." (1.3.78) However, his actions are not in apposition to his sermons. After preaching integrity, he suggests a technique of libel ("slight sullies" -- 2.1.39) without understanding his inconsistency. He advises Reynaldo to investigate Laertes' conduct in Paris by subtle means: the "bait of falsehood" is to be used in order to trap the "carp of truth" (2.1.63). Polonius believes he excels in areas where, in reality, he is shown most deficient. He spies on Hamlet and Gertrude in order to be an objective witness to Hamlet's private revelations, (3.3.29-33) but the quality of objectivity is just what he lacks. He mistakes surfaces and strategies for essences and ends, and

deludes himself into believing that he is a competent analyst:

> If circumstances lead me, I will find
> Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
> Within the centre. (2.2.156-158)

One of Polonius' defects is precisely his gullibility to circumstantial evidence. He is deceived by Hamlet's odd appearance and deduces that the Prince is mad. What Polonius needs is the wisdom to apply a mirror to his own soul. Thus, he generalises about others with the complacency of one who believes himself exempt from moral weakness:

> it is common for the younger sort
> To lack discretion. (2.1.116-117)

It is true that Polonius does not lack discretion, but he does lack self-knowledge and this deprives him of Mediocrity.

With Laertes, the problem is also a lack of self-knowledge. Like his father, he is free with advice (note his instructions to Ophelia -- 1.3.10-44) although he fails to apply some of his own precepts about the successful governance of passion. As Ophelia hints, he does not practise what he preaches:

> But, good my brother,
> Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
> Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
> Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
> Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
> And recks not his own rede. (1.3.46-51)

Self-restraint is a major theme in Laertes' address to Ophelia, but is one quality he lacks as his later wrath and rash bravado reveal. (5.1)

Claudius forms the second species of Extravagance without Mediocrity. He, too, can assume a posture of sincerity. He plays the role of uncle concerned with his nephew's grief and preaches hypocritically about excess, defect, and proportion. He pretends a commitment to the Mean, "in equal scale weighing delight and dole" (1.2.13), and even simulates a temperate grief with the balanced antithesis of

> one auspicious and one dropping eye,
> With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage. (1.2.11-12)

However, his measured rhetoric cannot conceal his extravagant actions, viz. his appetite for wine, Gertrude, and villainy. At one point he even proclaims the Extravagance of passion: "Revenge should have no bounds" (4.7.129), and suggests that passion is the spur for quick, effective action:

> that we would do
> We should do when we would; for this 'would' changes

> And hath abatements and delays as many
> As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents
> And then this 'should' is like a spendthrift sigh,
> That hurts by easing. (4.7.119-124)

When Claudius does temper his villainy, it is either in terms of pure pragmatism or in terms of his regard for Gertrude. He licenses Polonius to roam freely through the palace on espionage missions and when this Extravagance results in murder, Claudius weighs his mode of retribution against Hamlet:

> To bear all smooth and even,
> This sudden sending him away must seem
> Deliberate pause. (4.3.7-9)

Yet, he is only pretending to be moderate. He knows that he cannot eliminate Hamlet without offending Gertrude -- a woman who draws him tightly within the sphere of her love. (4.7.14-16) Claudius' guilty conscience weighs heavily on his soul and he finds it useless to pray for divine pardon when his will and inclination pull in opposite directions. Faced with two extremities of choice -- either renounce the effects of his crime or retain the full guilt for his crime -- Claudius' decision is revealed to be immature. His will for mercy is not strong enough to counteract his inclination for more vice: "May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?" (3.3.51-56) His excessive passion and deficient moral strength render his decision an immature one -- unripe for moderation.

The third form of Extravagance is that which seeks Mediocrity. The best example is Hamlet's constant aspiration towards balance. The Prince does waver between excess and deficiency but does not allow this to stop his aspirations towards Mediocrity. His Extravagance of passion, thought, and action cannot obscure his preoccupation with discovering due proportion and moderation. At one point, Hamlet jests bawdily about the Mean in a word-play with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and, the ribaldry aside, this shows an intrinsic awareness of the Mean as a balance between extremes:

> Guil. On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.
>
> Ham. Nor the soles of her shoe?
>
> Ros. Neither, my lord.
>
> Ham. Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours? (2.2.225-227)

Hamlet's awareness of Extravagance and Mediocrity is frequently indicated in his private thoughts. In his first whispered aside about Claudius, the Prince reveals his distaste with the King's extravagant, unnatural passion and also shows his own Extravagance of passion. "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (1.2.65) is a line which cuts two ways. The line could be construed as a comment either about

Claudius or about himself. It could mean that Claudius is an extravagant man who has moved out of nature's bounds: he is guilty of incest (an excess of concupiscence) and his relationship with Gertrude is kind-less: that is, out of nature's kind (type). The line has an alternate nuance: Hamlet could be describing himself as too close to Claudius as a blood relative and too far from him because of hate. In any case, the line implies categories of excess, deficiency, and proportion.

Hamlet's soliloquies are other sources of evidence for the Prince's general operation within an excess-deficiency dynamic. The first soliloquy, motivated by the Prince's deep grief for his father's sudden death, reflects a disillusionment with the world and the flesh. Hamlet feels that his own flesh is "too too solid" and the word "solid" may be construed as "sullied" for Hamlet wants his flesh to "thaw, and resolve itself into a dew" -- something ethereally pure. The inference is that the flesh is excessively defiled and deficiently pure. What intensifies the Prince's disillusionment with the flesh is his own mother's impurity. Gertrude's forms and shows of grief at her husband's death looked totally convincing. She was "like Niobe, all tears." (1.2.149) Yet,

less than a month later, her grief revealed its deficient sincerity when she married Claudius overhastily.

So broad is Hamlet's disgust with Extravagance that it covers the entire world of postlapsarian man:

> Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. (1.2.135-137)

Because the world is deficiently weeded, it has become completely corrupted by the "rank and gross in nature." The age is so flabby morally that virtue is sometimes subordinate to vice as Hamlet indicates:

> Forgive me this my virtue,
> For in the fatness of these pursy times
> Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
> Yea, courb and woo for leave to do him good.
> (3.4.152-155)

Hamlet would prefer a return to a purer world -- one ruled by his father who was more excellent a king than Claudius (1.2.139-140) and who reigned in a more orderly kingdom.

Aware as he is of the world's defilement, Hamlet does not neglect his own Extravagances especially when they concern the vital relationship between thought and action. The Prince's thoughts and feelings are often excessive enough to lack equivalents in action. He recognises the discrepancy between his thoughts and his actions but, ironically enough,

when he is moved to avow vengeance, he uses a metaphor where speedy <u>action</u> is seen in terms of <u>thought</u>:

> Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
> As meditation or the thoughts of love,
> May sweep to my revenge. (1.5.29-31)

Moreover, this resolve does not realise prompt execution because Hamlet emphasises the word to the detriment of the act. After writing down the Ghost's command (1.5.107-110) Hamlet delays in the execution of vengeance. However, he is conscious of this because he claims a surplus of evil impulses and a deficiency of thoughts, imagination, and time for action:

> I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious;
> with more offences at my beck than I have
> thoughts to put them in, imagination to
> give them shape, or time to act them in.
> (3.1.124-127)

It is ironic for him to confess a lack of thoughts at this point especially when his soliloquies have hitherto asserted a high degree of reflection on his part. Nevertheless, we can accept his words as evidence that his task of vindication is still incomplete. The conviction of his deficiency of action is strengthened in his own mind during the famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy which shows him contemplating the excessive hardships of fortune (the word "outrageous" indicates an Extravagance) and his own deficiency of resolute

action. An irony occurs at this moment in his drama because he increases his Extravagance of thought-sickness by emphasising his speculative power and by interrupting the gravitation of his will towards "enterprises of great pith and moment." He admits a puzzling of his will and this admission reveals that mental bemusement overpowers his volitional faculty. The soliloquy confirms Hamlet's surfeit of doubt and hesitation. By the end of it, his mind accepts the fardels of outrageous fortune because his conscience (here synonymous with consciousness) makes a coward of him, and his resolution to act against suffering is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." (3.1.56-88) His "thinking too precisely on the event" is a "craven scruple" (4.4.40-41) which shows:

> A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward. (4.4.42-43)

Hamlet comes to a discomfitting self-knowledge of his deficiency of action when he observes theatrical art in Elsinore. The actors respond to their cues for action in art whereas Hamlet fails to respond to cues for action in life. Watching the First Player, Hamlet ponders the actor's extravagant expression of an emotion in excess of the situation which is, after all, mere fiction. In his "dream of passion"

the Player is moved to express emotion so extravagantly as to

> force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wann'd;
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit. (2.2.526-530)

However, Hamlet's situation is real and so are his motive and "cue for passion," yet his emotion is deficiently expressed in action. Hamlet chastises himself for lacking the courage necessary to act upon his motive:

> for it cannot be
> But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter; or ere this
> I should have fatted all the region kites
> With this slave's offal. (2.2.551-555)

He has intense feelings of revenge but can only express them in words and not in action:

> Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave
> That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
> And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
> A scullion! (2.2.558-563)

He is in a situation more real than anything for the First Player, yet his response is weak:

> What would he do,
> Had he the motive and cue for passion
> That I have? (2.2.533-535)

He wonders aloud but does not speed to vengeance.

If he looked closely at the model of Pyrrhus, Hamlet would see the dangers of excess and deficiency dramatised in a paradigm for himself. The Pyrrhus of classical legend is initially a "neutral to his will and matter" (2.2.459) and does nothing to vindicate his honour. His sword sticks in the air over Priam's head (2.2.455-460) and it is only after a pause that "aroused vengeance" sets Pyrrhus anew at work to make "malicious sport" of Priam's limbs. (2.2.465-466; 2.2.491-492) In Hamlet's case, we find a Prince who is "neutral to his will and matter" standing with his sword poised to strike Claudius at prayer. However, Hamlet refrains after pondering the situation (3.3.73-96) and once more thought outweighs action and the ritual of vengeance is postponed to a time when Hamlet is able to make "malicious sport" of the King but only at the cost of his own life. Hamlet swings from one extreme to another in the rite of vengeance; after delaying and speculating excessively, he exposes himself to all that death, danger, and fortune present to him.

For most of the play, we find a Hamlet wary of overstepping the bounds of nature. He knows that it is easy to

be influenced by supernatural or unnatural evil. Hamlet feels the defiling Extravagances of the supernatural and the unnatural:

> 'Tis now the very witching time of night,
> When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
> Contagion to this world. (3.2.371-373)

The world is defiled by contagion that has moved out of Hell. As for himself, there is a potential defilement that can move out of Nero's bosom into his own:

> let not ever
> The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom.
> Let me be cruel, not unnatural. (3.2.376-378)

Both forms of defilement (Hell's contagion and Nero's mad act of matricide) are Extravagances against Nature: the supernatural defilement is above the ordinary laws of Nature with Hell intruding upon earth, and the other unnatural defilement is a deficiency of human filial feeling, which can move from Nero's soul into Hamlet's.

This sense of proportion and control, however, does not enter into Hamlet's scheme of revenge against Claudius. He does not want his act of vengeance against Claudius to be any less devastating than was Claudius' crime against King Hamlet, but he prefers his action to be excessive in its power to damn the king. The only bounds for Hamlet's act of

vengeance are to be the region of Hell where Claudius is to be dispatched. He does not kill Claudius at prayer because this is "hire and salary, not revenge." (3.3.79) In other words, this act would be less than (deficient) revenge. Instead, his act should be more than mere revenge:

> some act
> That has no relish of salvation in't.
> (3.3.91-92)

The Mean of justice is no longer operative: what is revealed, in fact, is an Extravagance of passion because Hamlet wants total damnation for his foe.

Although this secret passion shows a surfeit of hate, Hamlet knows how to control this extravagant emotion and spare himself a public indictment. He operates by "crafty madness" (3.1.7) and shows less than he is required to do. His exchanges with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reveal him to be "niggard of question" but "free in his reply" in all matters not pertaining to his "lunacy." (3.1.13-14) So, the Prince is judicious enough to know when he must say less than expected. He uses a rhetorical art to confound the spies and attain proportion between what he asks and what he reveals.

Clever as he is in foiling his spies, Hamlet continues to waver between excessive passion and deficient action, but not without hope for imminent action:

> How stand I then,
> That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
> And let all sleep ... (4.4.56-59)

This is a form of self-chastisement prompted by intrinsic honour. What has been aching within the Prince is the wounded memory of a dishonoured father and all his actions towards Gertrude and Claudius are motivated by two main forces related to honour: (a) the shame of dishonour ("O shame! where is thy blush?" he chides Gertrude -- 3.4.82) and reverence of virtue (note his concern with the "vicious mole of nature" -- 1.4.24; his cynical attitude towards Ophelia's "honesty" -- 3.1.103; and his disgust for "arrant knaves" -- 3.1.128), and (b) his fear that the Ghost will indict him if he does not vindicate his "wounded name."

Hamlet is reminded of his task to avenge his father when the Ghost makes an appeal to his sense of honour. The Ghost alludes to a "rankly abused" Denmark (1.5.38) -- implying that King Hamlet's unnatural demise was an example of a dishonour to him and to his country. It continues to underscore the notion of dishonour with such terms as "shameful"

(applied to Gertrude's lust -- a dishonour to the memory of her husband), "falling-off" (a loss of dignity), "dignity," and "decline" (Claudius' accession meant the decline of honour for the kingdom was now ruled by a person of low moral rank). (1.5.45-52) So, the Prince's goals of vengeance and self-vindication are presented as steps leading to the apotheosis of honour.

Hamlet's sense of honour is a result of his noble birth and breeding, but it is a sense that could be perverted if Hamlet were to stir without "great argument." However, Hamlet cannot be a man to debate a question of straw and risk lives rashly. He will not be antagonised by dares which are an "imposthume of much wealth and peace." (4.4.25-27) Only true honour will impel him to vindicate himself, his country, and his dead father. However, for most of the play he has no clear notion of how he can achieve medial honour himself. Looking around him, the Prince finds various forms of honour: the extravagant honour of Fortinbras and Laertes, and Horatio's noble, Stoical honour. His own sense of honour appears to be dormant or, at least, inactivated in terms of physical expression.

Fortinbras' honour, despite its positive qualities, is hardly an ideal example for Hamlet to follow. Fortinbras has the "great argument" and sanguine confidence in himself but his hasty actions reveal an inherent opposition between reason and blood, His fiery mettle and his uncompromising intrusion into Denmark are not marked by the traditional pre-eminence of reason. His conduct is not ruled primarily by reason. The mark of "divine ambition" (4.4.49) replaces reason and that makes Fortinbras' sense of honour a courtly one instead of a Christian-humanist one. Fortinbras' honour is fundamentally in the Aristotelian mold: it is the final end for a man of affairs.[4] However, it is limited by its lack of balance. Hamlet knows that Fortinbras would fight for nothing -- "even for an egg-shell." All he requires is an "invisible event" to stir him on to expose "what is mortal and unsure" to all "that fortune, death and danger dare." Fortinbras would find quarrel in a straw if honour were at stake. Act he does but on the least provocation. His example of honour is "gross as earth" but it does give Hamlet a perspective on his own deficiency. For all his hot bravado and rashness, Fortinbras does stir to assert himself, whereas Hamlet can only live to say, "This thing's to do." (4.4.43-56)

Hamlet also sees in Laertes a person with an extravagant notion of honour. Although he is moved to avenge his father's death and his sister's madness, Laertes distorts the notion of honour. His sense of honour is extravagant because it suffers from a surfeit of impulse and a deficiency of even temper. Laertes is carried away by hot passion. He is hot-headed to the point of inciting a rebellious mob against Claudius. Because he is "incensed" (4.5.122) Laertes intrudes upon Claudius and Gertrude like an angry ocean devouring the shore:

> The ocean overpeering of his list,
> Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
> Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,
> O'erbears [your] officers. (4.5.95-98)

His bravado is generated by an excess of blood (passion):

> That drop of blood that's calm proclaims
> me bastard. (4.5.114)

This feeling of passion also generates an unbounded appetite for revenge:

> To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest
> devil!
> Conscience and grace, to the profoundest
> pit!
> I dare damnation. To this point I stand:
> That both the worlds I give to negligence,
> Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged
> Most thoroughly for my father. (4.5.127-132)

It is clear that his passion to vindicate his father possesses his being so totally that reason does not temper his

concern for honour. Such Extravagance is decried by Claudius:

> is't writ in your revenge,
> That, swoopstake, you will draw both friend and foe,
> Winner and loser? (4.5.137-139)

The metaphor is from a card-game where the winner sweeps the whole stake. It reveals how completely swept Laertes is by the notion of avenging his dishonoured father. Because of this extravagant appetite for revenge, Laertes cannot possibly balance blood and judgement. Honour is abused by such sweeping passion.

The Extravagances of Fortinbras and Laertes taint the notion of honour, but Hamlet sees an ideal model of honour in Horatio. Well bred, honest, and inclined towards virtuous action, Horatio's emphasis on reason gives him an attitude of dignity, because man without reason is but a "beast, no more." (4.4.35) His Stoicism develops his individualism and self-reliance. "Be ruled," he tells Hamlet at their encounter with the Ghost (1.5.81) and this reveals his concern with order, proportion, and control. Horatio's belief in reason and dignified action lends his honour a different quality from that of Fortinbras who is the courageous soldier. Fortinbras' martial spirit helps to achieve honour for he

"makes mouths at the invisible event" of death. (4.4.50) But Horatio has no martial spirit -- only a Stoical one which makes reason and destiny supreme in life. He tempers his responses to events by a Stoical mixture of judgement and a sanguinity disposed to hope. He does not react rashly or impulsively, but bears all calmly. He listens to Marcellus' evidence about supernatural portents and reacts with care: "So have I heard, and do in part believe it." (1.1.165) His advice to Hamlet to be ruled is an indication of his even temper, and Hamlet stresses Horatio's even temper:

> Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
> As e'er my conversation coped withal. (3.2.49-50)

Horatio's Stoicism is the only revenue he has to feed and clothe himself. (3.2.55-56) This is what makes him honourable: this balance of fortitude and confidence, blood and judgement. As Hamlet says:

> thou hast been
> As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;
> A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hath 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. (3.2.60-66)

Horatio, accordingly, is not characterised by any imbalance and his even temper protects him from the Extravagance of

passion that taints the honour of Fortinbras and Laertes.

Hamlet evolves a sense of honour that balances blood with judgement. His thoughts and actions begin to assume a proportion, a sense of balance not evident earlier. As Hiram Haydn has shown, Hamlet recognizes "excitements of my reason and my blood" (4.4.58) and he seems for the first time to feel that commingling which he admires in Horatio. He no longer wants merely to kill or to incite for revenge; he desires a magnanimous vengeance. He must do it "greatly" as befits a man whose reason and blood are allies. He begins to feel capable of greatness, as Haydn says, because he is "in full command of himself."[5]

Hamlet's new strength and confidence are indicated by his remark:

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will. (5.2.10-11)

Like Horatio, he accepts destiny as it influences life and death. When he utters "the readiness is all" (5.2.210) he manifests a Stoical spirit of fortitude, patient endurance, and maturity. He is ready for a mature execution of his task for self-vindication. This new strength surprises Horatio who comments on it after Hamlet shows no sympathy for the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "Why, what a king is

this!" (5.2.63) Hamlet is filled with confidence and accepts Claudius' wager with a conviction that he "shall win at the odds." (5.2.199) His preparedness of spirit is epitomised before the duel:

> The interim is mine;
> And a man's life no more than to say 'One'.
> (5.2.73-74)

His mind is finally made up. He is prepared for honourable action and strengthen this resolve with yet another remark:

> If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it
> be not to come, it will be now; if it
> be not now, yet it will come; the
> readiness is all. Since no man, of
> aught he leaves, knows, what is't to
> leave be-times? Let be. (5.2.208-211)

This is a consent to time and death just as it is an assent to honourable action. It is Stoical in character and this quality is confirmed on his deathbed scene with Horatio:

> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw they breath
> in pain,
> To tell my story. (5.2.334-336)

So, the final impression of Hamlet is that of a man who has cured thought-sickness, strengthened his will, and reconciled blood (confidence and passion) with judgement (reason). In his death, he has shown himself a man of honour who has evolved a balance between action and thought. The shame of inaction and sullied reputation has been purged away by the Mediocrity of honorable action.

CHAPTER II

MICROCOSMOGRAPHIC EXTRAVAGANCE AND MEDIOCRITY

> "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" -- 1.4.90.
>
> "the o'ergrowth of some complexion" -- 1.4.27.

The themes of Extravagance and Mediocrity have an intense reflector in the disease imagery of the play. Caroline Spurgeon believes that Hamlet is dominated by the "constant conception of a corrupt and hidden tumour or cancer, which is the central imaginative symbol of the tragedy."[6] This disease image is most appropriate to the themes of Extravagance and Mediocrity because the action of the play ensues after Denmark has been "diseased" and only reaches a resolution when a cure has been produced for this "disease."

The notion of "disease" indicates that Danish society has moved away from healthy politics to "sick" disorder. The

"disease" is an Extravagance for it is seen to move from character to character, tainting words and deeds, mind and body, and producing such corruption as to render Denmark "rotten" to the core.

The significance of the "disease" imagery is that it extends the connotations of Extravagance. It also suggests that soul-conditions can be reflected in bodily states because the chief symbol of extravagant "disease" or "sickness" is that of an ailing body. Moreover, the extravagant "disease" appears to have an elemental fundamentality in character and setting, thus establishing certain microcosmographic patterns in _Hamlet_.

While the whole kingdom is reportedly "contracted in one brow of woe," it is subtly poisoned by a chemical which spread from King Hamlet throughout the country. The poison was the sting of Claudius' hebenon which, in infecting King Hamlet's body, also infected Denmark since the King was the head of the kingdom and the country was his body-politic. "The whole ear of Denmark" is "rankly abused" (1.5.35-38) and the spreading "disease" is suggested by Francisco's heart-sickness (1.1.8) and by Fortinbras' "stomach" for lawlessness (1.1.98-100).

The Ghost's extravagant movement out of fire continues the spread of "disease" or "sickness" so that the distemper in Denmark is increased. Witnesses' eyes and ears are troubled by the Spirit that walks the land in death (1.1.112). Hamlet becomes distracted in body and mind, (1.5.93-97) "poisoned" with grief, and thought-sick. He also becomes the "quick o' the ulcer" (4.7.124) which inflames Claudius in his "sickly days" (3.3.96) before spreading to Gertrude whose senses are apoplexed (3.4.71-73) and whose soul is "sick". (4.5.148) Other courtly characters are also infected. "Contagious blastments" are most "imminent" in young Ophelia who succumbs to the "poison of deep grief" (1.3.42 and 4.5.72). She is contaminated and so is her brother who becomes sick at heart. (4.7.56) The general "sickness" is so terrible that its remedy must be drastic because

> diseases desperate grown
> By desperate appliance are relieved,
> Or not at all. (4.3.9-11)

The ideas of "disease" and cure link the actions of the characters to body states and thereby remind us that Extravagance and Mediocrity have microcosmographic patterns that cannot be ignored. The Extravagances of the characters are often shown by the force of "nature's livery." Hamlet

speaks of the "vicious mole of nature" and "some complexion" that could so affect a person as to cause a dis-position of reason and a surfeit of "plausive manners." (1.4.24-30)

Nature's "livery" can have a reflector in the outer man. In the course of the drama, we are shown how actions affect the body and how the body expresses extravagant passions. Claudius' indulgence in Rhenish makes him a "bloat king" in the eyes of Hamlet. (3.4.182) His moral culpability is revealed by his wince in the Mousetrap episode (2.2.573-574) just as other characters' feelings of *eros*, guilt or shame are read by facial expressions or colours. The surfeit of passion could be betrayed by a blush. (3.4.82) Pyrrhus' wrath is revealed by a "dread and black complexion" (2.2.433) and "eyes like carbuncles." (2.2.441) Hamlet's melancholy is shown by his "nighted colour" (1.2.68) and his later physical disarray is interpreted as a sign of psychological dis-position. He appears before Ophelia with a facial complexion "pale as his shirt" and his look is one of nervousness ("his knees knocking each other") and horror,

> with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
> To speak of horrors. (2.1.78-84)

Of course, such ostensible signs of distraction could have satiric and deceptive possibilities and hence they are not necessarily accurate or literal indications of intrinsic psychological states. Hamlet once refers to a satire by Juvenal (Satire X.188)[7] which characterises physical traits of phlegmatic types:

> for the satirical rogue, says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. (2.2.195-199)

Hamlet is himself a satirical rogue who knows how to conceal his inner state by deceptive external traits. He can "put an antic disposition on" (1.5.172) or, like Laertes, wear a "face without a heart." (4.7.109) He is not alone in such a strategy for Claudius uses "devotion's visage" and "pious action" to sugar over "the devil himself." (3.1.47-49) Inner corruption could be skilfully veiled by an external mask. It could be a case of the "harlot's cheek" being "beautied with plastering art." (3.1.51) Nevertheless, "devotion's visage" and the "harlot's cheek" are exceptions to the general rule of behaviour.

The camouflage does not prevail indefinitely, and the degree of deception is finally minimised or completely

eradicated. The inner man ultimately shows through the outer guise. In Henry V, for instance, the conspirators (Cambridge, Scroop, and Northumberland) manage to play loyal servants to the King, but their moral culpability is finally revealed in their looks. The king studies their faces to confirm their hypocrisy and guilt:

> Look ye how they change!
> Their cheeks are paper. Why, what read you there
> That have so cowarded and chas'd your blood
> Out of appearance? (2.2.73-76)

A false exterior cannot be maintained consistently because the inner reality of man will eventually reveal itself. Macbeth can "sleek o'er" his "rugged looks" (3.2.28) for most of his career in crime, but there are moments when his face is

> as a book where men
> May read strange matters. (1.4.59-60)

In Hamlet's own case, his "inky cloak" and "clouds" of gloom reveal melancholy. When Claudius studies the Prince's colour and looks to read his disposition, he follows a Renaissance notion about the body being a mirror to the soul.[8]

Besides using the microcosmographic assumption that passions of the soul can affect the body, Hamlet appears to

present evidence of the Renaissance belief that the distemper of the human microcosm is reflected in the distemper of the macrocosm. This belief stems from the theory of the elemental fundamentality of the universe. Men share a common elemental basis with their cosmos because they are all made of four elements. If the cosmos is the large world, man is a "little world made cunningly of elements." The elemental distribution in the play shows patterns of Extravagance and Mediocrity within characters and setting. The "diseases" in characters and setting have elemental patterns and the relationship between "disease" and elemental distribution is a Platonic idea. In considering the origin of disease, Plato suggested that elements could upset the harmony in man: "there occurs either an excess or a deficiency of these elements, or a transference thereof from their nature region to an alien region."[9] Consequently, elemental Extravagance is a sign of microcosmographic distemper because it indicates that man's inner being is set out of balance. John Donne once eulogised:

> Shee whose Complexion was so even made,
> That which of her Ingredients should invade
> The other three, no Feare, no Art could guesse:
> So far were all remov'd from more or lesse.
> (The Second Anniversary,
> ll.123-126)

Obviously, the object of the poet's praise was a person who was well tempered and one in whom the elements mixed well:

> So though the Elements and Humors were
> In her, one could not say, this governes there.
> (ll.135-136)

Written as it was by 1603, Hamlet uses the Renaissance assumption that order in characters implies a balance or proper tempering of the four elements. The excess or deficiency of any element leads to "sickness" or distemper which affects the operations of the lower passions (the natural spirit), the mind (the animal spirit), and the heart (the vital spirit). We see this distemper not only in the characters' fundamental humors and in the operations of their spirits, but also in the world at large (the macrocosm). For example, there is an expository allusion to a cold air biting into Francisco's "sick" heart and this shows two sorts of distemper: one in the threatening element of cold air, and the other in Francisco's disposition itself. Characters are little worlds bound by the laws of nature to a larger world, and the notion of distemper is therefore contained both in character and setting. Fortinbras' hot threat impels Sabbath-breaking military preparations in Den-

mark; (1.1.72-78) and Ophelia's wateriness produces "distraction" and new grief for her and for those close to her. To cure such distemper, all elements need to balance but it is possible for one element to control the other three in the restoration of balance. The elemental imagery in the play reveals that a single element (fire) can temper both microcosm and macrocosm: this element functions extravagantly at first but eventually signifies Mediocrity.

The distribution of the four elements with their Extravagances is indicated in the very first scene of the play. Hamlet begins with a cold air biting into Francisco's "sick" heart. The reason for Francisco's "sickness" is related to the "rotten" state of Denmark -- a condition which we soon learn is consequent upon King Hamlet's murder, his wife's adultery, and his brother's crimes. The ritual of military guard is interrupted by the appearance of the pale Ghost who emerges from a region of sulphur and fire. It induces wan fear in its witnesses: Horatio pales and trembles and links an omen of "stars with trains of fire and dews of blood" (1.1.117) to disorder in the human world. So, in a single scene, we are shown links among the four elements and certain Extravagances: the cold, biting air prognosticates

danger and mystery; the hot womb of earth lets out the Ghost to reveal "sickness" in Elsinore; and the moist cosmic phenomenon is an omen of disaster. More important than these external signs and portents of Extravagance are the distribution of the four elements among the principal characters and their effect on the chief operations in man which are ruled by the animal, vital, and natural spirits.

What we see in the character's temperaments is basically a combination of the four elements with the predominance of one particular element. This dominant element is also partnered by a combination of two diverse qualities that constitute what is called a "complexion."[10] Thus, the phlegmatic humor, which has water as its chief element, is described by the complexion cold and moist. The choleric, where fire is the prime element, is hot and dry. The sanguine, with air as the predominant element, is hot and moist. Finally, the melancholy, where earth is the chief element, is cold and dry.[11] However, there could be numerous variations of the humors and complexions and since we are dealing with a play, it is unrealistic to expect a precise, prescriptive, technical vocabulary from Shakespeare in this regard. What we do find in <u>Hamlet</u> is an elemental distribution which characterises the

different figures in the play and shows their effect on moral order. The "hot" types and the "cold" types both influence moral order in their own ways.

Laertes and Fortinbras are linked to fire and choler. Laertes uses images of fire and heat to suggest his anger and emotion. (4.7.192) Fortinbras, however, does not refer to his own fiery choler. Other characters specify his controlling humor. Horatio, for example, speaks of Fortinbras' "unimproved mettle hot and full" (1.1.95), and Hamlet links the Norwegian prince to the hot and dry with his images of dry mass, charge, and puffed ambition. (4.4.47 ff.)

Claudius joins these two men in his choler and hot bloodedness, but his appetite for Rhenish and blood ally the moist to the dry in his complexion. Consequently, he demonstrates the choleric (hot,dry) and the sanguine (hot,moist). The King drinks wine, wakes and keeps wassail at the sound of an ordnance being shot off. The image provided is one of general sensuality as Claudius "drains his draughts of Rhenish down." (1.4.8-10) He is described as being "marvellous distempered" with choler (3.2.288-290) and is linked to heat in other ways. He is guilty of "shameful lust" (1.5.45), a hot, lower passion in man. At The Mouse-trap performance,

he becomes "galled" (3.2.232), a word that has the connotations of "wounded", "disturbed", and "burned" -- the last of which links him to discomfitting heat. It seems to Hamlet that Claudius is "frighted with false fire." (3.2.253) The King's increasing fear of Hamlet prompts him to act with "fiery quickness" (4.3.42) because the Prince acts "like the hectic" (fever) in his blood. (4.3.65) Thus, heat remains fundamental to his complexion.

The elemental distemper in these choleric characters bears a strong influence on the moral order in Elsinore. Claudius' animality substitutes base passion in place of honour. His swinishness (he is linked to garbage and a "nasty sty") has replaced King Hamlet's honour and his sensual indulgence mars Denmark's moral reputation. There is no doubt that he has contributed greatly to rottenness in Denmark and the moral flabbiness of the age. Thus, there is a moral and political dis-position in the body-politic which is revealed by the Ghost. Claudius has "abused" all Denmark by supplanting honour, dignity, intelligence, and true love in favour of shame, treachery, seduction, and lust:

> Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> With witchcraft of his wit, with treatorous gifts, --
> O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power

> So to seduce! -- won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen;
> O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!
> From me, whose love was of that dignity
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage; and to decline
> Upon a wretch, whose natural gifts were poor
> To those of mine! (1.5.42-52)

The state of moral and political dis-position is heightened by Laertes' inflamed mind and raging "heartsickness" and by Fortinbras' "hot" threat. Laertes' choler influences his followers who become "muddied" -- thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers." (4.5.77-78) Denmark also has to cope with Fortinbras' political aggression so that the turmoil in the land is sprung from many human passions -- all signified by elemental distemper in the characters. The various passions in these characters cited thus far share in dangerous ambition: Claudius' ambition for the throne resulted in regicide; Laertes' ambition for revenge fans civil heat; and Fortinbras' ambition for honour increases the force of Extravagance in the macrocosm. However, elemental distemper does not occur only in these choleric types.

Polonius, Gertrude, and Ophelia constitute the big trio of phlegmatic characters who, while temperamentally different from the "hot" types, share in the influences on

moral order. Polonius is linked to other old, phlegmatic types by Hamlet:

> ... for the satirical rogue says here old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams.
> (2.2.195-199)

This satiric categorisation allies with such generally available technical information as found in Sir Thomas Elyot's list of phlegmatic traits: white colour, slowness, dullness in learning, and smallness of courage. Of course, Elyot also indicates dreams of things watery or of fish,[12] and this applies best to Ophelia who often uses images of moisture and who eventually goes to a watery grave. Ophelia is linked to water and to flowers, that is to the cool and moist. (4.5.36-38) When Polonius sermonises to her, Ophelia is addressed in terms of water imagery: according to her father, she is in the "liquid dew of youth." (1.3.41) To Hamlet, she is a Nymph (3.1.89) who will find that though she is "as chaste as ice, as pure as snow" (3.1.136) -- two states of water -- she cannot escape calumny. Later, in her pathetic madness, Ophelia strengthens her associations with water for she sings a ballad which has a liquid image conjuring "true-love showers." (4.5.38) After Polonius' death, she "cannot choose but weep" (4.5.66) and her next ballad voices

the essence of deep grief through which "rains many a tear." (4.5.162) Of course, the elemental nature of Ophelia is finalised by her death "in the glassy stream." (4.7.169) She falls "in the weeping brook" (4.7.177) and Gertrude laments: "Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia." (4.7.187) For her part, Gertrude, who considers Ophelia

> a creature native and indued
> Unto that element (4.7.181-182),

is herself phlegmatic. Hamlet has seen mother as a watery Niobe figure (1.2.149) and he tells her that at her age "the hey-day in the blood is tame." (3.4.68-69) She is different from Ophelia because there is a degree of lust in her temperament. Whereas Ophelia is linked to youthful purity (through the symbols of flowers), Gertrude is linked to passion (through images of blood, "stewing," and feeding on Claudius). Yet, the two women remain phlegmatic and are joined to this effect by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ("sponges" that soak up the King's countenance -- 4.2.11-16) as well as by Osric who is termed a "water-fly." (5.2.83)

The phlegmatic disposition, no less than the choleric, is inclined to influence moral order and Gertrude, whose lower passions substitute lust in place of ideal love, joins Ophelia in typifying the frailty of women. Gertrude's transformation

from King Hamlet's loving wife to Claudius' "mouse" (3.4.183) shows how latent sexuality surfaces to corrupt moral order. Her lust has replaced her doting on King Hamlet. She is guilty of desecrating the most solemn contract of marriage:

> oh, such a deed
> As from the body of contraction plucks
> The very soul, and sweet religion makes
> A rhapsody of words. (3.4.45-48)

She victimises herself and so does Ophelia, but in a different way. Gertrude gives herself illicitly and intemperately to Claudius and thereby contributes to moral pollution; Ophelia yields to her passion and sacrifices her psychological balance for Hamlet. Both women typify the frailty of women and the corruptive power of beauty:

> Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will
> sooner transform honesty from what it is
> to a bawd than the force of honesty can
> translate beauty into his likeness.
> (3.1.111-113)

Gertrude's beauty is a decoy for her lust, and Ophelia's beauty has been used by Polonius to lure Hamlet into a trap. (3.1.) The surfaces of the phlegmatic types are accordingly deceptive: Polonius' courtier manner is a camouflage for his power-play against Hamlet; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern look harmless, but perform a dangerous mission of espionage; and Osric's "golden words" are a gloss for his shallowness.

When Hamlet analyses these characters, he recognises their cant and hypocrisy which spread through the "drossy age" and "pursy times."

Hamlet's own elemental distemper is more complex than anyone else's and together with Horatio's temperament rounds out the relationship between microcosmography and the moral universe. Of the two men, Horatio acts consistently but Hamlet is the big puzzle. Horatio's actions indicate wit and watchfulness. He is scrupulous in his perception and judgment, and is not gullible. Horatio is not an easy believer of the Ghost's witness. He wonders about its credulity and significance, and is only partially convinced of its validity as supernatural witness. (1.1.165) In the play-scene, Horatio once again plays a careful observer who is to enhance Hamlet's strategy against Claudius. "Didst perceive?" Hamlet asks him, to which Horatio replies, "Very well, my lord." (3.2.275-276) He is an admirable balance of blood and judgment. (3.2.60-69) His character traits indicate a sanguine condition allied to the phlegmatic. He has confidence in reason and the power to temper will. Except for his emotional intensity on Hamlet's deathbed where he desires the venomous wine, he does not act rashly but coolly

and moderately. His character is not entangled in paradoxes.

Hamlet, however, is the one character whose real complexion and humor are concealed behind a conglomeration of deceptive and confusing details. Most critics (led, of course, by A.C. Bradley) consider him a melancholy man, but Hamlet himself raises important doubts. Ostensibly, Hamlet's appearance and activities provide adequate equivalences for the Renaissance notions of melancholy.[13] The Prince bears a "nighted colour," (1.2.68) but his thoughts pale his complexion. (3.1.85) He has bad dreams, (2.2.250-251) his imagination waxes desperate, (1.4.182) and he is quite adamant in his opinions. Once he has made up his mind, he follows his convictions. He nurses a deep-seated, long bubbling hate towards Claudius, and his grief over his father's death renders him mirthless. (2.2.288-301) Indeed, his grief has made him forego "all custom of exercises" -- one of the prime symptoms of melancholy. His apparent lassitude, sorrow, and ire are further evidence of melancholy.[14]

Madness or some affliction of the mind also marks the deeply melancholy man, and Hamlet -- to his rivals, at least -- appears to be mad. He sighs deeply, looks pale, and uncomposed to Ophelia almost as if he were only semi-conscious. He appears

with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
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.
(2.1.78-83)

When he is confronted by the two spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet remarks that he is incapable of reason (2.2.259) and that his wit is diseased. (3.2.306) However, the Prince has a penchant for ambiguity and he has already warned Horatio that he will put "an antic disposition on." (1.5.172) Moreover, he urges his comrade to indulge in "ambiguous giving out" (1.5.178) so we should consider the strong possibility of simulated madness. He intensifies the ambiguity by both denying and admitting madness. In a soliloquy on the necessity of using reason and balancing action against thought, Hamlet acknowledges the excitements of his reason. (4.4.58) Of Laertes he begs forgiveness for wrongings induced by "madness." (5.2.226) Yet, he denies true madness when he assures Gertrude that his brain is not agitated in the matter of seeing the Ghost:

it is not madness
That I have utter'd; bring me to the test,
And I the matter will re-word, which madness
Would gambol from. (3.4.141-144)

His observers, however, are convinced of his lunacy. Polonius is certain that he is mad. (2.2.92) The old courtier is confident that he can determine how Hamlet has "from his reason fall'n." (2.2.164) Ophelia laments the overthrow of a noble mind. (3.1.150) Claudius refers to "madness in great ones," (3.1.189) "this mad young man," (4.1.19) and the King warns against letting this madness range (3.3.2) because there is a grave danger to the kingdom. (3.3.7) When Polonius is murdered, Claudius declares openly: "Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain." (4.1.34) The suspicion of Hamlet's madness is widespread and even the first gravedigger refers to "he that is mad, and sent into England" (5.1.140) where "the men are as mad as he." (5.1.145) Be this as it may, we cannot ignore the Prince's own self-analyses and his hint of premeditated simulation. He does not doubt that his "wild and whirling words" will aid him "put an antic disposition on." (1.5.172) His antagonists do suspect that his is a "crafty madness" (3.1.7-8) and Hamlet himself proclaims:

> I essentially am not in madness,
> But mad in craft. (3.4.187-188)

There is an ambiguity even in this admission for Hamlet seems to mean one of two things: (a) that he is not really mad but craftily pretends to be so, or (b) that he knows what he's

after (therefore he is not <u>essentially</u> mad) but madly uses the wrong means. The question of his madness (at least the nature and degree of it) remains open, although there is abundant evidence to indicate that the Prince is most careful in his deliberations. In his attempts to suit the action to the word, the word to the action, he reveals an aspiration towards balance absent in the mad or melancholy man. He is swift to make Gertrude recognise her own "madness":

> Sense sure you have,
> Else could you not have motion; but sure that sense
> Is apoplex'd ... (3.4.71-73)

And when he turns to himself, his interest in honour is an overt sign of an inclination to Mediocrity.

The vacillations between self-control and semblances of madness typify the Prince's mutable disposition. It is therefore futile to search for a single humor in him especially when Hamlet's self-analyses raise doubts about his own disposition. He admits to phlegm (by calling himself a "muddy-mettled rascal" -- 2.2.541) and to the sanguine:

> Oh, from this time forth,
> My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!
> (4.4.65-66)

Critics have attempted to solve the problem of his shifts in temper by making cases for unnatural melancholy. A.C. Bradley, for instance, argues that Hamlet's melancholy is not really

his fundamental humor but a consequence of emotional and psychological stresses.[15] Lily B. Campbell also asserts that Hamlet's melancholy is a consequence of his passion and is the adustion of blood.[16] However, Miss Campbell's diagnosis is too prescriptive and ignores Hamlet's vacillations between the cold and the hot, the dry and the moist. My own inclination is to view Hamlet's mutability as signs of modified "fire".

The Prince's actions indicate that heat is fundamental to his role in the ritual of purge. When the Prince feels dull, lethargic, inert, (2.2.552) he castigates himself for lacking gall and for being pigeon-livered. The "pale cast of thought" (3.1.85) and the "pigeon" liver betoken the deficiency of heat and signify a natural melancholy in Hamlet. His body fire appears to be burned out and his flesh feels too "solid," that is, constricted and modified by earthly fardels. When he is inflamed to translate thought into action he thirsts for hot blood (3.2.373) and is inclined to violence. This betokens the dominion of heat and exemplifies the presence of fire in a form of unnatural melancholy.

Hamlet's unnatural melancholy bears strong patterns of fire and this renders it a dramatic expression of choler

adust. Hamlet verges extremely close to the boundary of uncontrolled rage, furious fits, and mental delirium. The Touchstone of Complexions (1581) wrote of choler adust: "If it bee immoderately and too much enflamed, it bryngeth the mynde into furious fits, phreneticke rages, and braynesicke madnesse."[17] Hamlet is choleric from time and time and when the fire of choler engenders an excess of heat, this immoderate elemental dominance is expressed by Hamlet's Extravagances. Hence, Hamlet could turn rash once rage has seized his mind and heart. Aware of his own hesitation and lack of action, the Prince says:

> Rashly, --
> And praised be rashness for it, let us know,
> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
> When our deep plots do fail. (5.2.6-9)

This comes a little after he has proclaimed that he is not "splenitive" (morose) and "rash," (5.1.249) and goes to show that the Prince vacillates in his feelings, thoughts, and actions. However, within his vacillations, we do find some consistency of elemental imagery and this derives from fire or some form of heat.

Much of Hamlet's behaviour could find equivalences in Renaissance descriptions of fiery choler. The Prince trembles and shakes before Ophelia (2.1.81); acts frenzied

after Claudius' cry for light (3.2.259-266); his message is abnormally affected (2.1.81 and 3.4.119); his lack of charity towards Polonius increases with his growing hostility towards Claudius; and he is sometimes rash and irreverent. The general sense of Extravagance is conveyed by Hamlet's line: "We are arrant knaves all," (3.1.129) and a little earlier, when he says: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious," (3.1.124) Hamlet underscores a choleric chafing of his spirit. Choler is a frequent emotion in Hamlet, and it is synonymous with wrath, hot temper, and irascibility.[18] It is this choler that makes other Shakespearean characters full of hot temper. Fluellen in Henry V is "toucht with choler, hot as gunpowder," (4.7.175-176) while Hotspur in I Henry IV is "drunk with choler." (1.3.129) Hamlet becomes filled with deep resentment against Claudius and with cynicism towards women. His hostility is then expressed in "hot" words; he thunders against the corruption "mining" Gertrude's soul (3.4.144-149) and thinks of explosions against the King's spies. (3.4.208-209)

Hamlet's own case makes it clear that the elemental distribution and orthodox complexion theory express in physical terms the intense psychomachia within the characters. The soul-struggles are underlined by symbolic references to the seats

of the natural, animal, and vital spirits. We must not forget that Elizabethan drama incorporated Renaissance theories of psychology where particular temperaments could be read by descriptions of spirits in _dramatis personae_. Macbeth, assuring his hired murderers that he does not doubt their sincerity, tells them: "Your spirits shine through you." (3.1.128) Gertrude, in describing Hamlet's excitement at the sight of the Ghost, tells her son: "Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep." (3.4.119) In _Hamlet_, there is much use of organic imagery (heart, liver, brain) which denotes soul-states. Actually, the use of the three seats for man's spirits is an integral part of the Extravagance and Mediocrity themes. Each seat has roles to play and the excess or deficiency of a particular spirit can be read as evidence of Extravagance.

Because there are three seats for the spirits, there are three basic organic images. The heart imagery connotes the quality of human passion and the effect of psychomachia. Shakespearean characters can often be read by the condition of the heart. Thus, Oliver professes sincerity in a line to Duke Frederick: "O that your Highness knew my heart in this!" (_As You Like It_, 3.1.13) Lear wonders at Regan's nature; "Is

there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?" (King Lear, 3.6.76-78) The second seat is the liver which also plays its part in tempering humor by functioning as the lower, appetitive part of man. It is the seat of courage, anger, and sometimes love. If "livery" is literally dress or garment that shows the outer man, it can also be (if accepted as a pun) an expression of internal passion. The liver can be "white as milk" to show cowardice (The Merchant Of Venice, 3.2.86) or it can be washed "as clean as a sound sheep's heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in't." (As You Like It, 3.2.386-388) In Hamlet, it generates either excessive or deficient passion in the Prince and it serves to remind man of his essential "livery" -- that is, of his natural make-up as opposed to his nurtured conduct. Of course, the most central seat is the brain implicating the world of the mind: perception, wit, imagination, dream, reflection, memory, and reason. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare wrote: "Lovers and madmen have such seething brains." (5.1.4) And Macbeth certainly reveals the destruction of minds through inflamed ambition: "The heat-oppressed brain" (2.1.39) diseases the minds of Macbeth and his wife. Any distemper of an organ in Hamlet indicates a microcosmographic Extravagance and this, by virtue of the bond linking man

to his outer world, extends into the setting for the characters.

The presentation of the organic imagery is such that the play bears an early reference to heart-sickness (1.1.8) and ends only after the moment of Hamlet's cracking heart. (5.2.346) Within this frame, characters are set off against one another in order to signify the turmoil of psychomachia and the movements towards or away from Mediocrity. Early presentations of heart imagery suggest deficiency and "sickness." Francisco's heart-sickness is a mysterious condition inasmuch as there is no specific reason described for it. However, it might be a suggestion that the present state of Denmark is disconcerting to Francisco who is, after all, part of the old guard -- pun intentional -- and who is affected by the circumstances of Gertrude's remarriage, Claudius' accession, and witnesses to the Ghost. His heart-sickness is a proem to the intense melancholy of Hamlet. It may be contrasted with old Polonius' heart which is numb and blind, if we accept the chamberlain's reference to his "winking" heart. (2.2.136) He lacks heartfelt instincts and, as such, indicates a deficiency of vital spirit.

Even Hamlet's heart ails: Claudius alludes to "a heart unfortified" (1.2.96) because of excessive grief when Hamlet takes to heart his father's death. Hamlet's heart-break is revealed to Horatio but its stress remains a private, secret suffering for the most part: "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue!" (1.2.158) The Ghost's appearance and testimony generate feelings of shock, horror, and fury. Hamlet feels the impact and exclaims: "Hold, hold, my heart" (1.5.93) -- an appeal to his own capacity for steadfast courage and control. However, as his intense grief and dis-enchantment with the world continue, Hamlet feels a deep "heart-ache." (3.1.62) The heart becomes the area of deep-felt emotion, resolution or wavering, courage or cowardice. Unlike Polonius, Hamlet does not yield to insensitivity. While the old chamberlain is fearful, scrupulous, curious, and slow to react, Hamlet is hardy, bold, and capable of long-harboured anger. Once aroused, he is not easily pacified as evidenced by his quarrel with Laertes. (5.1) Yet, his heart is also capable of weaker moments where it threatens to sink into a pale of cowardice and inactivity. Hence Hamlet's invocation: "O heart, lose not thy nature." (3.2.376) Yet, it revives and the Prince is able to wring Gertrude's heart which is fearful, timorous, and slow to register its spirit-

ual ethos although quick in sensuality. In his stronger moments, Hamlet expresses the significance of the heart as it is reserved for cherished values. In praising Horatio's good temper and balance, Hamlet proclaims:

> Give me that man
> That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
> As I do thee. (3.2.66-69)

The heart is one of the innermost parts of man and signifies his recondite mystery: the heart of his mystery. (3.2.349) However, it does not conceal his passion or the ultimate turmoil of psychomachia. Claudius draws attention to this fact when he speaks of the vital spirit affecting the temper of the animal spirit:

> This something-settled matter in his heart,
> Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
> From fashion of himself. (3.1.173-175)

Indeed, the "something-settled matter" in Hamlet's heart is what intensifies his struggle towards balance for he feels guilty for having replaced the deep sentiments of the heart with mere words: "Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words." (2.2.561)

As a seat of passion, the heart functions vividly in the cases of the principal characters. Apart from Francisco's heart-sickness, Polonius' numbness, and Hamlet's shifts of

sentiment, there is Laertes' impulses which prompt him into extravagant action such as leaping into Ophelia's grave. (5.1) He manifests heart-felt grief for his dead sister, but is excessive in his expression of emotion and his bravado is rash. Laertes is too fiery-mettled, too impulsive. It is not the mere presence of heat that is sufficient to brand the heart as excessive or deficient in its operation: heat is caused by the presence of fire which, in itself, is not an extravagant element but a pure, refining one: "Fyre, is absolutely lyght and cleare, and is the clarifier of other elementes ... and is properly hote and drye."[19] The proportion of heat makes all the difference as can be seen in Hamlet's case. Though it sometimes pounds against his ribs in fear, Hamlet's heart also asserts the hardiness and forbearance of the Prince, and it is no hyperbole for Horatio to call it "a noble heart." (5.2.346)

Perhaps the most dramatic function of the heart in Hamlet entails its activity in characters' soul-struggles. Ophelia, with her phlegmatic complexion, is too simple, too slow, too restrained in anger to survive the cruel shocks of fortune. When warned not to lose her heart to Hamlet, (1.3.31) she replies as if her heart were something to be guarded from assault:

> I shall the effect of this good lesson keep,
> As watchman to my heart. (1.3.45-46)

However, her heart cracks before her mind when she is repulsed by Hamlet (3.1) and in her madness, she beats her heart as if to signify the world's cruel assault on her frailty. (4.5.5) Ophelia's heart lacks the brazen quality found in Gertrude's. Hamlet finds that his mother's heart cannot be easily wrung because it appears to be hard and impervious to feeling:

> Peace! sit you down,
> And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,
> If it be made of penetrable stuff:
> If damned custom have not brazed it so,
> That it is proof and bulwark against sense.
> (3.4.34-38)

At first, Gertrude can only wring her hands (3.4.34) but when her psychomachia stings her consciousness, the Queen cries in anguish: "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain." (3.4.156) The inference is that she is broken-hearted about her own weakness, but she does nothing to disavow her frailty. Of course, Hamlet's own psychomachia is no less acute, but it has a different evolution. The genesis for mother and son's soul-struggles lies in circumstances of regicide, lust and adultery. Both Gertrude and Hamlet want to move away from dishonour, but because the will is not always supported by the inclination, their hearts express vacillation and weakness. Both characters are consequently

restless, and Hamlet admits this to Horatio:

> Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting,
> That would not let me sleep. (5.2.4-5)

However, this confession of restlessness is a sign that the heart's struggle is all to the good. It engenders a movement towards Mediocrity for Hamlet knows that honour is at stake and he must temper his spirits to achieve it. He holds the notion of honour as dearly to his heart as he does Horatio:

> O God! -- Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story. (5.2.331-336)

In its ideal aspect the heart, then, is reserved for virtue such as that of amity and honour. The heart is a battle-ground between virtue and vice, honour and dishonour, and plays a central role in Hamlet's evolution towards Mediocrity.

The progression towards Mediocrity also involves the lower passions and the natural spirit with their subsequent indications of increasing or decreasing Extravagance. Hamlet indicates a sharp interest in Gertrude's lower passions for he knows that she has deep inward desires that could become a bad custom. He warns her accordingly:

> He [custom] likewise gives a frock or
> livery,
> That aptly is put on. (3.4.164-165)

Hamlet uses "livery" as a pun to ally the metaphor of dress to the connotation of human passion. In his own case, he wonders if he is a coward:

> For it cannot be
> But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter. (2.2.551-553)

It was a Renaissance supposition that pigeons and doves owed their gentleness to the absence of gall.[20] Hamlet infers that he lacks the requisite bitterness, rancour, and poisonous feeling (passions which arise from gall) to convert his thoughts of revenge into action. Hence, the allegiance between "pigeon-liver'd" and the lack of gall. Of course, the Prince is excessive in his self-deprecation for he is anything but heartless, as evidenced by the numerous instances of his heartache, stirrings, and internal soul-warfare. Yet, he insists at this point that he is phlegmatic -- too gentle -- with his natural spirit denying his fiery bitterness against Claudius. The inference would be that he has given way to the wrong type of geniality whereby he is unable to act purposefully. However, this is not totally substantiated by later circumstances. Claudius is the "galled jade" who winces because he is frightened by <u>The Mouse-trap</u>. (3.2.

232) Hamlet is the "hart ungalled" at play (3.2.260): that is, the unwounded innocent who exults in his successful scheme to evoke Claudius' guilt-reaction. Moreover, Hamlet later demonstrates his capacity to be passionate when he warns Laertes:

> For, though I am not splenitive and rash,
> Yet have I something in me dangerous,
> Which let thy wisdom fear. (5.1.249-251)

Therefore, even if Hamlet sometimes accuses himself of cowardice, it should be remembered that his self-judgments keep shifting within the swirl of his mind and emotions. He alternately considers himself melancholy ("Out of my weakness and my melancholy" -- 2.2. 577) and phlegmatic ("I am pigeon-liver'd" -- 2.2.552). He shifts from natural melancholy to unnatural melancholy (choler adust) and these shifts are marked by corresponding changes in his outlook and conduct. He vacillates between rash and cautious action. It takes him a relatively long period of time to decide whether the Ghost is ultimately reliable. He does not hurl himself headlong into a brazen, open confrontation with Claudius, but plots subtle schemes to expose the King's guilt. Yet, there are moments when he is impulsive (he leaps into Ophelia's grave -- 5.1) and this expresses an inner disposition to danger and violence, an expression of extravagant lower

passions and a quality indicative of hot tempered choler adust.[21]

Shifts between extravagant behaviour and medial conduct are also expressed through activity of the mind. So central are the brain and mind of Hamlet, that scholars such as Schlegel, Coleridge, and Dowden have traditionally interpreted the play as a tragedy of thought, reflection, and the speculative habit. Scholars agree that the mind plays an outstanding role in the drama. Bradley comments on Hamlet's mental nimbleness and flexibility.[22] J.M. Robertson writes on the Prince's mental lucidity,[23] and A.P. Rossiter describes the play as a story "about a Mind, in the world of its mind (a distracted globe), and also the world <u>about</u> that mind, which is partly what that mind makes of the whirl."[24] The very dialectic of the play's language suggests mental processes: the actions of interrogation, doubt and irony.[25] The stratagems of the two foes, Hamlet and Claudius, are constructed on the dialectic of question-answer-doubt. Claudius must determine if Hamlet is mad and what his inclinations are; Hamlet must find answers to his doubts about the Ghost ("O, answer me!" -- 1.4.45), Claudius, and himself ("Am I a coward?" -- 2.2.545). The mind and its relation to the brain are therefore likely to be essential factors in the

play. If the heart is the Mean between soul-states, the liver between natural and unnatural passions, then the brain becomes a factor for intellectual Mediocrity.

Hamlet's mind is the most tested in the play. He is the "observed of all observers" (3.1.154) so he must keep his mind alert. Although he complains of bad dreams (2.2. 250-251), he matches his quicksilver wits with anybody in the context of daily activity. He spins circles around Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Osric. The chief characteristics of his animal spirit would be his watchfulness ("I'll observe his looks" -- 2.2.572), his hot-headedness which is revealed through hyperbolic imagery of dry heat ("the burning zone" -- 5.1.268-271), and general restlessness streaked with a current of bubbling danger. His good, ready wits, watchfulness, and restlessness are all symptoms of inner fire.[26] As such, he is very different from the other characters. Polonius is cold for his wits have grown dull, Ophelia and Gertrude, being essentially phlegmatic characters, are marked by the cold and moist: that is, through imperfect or dull senses and wits. Similarly, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. As for Horatio, it is good, ready wit that marks his character and this is indicated by his Stoical mind. Only Claudius

and Laertes share something of the hot and dry with Hamlet. They are hot and dry with the excess of anger and the deficiency of self-control. Claudius is restless too but his restlessness stems from fear of Hamlet's lunacy and not from any sensitivity to a spiritual mission:

> I like him not, nor stands it safe with us
> To let his madness range. (3.3.1-2)

Although Claudius has earlier preached on the virtue of balance in man (1.2) he does nothing to temper his own excesses. His heat grows: he is affected not only by the "false fire" of The Mouse-trap but by his own choler which galls him into suffering. Hamlet, however, tries to temper his operations to moderate the heat of deeds. He does this by attempting to subordinate the lower passions to the sentiments of the heart.

The dynamic of such an essay in Mediocrity is not a uniformly consistent one. The play makes no categorical statement about which seat of spirits is the true Mean. In terms of traditional Renaissance psychology, there was no doubt that the heart was the most instrumental organ in the body as far as governing the sensitive part of man. The heart was king of the middle portion of man's body[27] and since this portion law between the brain and the liver, it occupied

a Mean position in man's biological structure. If the heart nourished evil passions, this would automatically affect the brain's powers to reason. Plutarch wrote that "when furious yre in hart so leapes and boiles," man's wit and reason "beare no sway."[28] Elyot emphasised this point: "Ire is kendlyed in the harte, mordynately chaufynge the spirites there, and than is sent forthe in to the members, and doth superfluously heate them, and disturbeth reason."[29] The heart moderated the body's temperature by preserving and issuing natural heat into the body, so that it could function harmoniously.[30] Medieval allegory (such as Alanus de Insulis' De Planctu Naturae, [c. 1160-1170]), held that lust was generated in the lower portion of man's body, wisdom in the head, and magnanimity -- the culminating virtue -- in the heart. Yet, it was the brain that became the connecting link between body and soul for it commands the body and interprets the senses of man. John Donne wrote in The Progress of the Soul:

> The tender well-arm'd feeling brain, from whence
> Those sinewy strings, which do our bodies tie,
> Are ravelled out, and fast there by one end,
> Did this soul limbs, these limbs a soul attend.
> (Stanza 51)

However, in Hamlet, the seats of vital and animal spirits assume alternating paramount positions. Beginning with an example of heart-sickness, the play reveals how Hamlet's

heart decrees his deepest feelings and sometimes lends his thoughts an emotional intensity. Then, the drama goes on to distemper and distraction of the mind thereby implying that magnanimity is impossible without some sort of wisdom.

The shifts between the seats of heart and brain show that Mediocrity is not located in any single function of man. Hamlet's grief and sloth arise out of a heartsickness. Claudius interprets the Prince's grief as evidence of a "heart unfortified," (1.2.96) and, to Hamlet, the heart is a vital part of man which conceals his mystery of being. He secretly harbours his deep passion against Claudius and will not allow Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to "pluck out the heart" of his mystery. (3.2.349) He ruminates on the possibility of escaping the "heart-ache" in life. (3.1.62) His heart can be caught between the excess of passion and the deficiency of feeling, so Hamlet utters "Hold, hold, my heart." (1.5.93) When he gathers up his courage to assault Gertrude's guilt, Hamlet tries to temper his heart. He would rather love his mother than kill her: "Heart, lose not thy nature". (3.2.376)

These examples show that the heart often wavers between excess and deficiency although it is supposed to be the seat of magnanimity. Probing deeper, however, we discover that Hamlet's heart operates from motives of honour and this allies it to the force of Mediocrity. Honour as an aristocratic virtue is lodged in Hamlet's blood because he is the son of a veritable Jove. (3.4.56) His heart cracks with the attempt to vindicate this honour. (5.2.346) Yet, the excitements (in good and bad senses) of his blood are also accompanied by excitements of reason. (4.4.53) Hamlet's bemusement about the Ghost's reliability, his own ability to execute a mission of revenge, and the tension of mental distraction are all expressed in his "distracted globe" image. (1.5.97) He is most concerned with thought and the proper functioning of the mind. "About, my brain!" he exclaims after indicting himself for his diminished desire for revenge. (2.2.564) Yet, if his brain provides him with memories of his dishonoured father and his avowed mission, it is his heart that quickens his excitement to act. His animal spirit refines his vital spirit and the operations of the heart and mind complement each other. In the realm of Mediocrity, the head is not more native to the heart or vice-versa. Both are affected by the balance or imbalance among the elements in man and this

is why the elemental imagery plays such an important role in indicating Extravagance or Mediocrity in the play.

The disorder in the operations of the spirits is often signified by elemental disorder and it impinges on the macrocosm in the play. The lower passions reveal the baseness and animality of man. The royal couple's lust pollutes Denmark and fills Hamlet with so much repulsion that he turns his cynicism and repulsion into a universalising hostility. His unnatural melancholy (choler adust) chafes his spirits and this adds to his mental distraction. His distemper assumes a comprehensive nature. When he refers to his "distracted globe," he posits a relationship between his mental state (the globe of his mind) and the world globe. His "distraction" becomes global for he speaks of "infinite space," (2.2.250) "wandering stars," (5.1.244) "the uses of this world," (1.2.134) and man in a postlapsarian state. (1.2.133-137) His "distraction" shows how his outlook changes and since he acts according to his outlook, his "distraction" affects the setting for his actions. He emphasizes the corruption of man and the universe:

> indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promon-

> tory; this most excellent canopy, the
> air, look you, this brave o'erhanging
> firmament, this majestical roof
> fretted with golden fire, -- why, it
> appears no other thing to me than a
> foul and pestilent congregation of
> vapours. What a piece of work is man!
> how noble in reason! how infinite in
> faculty! in form and moving, how ex-
> press and admirable! in action, how
> like an angel! in apprehension, how
> like a god! the beauty of the world!
> the paragon of animals! And yet, to me,
> what is this quintessence of dust? man
> delights not me; no, nor woman neither,
> though by your smiling you seem to say
> so. (2.2.289-301)

It is clear from these lines that Hamlet sees a corruption of all the elements in the world. Earth, air, fire, and water are all foul and pestilential making man so too.

Hamlet's view of elemental disorder draws attention to the need for a tempering agent, and it is to such a tempering agent that we turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

FIRE AS EXTRAVAGANCE AND MEDIOCRITY

"burnt and purged away" -- 1.5.13.

The patterns of elemental distribution in characters and setting do reveal that fire is the most significant element in the play because of its dual role as a force of distemper and of cure. While the play opens with hostile, cold air biting shrewdly and nipping sharply, it ends with a "hot" peal of ordnance. Within this framework, we see how the major phlegmatic characters are eliminated and elemental distemper is brought under control by a "hot" character. The final Act of the play completes the ritual of purge and moves in such a way as to mark the diminution of cold and the ascendancy of heat. The choler of Laertes and Hamlet at Ophelia's grave is a proem to their "fiery" duel, and the final scene is dominated by the "hot". Claudius commands all the battlements to fire their ordnance. (5.2.254-257) Laertes and Hamlet then duel in an "incensed" fashion (5.2.289) causing the play to speed to its "upshot" -- that is, to its violent conclusion in the

metaphorical sense of a final shot. The "hot" excitement of the duel propels Gertrude to wipe Hamlet's sweaty (hot, moist) brow and to drink the poisoned wine which Hamlet then pours down Claudius'. throat. The King dies by drinking a venomous liquid which had nourished his base passions. Laertes and Hamlet also die and the moment of the Prince's death is marked by a "shot within" and the "election lights" of Fortinbras. The Norwegian prince who claims Denmark for himself has choler as his fundamental humor and his military tribute to Hamlet is "fiery" enough to suggest the ritual has ended with purging "heat".

I have summarised the final action in the play in order to suggest that there is a clear role for fire in _Hamlet_. The fire images are numerous and diverse but they all indicate the role of fire either as a burning, extravagant force or as a purging, medial one. In _King Lear_, Shakespeare uses an example (in an ironic way, but that's not the point here) of the duality of fire when Lear tells Regan how she comforts him in contrast to Goneril:

> Her eyes are fierce, but thine
> Do comfort and not burn. (2.4.171-172)

These lines are evidence that, in any one context, fire can operate in opposing ways. In _Hamlet_, fire functions in both

character and setting for it is the fundamental element in all the humors in man[31] and thereby influences his actions within a specific context. Fire also forms the basis of the eternal regions awaiting man after death and there it appears as a damning, purging, or redeeming force. The significance of fire is so tightly interwoven into the fabric of the play that we note now Extravagance can burn within body and soul until a curative fire purges the "disease".

The diverse references to fire indicate the opposing senses of this elemental image. There is an astral fire which burns as an indication of the Ghost's extravagant movement. The Spirit appears

> When yond same star that's westward from the pole
> Had made his course to illumine that part of heaven
> Where now it burns (1.1.36-38)

The Ghost is being purged by an eternal fire and tries to carry the message of purge to an Elsinore "burning" with extravagant corruption. Thus, we note how fire can have opposite functions: it can burn and corrupt, or purge and cleanse. While the Ghost is being cleansed in its spiritual realm, Denmark "burns" extravagantly with corrupt passion, lower bodily appetites, and ill-tempered individuals. Claudius' choleric distemper, Gertrude's "stewed" corruption,

the "blazes" of eros, and Fortinbras' hot temper, all signify the problem of ill-regulated living. The Ghost, while preoccupied with a revenge mission, does decry the several Extravagances in Elsinore and his persuasion of Hamlet is strongly motivated by a sense of purgation. It comments on the "garbage" soiling Denmark (1.5.57) and the rank abuse of the "whole ear of Denmark" (1.5.36-37). While it leaves Gertrude to Heaven's "fire," the Ghost so convinces Hamlet of the King's villainy, that the Prince intends to dispatch Claudius to the fiery zone of Hell in order to cleanse Denmark.

The Ghost's tale of "sulphurous and tormenting flames" (1.5.3) reminds us of the soul-determining consequences which await the characters in Hamlet. The region of fire, to which the Ghost is confined, is supposed to burn and purge away the "foul crimes" done on earth. (1.5.12-13) However, the Spectre's Extravagance has caused it to interrupt its purgation as it wanders along the battlements of Elsinore. The fire of its eternity is the only force capable of "curing" the Ghost. The spirit's movement away from this fire interrupts the soul-saving process.

The fire of Purgatory, however, is not the fire of absolute salvation. There is a higher fire found in the abode of God but Scripture reveals that this can only be experienced after passing through the fire of Purgatory:

> . . . the day of the Lord . . . is to reveal itself in fire, and fire will test the quality of each man's workmanship. He will receive a reward, if the building he has added on stands firm; if it is burnt up, he will be the loser; and yet he himself will be saved, though only as men are saved by passing through fire. (I Cor. 3: 13-15)

Clearly, the final day of judgement is represented as a ritual of justice, testing, and purge. Many souls will escape condemnation only by passing through the fires of Purgatory. It is only after this mode of spiritual cleansing that the just can inherit the kingdom of Heaven, lit with golden lamps and blazing with lightning. (Apoc. 4: 1-6)

Judaeo-Christian tradition contains abundant fire imagery to indicate the majesty of God and Heaven. Some form of fire has often represented the light, truth, and power of God. We read of God as a "consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29) and of his glory and majesty radiating from Heaven through the sun and stars. God appears to Moses in a burning bush which is preserved intact despite its fiery glow. (Exod. 3: 2-3) His blinding light converts Saul on the way to Damascus,

(Acts, 9:3-19) and his grace is a redeeming fire. (Mt. 3:12) The apostle John has a vision of a heavenly angel with flaming eyes and sun-like face (Apoc. L:12-20) and the apostle writes a message from the Son of God who "has eyes like flaming fire." (Apoc. 2:18-19) The myriad metaphors of sun and fire have precedents in classical legend where the sun was turned into a god such as Phoebus and Hyperion. The Christian sun was also mythopoeic and fire came to symbolize the Holy Spirit.[32]

Although there is no overt sign of the Holy Spirit in Hamlet, there is an explicit reference to the sun as a source of generation and nourishment and as an agent of putrefaction. Hamlet speaks of it to Polonius:

> For if the sun breed maggots in a dead
> dog, being a good [god] kissing carrion ...
> (2.2.180-181)

Solar light creates the golden fire which frets the roof of Heaven, (2.2.293) and its power is indicated by its ability to be a principle of good and of corruption. The sun is a concrete form of Heaven's fire that performs functions attributed to God's Providence -- functions of generation and nourishment. Hamlet's lines, therefore, can also be read as a pun involving the supernatural powers of a divine agent. In such a reading, supported by Hamlet's facility with puns that combine wit and moralisation, the sun is a symbol of God's

light, truth, and power. Ordinarily a principle of goodness, it can also be a source of damnation.[33]

However, _Hamlet_ also offers the univocal fire of eternal damnation. The Bible refers to the "unquenchable fire" of Hell (Mk. 9:43) and the torment of its flames, (Lk. 16:25) and the presence of Hell awaits the damned in the play. Hamlet wishes to send Claudius to the doom of Hell and there are moments when he feels the hot contagion of Hell spreading through himself and the world. He believes that his imagination is "as foul as Vulcan's stithy" (3.2.78-79) and prior to his visit to Gertrude's chamber, he feels Hell breathing out contagion to the world. (3.2.372-373) The fire of Heaven is the fire of generation and nourishment; the fire of Purgatory is deficient in comparison, but it is a fire that induces purgation. However, in relation to these two fires, the flames of Hell are totally execrable. They are meant to punish sinners. Consequently, a comprehensive view of the three eternal fires would yield an arrangement parallel to the excess-mean-deficiency dynamic. Purgatory would have fire for spiritual cure, but it would not be the finality towards which the redeemed move. There is a higher realm for the spiritually purged and this is Heaven whose golden fire awaits those who have been purged in Purgatory and saved from

Hell. The characters who participate in a drama of revenge inherit one of these fires. They who move completely away from virtue and Mediocrity cannot escape damnation in Hell; those who are capable of redemption but are partially defiled must suffer in Purgatory. The fire of Heaven burns steadily over the characters and glows with shame when they sin. As Hamlet indicates, Gertrude's sins are acts that defile virtue and cause Heaven's face to glow. (3.4.48) This recalls 1 Cor. 3:13-15 where the sudden blaze of God's light searches like a flame through all man's deeds.

Hamlet cannot escape the realisation of the three fires burning in the background of his drama. His father's spirit suffers in Purgatory and commits an Extravagance to remind the Prince of his revenge mission. Hamlet desires Claudius to inherit the damning fire of Hell, but the "burning eyes of Heaven" (2.2.495) watch his deeds to measure them in the final balance. Heaven has fixed its canon against self-slaughter and self-righteousness which tempt men.

The opposing senses of fire as burning Extravagance or as medial purge continue to function within the characters at Elsinore. Here, however, the fires are bodily ones

which "cook" men's actions and temperaments. They either burn out of control or moderate their heat to signify good temper and Mediocrity. It is not at all surprising to note the references to body fires after having been shown that the body is the countenance of the mind and soul. If body images can signify Extravagance and Mediocrity, then it follows that body fires can also signify burning Extravagance or temperate Mediocrity.

The body's fire not only "cooks" food but also "cooks" man's humor and passions. Food feeds the body and some of it is converted into subtle spirits which govern man's vital, animal, and natural functions. Now if fire "cooks" the food badly, this would affect the operation of man's spirits and would consequently affect his passions, thoughts, and actions. A popular Renaissance assumption derived from classical antiquity was that excessive heat (caused by the body's "overcooking") could produce physical diseases and psychological aberrations. Plato had written that:

> When a body has become diseased mainly from an excess of fire, it produces constant inflammations and fevers.[34]

Such a belief was expanded by Renaissance writers like Sir Thomas Elyot who detailed effects of elemental Extravagance

in The Castel of Helth from which I quote a small section:

> Brain hot and moist distempered hath:
> head aching and heavy; sleep deep, but
> unquiet, with often wakings and strange
> dreams; senses and wit imperfect.[35]

A natural humor could be transformed into an unnatural one (such as choler adust) and thereby produce repugnant effects. For example, natural melancholy could be

> whollie chaunged into an other nature by
> an unkindly heate, which turneth these
> humours, which before were raunged under
> natures gouernment, and kept in order,
> into a qualitie whollie repugnant, whose
> substance and vapor giueth such annoyance
> to all the partes, that as it passeth or
> is seated maketh strange alterations in
> our actions, whether they be animal or
> voluntarie, or naturall not depending
> upon our will, and these are all which
> the name of melancholie doth signifie ...[36]

Shakespeare was certainly familiar with such theory for we find in Venus And Adonis that

> An oven that is stopp'd ...
> Burneth more hotly ...
> So of concealed sorrow may be said:
> Free vent of words love's fire doth
> assuage. (11.331-334)

There is a similar idea in Titus Andronicus:

> Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped,
> Foth burn the heart to cinders where
> it is. (2.4.36037)[37]

In _Hamlet_ the body is nourished by certain fires and its own heat "cooks" the passions of the characters.

The "cooking" fires in _Hamlet_ burn extravagantly. Claudius' body is "marvellous distempered" by "choler" (3.2.288-290). This is caused by his draughts of wine which nourish his body heat only to produce quick passion and response. The wine feeds his body fire and is converted into distemperate passion. Claudius' appetite for Rhenish leads the Danes to a condition of drunkenness and this soils the country's name. (1.4.17-20) The excess of human passion is also detailed in another "cooking" image -- this time an explicit one. Hamlet is repulsed by the thought of Gertrude and Claudius "stew'd in corruption." (3.4.93) The word "stew'd" is a pun: it connotes sin (to stew = to whore) and food (a stew = a meal.) Earlier in the play, Pyrrhus, a paradigm for Hamlet because of his delay, is "roasted in wrath and fire." (2.2.439) In this case, "cooking" has an ambivalent value: it is both good and bad for it excites an inactive Pyrrhus and prompts him to action, but it continues its "cooking" too intensely and makes him fiendish, viz. "the hellish Pyrrhus." (2.2.441) The excessive fire also affects the external region of man. The bloody horrors of Pyrrhus are lent "a tyrannous and damned light" by the "baked

and impasted" streets. (2.2.437-439)

The "cooking" fires are only a part of the many fires in the play. These fires can be false fires of passion of the galling heat of disease or a wound. In any case, the burning denotes Extravagance, and serves to dramatise the significance of bodily fire.

Renaissance medicine emphasised the significance of heat: "Among those that digresse from a meane and differ from temperateness, the hoate complexioned body is first to be spoken of."[38] Excessive bodily heat could be signified by bravado (as in Fortinbras' case) and could be read by physiognomic details. Bardolph is perhaps a prime example in Shakespearean drama of a man whose inner "fire" burns outwardly on his mien. Falstaff calls him "the Knight of the Burning Lamp" who bears a lantern "in the poop" and who looks like an "everlasting bonfire light." Falstaff, on looking at Bardolph's face, can see nothing in it except hell-fire and Dives "in his robes, burning, burning." (I Henry IV, 3.3.25-38) Bardolph's "heat" and ugliness are used for comic effect, but there are serious examples in Hamlet of a relationship between inner heat of distemper and outer Extravagances. While Bardolph's "heat" is exemplified by his ugly face, Hamlet's "heat" is indicated

by reckless anger as in his challenge to Laertes:

> let them throw
> Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
> Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
> Make Ossa like a wart! (5.1.268-271)

He must moderate this distemper by diminishing his inner fire. Gertrude has urged him:

> O gentle son,
> Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
> Sprinkle cool patience. (3.4.122-124)

There are other characters who also reveal the fire of extravagant passion. Laertes' motions are hot and dry (4.7.158) and his inner heat is suggested by his verbal rant: "I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze." (4.7.192) His desperate reaction to tragic circumstances increases the "flash and outbreak of a fiery mind," (2.1.32) until he becomes totally "incensed." (4.5.122) His sister's body also "burns." She is told that her love for Hamlet is only the consequence of burning blood (1.3.116) and that "these blazes" are not trustworthy guides of genuine sentiment, but are mere signals of false passion. (1.3.117-120) This "hot" love (2.2.131) is transitory because the body's ardour can be cooled. Ophelia is young and it is natural for passion to be heated by "flaming youth." Certainly, Hamlet implies this in his tirade against Gertrude where he shows how virtue is consumed by the heat of passion:

> To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
> And melt in her own fire. (3.4.84-85)

Burning, extravagant fire underlines the theme of defilement or "sickness." King Hamlet's body was "diseased" by a poisonous hebenon. The Ghost alludes to the "possetting" influence of the chemical that causes a skin eruption on the late King's body -- a "most instant tetter." (1.5.71) The sharp, acid (therefore, burning) quality of hebenon is suggested by the phrase "eager droppings" (1.5.69) and this eats into his body like a "leperous distilment." (1.5.64) His surviving wife has her eyes "burned" with grief (1.2.153-155) and her soul is in the process of disease. Hamlet's first soliloquy refers to the "salt of most unrighteous tears" that "galled" Gertrude's eyes. (1.2.154-155) Here, salt has a fiery effect that rubs and burns painfully. Gertrude's soul is also burned through moral disease. It is an "ulcerous place" (3.4.147) which infects and burns from within.

Juxtaposed against the extravagant, burning fires are the purging fires which indicate a "cure" for Extravagance through cleansing or refining. The whole problem of purge is introduced by the Ghost who shows that fire is a mode for spiritual purgation. The Ghost's mortal excesses are to be

purged in "sulphurous and tormenting flames (1.5.3) and to this effect the Spirit is

> for the day confined to fast in fires,
> Till the foul crimes done in [my] days of nature
> Are burnt and purged away. (1.5.9-13)

If man's spirit is to be spared this painful punishment, his body should be purged on earth. Hamlet's first soliloquy testifies to the limitations of "solid flesh" (1.2.129) which ought to be transmogrified into a substance of purity. When the Prince wishes for his flesh to "thaw, and resolve itself into a dew (1.2.130) he implies the Mediocrity of heat in the phenomenon of a radical metaphysical refinement.

The purging fires in the play are linked to metallurgy or medicine and, in either case, they imply a basic distemper in character and setting. According to Hamlet, Danish society has entered a "drossy age." (5.2.180) The Prince's metallurgical metaphor is a short-cut to the real truth. The process of drossing denotes that after the heat of smelting comes the scum from metals and this scum floats on the surface of the molten material. So in Danish society, the moral scum have risen to the top levels of aristocratic privilege and what is needed is more "heat" to purge away this scum. Hamlet is him-

self affected by his society. He sees himself as a "muddy-mettled rascal" (2.2.541), most unlike Fortinbras who has a "mettle hot and full." The implication in Halmet's case is that the Prince lacks Mediocrity because of his complexion which is "muddy" -- that is, wet and cold, lacking heat. This is entirely consistent with his mood under the circumstances for he considers himself weak and melancholic (2.2.577) -- lacking the moderation of fire in the relationship of body elements. Hamlet knows that fire is a powerful element for man's mettle, and even his medical metaphors incorporate some form of purging fire. Hamlet seeks to purge Claudius' distemper but knows that any violent blood-letting ("purgation") would perhaps "plunge him [Claudius] into far more choler [fire]." (3.2.292-293) A Renaissance cure for choleric distemper was bleeding so that the excessive heat of the body might find an outlet and thereby produce a stabilised body temperature. However, Hamlet sees no earthly cure for Claudius' distemper and wishes him plunged into an eternal fire.

The two opposing moral senses of fire are most vividly expressed in terms of explosive imagery as is befitting a drama where there is so much deep-seated animosity between protagonist and antagonist. The ill-regulated burning fires some-

times take the form of bad "shots" or explosions in the play. They indicate the evil force of fire in _Hamlet_ but they are matched against good "shots" or explosions and the two types of explosion show the irony of fire fighting fire. The good and bad "shots" carry the drama to its final "upshot" -- the cure of Extravagance.

Because Claudius and Hamlet are the principal rivals in the drama, the "shots" or explosions are arranged around them. Claudius is close to Gertrude's ardour which acts like an explosive "charge" (3.4.86). The King is not aware of this "charge" but he is cognizant of another explosion -- this one caused by a scandal owing to Hamlet's desperation. Claudius hopes that slander will not affect him but will strike another target like an erratic cannon-shot:

> so, haply, slander,
> Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,
> As level as the cannon to his blank
> Transports his poison'd shot, may miss our name
> And hit the woundless air. (4.1.40-44)

Hamlet has his own "shots": he provides the "shot and danger of desire" which Ophelia is advised to avoid (1.3.35) and he aims his most powerful "shot" at Claudius. He exults when Claudius is "frighted with false fire." (3.2.254) The King is frightened by a false "shot" and not by a real explosion. Hamlet's phrase

is derived from the phenomenon of discharging priming-powder in the pan of an otherwise unloaded firearm.[39] Although Hamlet's strategy is not yet his real weapon against Claudius it creates a significant effect on the King. The "false fire" ignites Hamlet's revengeful purpose against the King. _The Murder of Gonzago_ creates the "false fire" as a prelude to a final, dangerous charge against the King who, for his own part, will select his "shots" against the Prince. The two are the "fell incensed points," "mighty opposites," who try stratagems against each other. (5.2.61-62)

However, while Hamlet is wary of Heaven's "cannon" (a pun on divine law as well as the weapon) pointing at him (1.2.132), Claudius has no ostensible fear of Heaven's "shot." The King points his cannon to Heaven. The peal of ordnance is used by Claudius in order to bespeak his "earthly thunder," that is, his power and glory. The King orders that

> the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
> And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit again,
> Re-speaking earthly thunder. (1.2.126-128)

Both rivals are stealthy in their schemes against each other, but their deep antagonism is expressed in concrete

terms of ordnance. Hamlet rejoices in his method of trying to destroy Claudius:

> For 'tis the sport to have the enginer
> Hoist with his own petar; and't shall go hard
> But I will delve one yard below their mines,
> And blow them at the moon. (3.4.206-209)

As Maurice Charney has pointed out, the ordnance words are used in both their technical and general senses. The "enginer" is not merely a schemer, but a demolition expert who is to be hoisted as well as blown up by the force of his own "petar" -- an engine filled with explosives. The connotation of an explosion is substantiated in the next two lines where Hamlet conveys the idea of secret, undermining and hot destruction:

> In Hamlet's image, he pictures himself working, like the Ghost in the cellarage, 'A worthy pioner' (1.5.163), to delve beneath the mines of his enemies and set off their explosives unawares. He, too, will be a crafty and unpredictable 'old mole', who can 'work it' th'earth so fast'.[40]

For his part, Claudius talks of a "murdering-piece" (4.5.91) and this is a reference to a small cannon filled with shrapnel which was designed to scatter its shot and inflict maximum casualties. Claudius' plot against Hamlet is expressed to Laertes in an image drawn from the trying or proving of fire-arms:

> Therefore this project
> Should have a back or second, that might
> hold
> If this should blast in proof. (4.7.153-155)

The hot explosion image is used most emphatically in the final scene of the play and once again Hamlet and Claudius aim at each other. Upon receiving Osric's message of the King's invitation to duel Laertes, Hamlet utters a thought of carrying "cannon by our sides." (5.2.153) This cannon would be aimed at Claudius and its direction of fire would be deliberately selected. It would not be a case of repeating the wayward (extravagant) shot that unfortunately strikes Laertes:

> Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil
> Free me so far in your most generous
> thoughts,
> That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,
> And hurt my brother [Laertes]. (5.2.228-231)

When the duel commences, it is Claudius' turn to use his "shots" and these are employed with fanfare:

> If Hamlet give the first or second hit,
> Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
> Let all the battlements their ordnance fire.
> (5.2.255-257)

This ceremonious explosion is merely a disguise for Claudius' scheme aimed at Hamlet, but it is eloquent in its expression of the King's explosive nature. Through it we hear

> the kettle to the trumpet speak,
> The trumpet to the cannoneer without,
> The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to
> earth. (5.2.262-264)

The events at the duel carry the drama to its most hectic point of physical action and the hot explosions continue to play their part in the final phases of the tragedy. Now, however, the "shots" are not fired by Hamlet or Claudius, but by Fortinbras and the "fell sergeant, death." Before Hamlet dies, he hears a warlike volley by young Fortinbras. (5.2.338) Ironically enough, this "shot" is delivered by an extravagant character who carries the drama of Hamlet to its final "upshot." Fortinbras' "shot" does not harm Hamlet because Death's "shot" has already done that:

> O proud Death!
> What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
> That thou so many princes, at a shot,
> So bloodily hast struck? (5.2.351-354)

The irony of "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts" falling on "the inventors' heads" is all a case of a bad "shot" -- a final shot that decides a duel. It is an "upshot" (5.2.371) which sacrifices Hamlet in the process of awarding the match to purgation. However, the final explosion is not the

metaphoric "upshot" but an obsequious peal of ordnance that accords Hamlet "soldier's music and the rites of war" proper to a Prince who had fought Extravagance. Fortinbras gives the order for this ritual: "Go, bid the soldiers shoot." (5.2.390) The final word lies with fire to indicate the end of Extravagance.

CHAPTER IV

RITUALISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF EXTRAVAGANCE, MEDIOCRITY, AND FIRE

"What is it ye would see?
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search."--
5.2.349-350.

The conflicts between the forces of Extravagance and those of Mediocrity suggest that Hamlet is more than just a play of revenge. While it is certainly true that without the revenge theme or the Ghost, Hamlet would have been a radically different play, we cannot escape the fact that the world of Denmark is one where characters are involved in perverse, interrupted, or ill-tempered rituals. The simplest rites of life and death are extravagant and reveal, as C.S. Lewis contends,[41] a world where "one has lost one's way." Characters appear unsettled, confused, terrified, or tainted by distemper. The setting reflects the disorder within the characters for it echoes with brazen cannons, "post-haste and romage", and provides omens of disasters to come. The progression of the play is really a sequence of rites, starting with a reve-

lation of "disease", developing with rituals of espionage or entrapment, and building up to obsequies of annihilation and purgation. The ritualistic pattern is a unity of diverse rites: it opens and develops with extravagant rituals until a "cure" asserts the concluding ritual of purge. Yet, this last ritual is not without a severe irony. In attempting to stop the evil spread by the damning canker of nature, Hamlet inherits death in a chain of accidental deaths. There is a lingering sense of pain and evil in the purged Elsinore that falls to Fortinbras, and it is the very nature of the concluding ritual which maintains the tragic equilibrium in Hamlet. The ritualistic conflict between Extravagance and Mediocrity makes a play that offers two contrary styles of life and which finally ends with a catastrophic, ironic purge. The style of life in an extravagant and erring mode is weaker than the one which follows the "modesty of nature". What begins as a drama of revenge in an evil world is converted into a play of purgation where, amid a concatenation of evil disasters and pain, the human spirit is vindicated.

Because of the sequence of events starting with "disease" and ending with "cure", the drama appears to be a grand ritual of redemption or purgation. The frame is such that

the "burning" Extravagances are eliminated through purging Mediocrity. We see that all the specific rituals of life and death in Elsinore are parts of the total scheme and even the chain of catastrophes is ironic in a uniquely sublime way: the Prince, sworn to a revenge mission, kills his arch-foe but dies in the process; yet, his death bears testament to a noble, magnanimous spirit which has, at long last, transcended the fardels of "nature's livery" and "fortune's star". Hamlet learns to find his way in this intricately, extravagant world and by the end of Act Five the evil condition of Denmark is cured, although the throne goes to a foreigner imbued with an extravagant sense of honour. The ritual of purge is an undeniable reality: no Ghost stalks the castle ramparts, no "garbage" soils the royal bed, and honour is an active principle in the soul of the new king who recognises greatness in Hamlet. The "fires" of Extravagance are douted in the "upshot" and the medial "fires" of Mediocrity close the ritual. In Act One, the Ghost has shown how eternal fire purges sinners of Extravagance. Act Five asserts the final purge in Elsinore after extravagant "fires" have burned out in characters and setting.

The forces of Extravagance, which have been examined as factors of dis-position and distemper, make every ritual in Denmark a flawed ritual. Herbert R. Coursen, Jr. contends that one of the most pervasive patterns of Hamlet is that of "the corrupted ritual."[42] He cites several examples, beginning with the simple ritual of the changing of the guards and leading to what he believes is the central illustration of Hamlet's failure to "cure" the "disease" in Denmark and himself: the Mouse-trap sequence. While Mr.Coursen is correct about the interrupted rituals in general, he neglects the "disease" imagery with their suggestions of burning fire which underscores the "sick" rituals and indicates the necessity of "cure". Nor does he see that the individual rites,especially the Mouse-trap, are but parts of the grand ritual of purge. The pattern of the play is such that we move from "sick" or fiery rituals of Extravagance to a purging ritual of Mediocrity.

In Act One, we are introduced to the pattern of extravagant ritual. Even the simplest ceremonies are interrupted or unsettled by some type of Extravagance linked to fire and "disease". The military watch is marked by disturbing heartsickness and is eventually interrupted by the Ghost who

emerges out of "sulphur and fire". The melancholy Ghost has interrupted its own ritual of purgation in order to reveal the rank abuses in Elsinore and its extravagant movement out of Purgatory impels extravagant emotions in its witnesses. Of course, the state of affairs in Denmark is ritualistically extravagant without the Ghost's "eruption". The Sabbath ritual is broken by "romage" and "sweaty haste" of the militia (1.1.72-78) and Denmark's ritual of military defence is a bulwark against Fortinbras' "hot" aggression.

At court, where we might expect moderation, peace, and balance, the rituals continue to be extravagantly "diseased" and "fiery". Claudius turns from Fortinbras' hotheadedness to Hamlet's "sick" grief. Even when Hamlet interrupts to proclaim his "sun-burnt" disposition (1.2.67) the ritual of reconciliation is fiery because it is concluded by firing cannon and Claudius' "hot" rouse:

> Why, 'tis a loving and fair reply;
> Be as ourself in Denmark.--Madam, come;
> This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
> Sits smiling to my heart; in grace whereof,
> No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,
> But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
> And the king's rouse the heavens shall bruit
> again,
> Re-speaking earthly thunder. (1.2.121-128)

Hamlet's reconciliation is superficial because the Prince has not forgotten or forgiven the royal couple for an overhasty marriage. The mourning ritual for King Hamlet's death was so abruptly interrupted by the nuptial ceremony that "the funeral baked-meats" did "coldly furnish forth the marriage tables". (1.2.180-181) Hamlet's antagonism towards Claudius is quickened by the Ghost who makes of its visitation a ritual of revelation and revenge. News of the Ghost is brought to Hamlet by Horatio who has interrupted his studies at Wittenberg to condole with the Prince. The Ghost interrupts Hamlet's discussion with his friends and shows itself to be a "worthy pioner" (1.5.163) whose revelation of "rottenness" in Denmark explodes in Hamlet's mind and soul. The Prince acts most strangely at court, fracturing the courtier-ethic in his cruel rejection of Ophelia and in his mockery of Polonius. His wit appears to be diseased and he once looks as "if he had been loosed out of hell", like a devil wandering out of fire.

The atmosphere at court is one of suspicion, agitation, and espionage all revealed by "hot", extravagant rituals of torture, private confidence and execution. Polonius plays the "rash, intruding fool" in Gertrude's chamber (3.4.31) and his

secret ceremony of espionage ends in sudden death. Hamlet underscores the foul, extravagant notion of that ritual when he smells a "rat" (3.4.23). Hamlet is inflamed in this scene and Gertrude urges him to calm down, but the Prince is agitated by the Ghost's appearance and his emotions turn hot and explosive. The ritual of mental torture against Gertrude unfolds in images of heat: Gertrude is advised to cure her "ulcerous place" from "rank corruption; mining all within." (3.4.144-149) The ritual shifts to a level of explosive cruelty when Hamlet plots to "blow" the King's spies to the moon after delving below their "mines". (3.4. 207-209) What had begun as a difficult ritual of espionage and mental torture ends in violence and "hot" excitement.

The waves of extravagant ritual builds up to a peak in Act Three. Hamlet learns from "hellish Pyrrhus" that he must act in "aroused vengeance" (2.2.). He is made aware of the "burning eyes of heaven" (2.2.495) that scrutinise his work of vengeance -- a rite that is left incomplete. So, the Prince, knowing Claudius' scheme of espionage, devises his own trap to force the King's guilt into the open. The _Mousetrap_ becomes a crucial ritual in his scheme of revenge and purgation. Through the "galling" situation in _The Murder of Gonzago_, Hamlet is able to frighten Claudius with "false fire"

and to "tent him to the quick". However, although he has the "fiery" revelation of Claudius' guilt, Hamlet delays in the grand ritual of purge.

The gulf between Hamlet's confirmation of Claudius' culpability and the Prince's eventual act of self-vindication is a wide one and emphasises the Extravagance within him. The ritual of purge is what Hamlet desires:

> is't not to be damn'd,
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil? (5.2.68-70)

However, the tension between his thought-sickness and hot-bloodedness delays the ritual. It takes a ritual of political exile and return to show a new Hamlet, one ripe and ready for the rare action.

The final Act of Hamlet carries us to the perversion of funeral rites. Ophelia's funeral is an uncommon ritual. While she is buried in sanctified ground by order of the King, her death is dubious and she is interred with "maimed rites" (5.1.42). The ceremony is interrupted by a hot-headed encounter between Hamlet and Laertes whose fiery passion cannot be extinguished:

> Let them throw
> Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
> Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
> Make Ossa like a wart! (5.1.268-271)

The "fiery" struggle pollutes Ophelia's grave and it leads to the final encounter involving the "shots" arranged around Claudius and Hamlet.

The last scene of the play is the final phase in the total scheme of revenge and purgation. It is also the scene that characterises the drama as a perplexing ritual that challenges conventional categorisation. What begins as a courtly ritual of reconciliation between Laertes and Hamlet terminates in a "hot" upshot of annihilation, sacrifice, and the Ghost, back in Purgatory, awaits Hamlet's rare action of self-vindication. The Prince expresses amity towards Laertes as his mother drinks to his health and comforts him during the duel. Hamlet is able to force the poison into the glands of its architect and die reconciled with honour. Apparently, he will inherit the "golden fire" of Heaven:

> Good night sweet prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!
> (5.2.346-347)

In spite of the completion of the purging ritual, the final scene challenges conventional categorisation because of its irony. What would seem to be a courtly ritual of reconciliation between Laertes and Hamlet terminates in a "hot"

upshot of annihilation, sacrifice, and ironic purge. The "cold" types are eliminated or relegated into insignificance as the "hot" characters struggle to their destiny. Hamlet gains new revelations just prior to his death: he learns of Claudius' poisonous trap, of Laertes' involvement, of his own fatal end, and of Fortinbras' rite of vanquishment. It is true that "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts," "accidental judgements, casual slaughters", and "purposes mistook" have been carried to an extreme (5.2.368-371), but it is also true that the burning "fires" of Extravagance have been extinguished or controlled. Fortinbras, who gains the throne, reveals a moderation of his hot mettle. He embraces his fortune with sorrow and memorialises Hamlet's honour in a military tribute that is at once an explosive funeral obsequy and a "fiery" symbol of ironic purge:

> Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
> For he was likely, had he been put on,
> To have proved most royally; and, for his passage,
> The soldier's music and the rites of war
> Speak loudly for him.--
> Take up the bodies.--Such a sight as this
> Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.--
> Go, bid the soldiers shoot. (5.2.383-390)

With Fortinbras' words, the psychomachia of Hamlet is complete. It is true that the carnage in the throne room is more appro-

priate to a battle-field than to a palace, but it speaks of a ritualistic struggle between Extravagance and Mediocrity terminated with an ironic implication that all men are necessarily involved in this explosive ritual wherein honour is vindicated even at the cost of a hero.

The dramatic ritual where Extravagance is "cured" by forces of Mediocrity establishes the tragic equilibrium of Hamlet. Shakespeare offers us two contrary styles of life with all the sequent emotions relating passion to event.[43] The Extravagances of characters invite catastrophic events, but through the "cure" of Mediocrity we learn that the condition of evil is not irremediable. The ritual opens with a malevolent world-order in Denmark; the dis-position and distemper are examples of apparent lawlessness against underlying laws of nature. With the Ghost's entrance, we are confronted with Shakespeare's broad design: evident evil against partially hidden yet overruling purge. The Ghost's own Extravagance helps to confirm the evidence of pain and dis-position in the world of Elsinore. The Ghost's spiritual suffering is as real as the mortals' pain and distemper. The Ghost reveals a "disease" to Hamlet and urges him to cure it, and it is from this point that the play becomes an unfolding of an

ironic destiny where pain and material catastrophe are resolved in honour and spiritual comfort. Hamlet struggles to live his life according to the "modesty of nature" (3.2.18) so that no action is excessive or deficient in relation to its norms. Having been given a task by the Ghost, the Prince is motivated to fulfill it. His sense of honour activates him to find a balance between word and deed, will and inclination. His psychomachia is a struggle to maintain equilibrium from within. Early in the play, he is "distracted" or agitated and raises

> a sigh so piteous and profound
> As it did seem to shatter all his bulk
> And end his being. (2.1.94-96)

His inner distemper is only "cured" when he acknowledges excitements of reason and blood. In Act Five, a balance has been effected: Hamlet has acquired a Stoical fortitude and composure. He consents to death, time, and Providence and is prepared for a final encounter with Claudius. When he accepts Laertes' challence to a duel he does so with "readiness". (5.2.210) If he has formerly lost his way in the ritual of purge, "we can tell the precise moment at which he finds it again."[44] It comes with the recognition of "a divinity that shapes our ends" (5.2.10) and of the fact that "a man's life 's no more than to say 'One.'" (5.2.74)

If the Prince discovers equilibrium, what of his world? While the "rottenness" has been purged, Denmark has fallen to a foreigner. Evil is not destroyed _forever_, nor is honour _irrevocably_ asserted. Fortinbras, it should be remembered, is still of mettle "hot and full" but he has temporarily suspended hot-headedness. His tribute to Hamlet offers us the suggestion of a spiritual victory against a material loss. Hamlet, had he lived, would have "proved most royally" and the manner of his dying allows the conflict between two contrary styles of life to be resolved.

The final rituals of _Hamlet_ do not expunge the memory of Extravagance, but they do create a new order of Mediocrity. The dead bodies will be cleared from the throne-room and Denmark will inherit the comfort of Fortinbras' "divine ambition". The accession of Fortinbras will also allow honour to return to a position of paramount importance and at least in such a leader Denmark has found a man with enough inner fire to follow a cue for action. Besides, Horatio's admixture of blood and judgement survive the holocaust and this well-tempered mixture will add to the new order. The "cure" of malevolence does not extinguish the memory of pain and evil

(the memory of Hamlet's "wounded name" will live on in Horatio's version of the story), but the extravagant "fires" have been eliminated or controlled.

NOTES

Chapter I

[1]See Horace Howard Furness (ed.), Hamlet - A New Variorum Edition, Vol. I (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963). All quotations for Hamlet are from this edition.

[2]The word "Extravagant" is derived from medieval Latin (extra + vagari) O.D.E. (1966), p. 340. Shakespeare uses the term in the sense of a wandering. In Othello, there is a reference to "an extravagant and wheeling stranger/Of here and everywhere". (1.1.137-138) Sebastian in Twelfth Night confesses that his "determinate voyage is mere extravagancy". (2.1.9)

[3]Cf. Aristotle, Ethics, trans. J.A.K. Thompson (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), II, vi, pp. 65-67; II, vii, viii, ix, pp. 68-75.

Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968), p. 95. Miss Campbell reveals that the Holland translation of Plutarch's Morals, p. 68, contains a passage on the Mean:

> But now, forasmuch as this terme of Meane or Mediocritie may be understoode diverse waies, we are to set downe what kind of meane this Morall vertue is.

Thomas Elyot, The Book Named The Governor, ed. S.E. Lehmberg (New York: Everyman's Library, 1962), III, viii, p. 183. Elyot discusses Mediocrity as a balance between two extremities, "the one in surplusage, the other in lack".

[4]Aristotle, I, v. p. 30.

[5]Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1960), pp. 622-623.

Chapter II

[6]Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge University Press, 1966), Chart VII.

At this point, I would like to add a little note on my assumption that Shakespeare was familiar with common medical theories of his time. The abundance of medical images in Shakespeare's works indicates that the playwright had at least a layman's insight into contemporary microcosmography and medicine. This is hardly surprising since it is reasonable to expect that a great poet and dramatist would be familiar with commonly accepted Renaissance theories about health and sickness, especially in an age where the anatomy of man was linked to the progress of his soul. What is significant about Shakespeare's medical and microcosmographic metaphors is not merely their ostensible content, but the underlying ideology which is simultaneously metaphysical and psychological. The body nourishes the passions which dispose the soul and Shakespeare's metaphors help to underscore this Renaissance assumption.

[7]Furness (ed.), p. 151.

[8]Levinus Lemnius, The Touchstone of Complexions, trans. Thomas Newton (London: Michael Sparke, 1933), I, iv, p. 36. Newton's translation had editions printed in 1565,1576, 1581 and 1633. Its popularity was maintained because, as its title-page indicated, it contained "most easy rules and ready tokens, whereby euery one may perfectly try, and throughly knowe, aswell the exacte state, habite, disposition,

> and constitution, of his Body outwardly: as also the inclinations, affections, unctions, and desires of his Mynde inwardly." Moral affections were revealed by "the countenance, which is the image of the mynde, in the eyes, which are the bewrayers and tokentellers of the inwarde conceiptes." (l.iv, p. 36)

[9]Plato, Timaeus, trans. R.G. Bury (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1966), 82 A-B, pp. 219-221.

[10]Thomas Elyot, The Castle of Health (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1937), I, p. 2.

[11]*Ibid*., I, p.3.

[12]*Ibid*., I, p.2.

[13]*Ibid*., I, p.3 and p. 13.

[14]*Ibid*., III, pp. 62-63, 64; IV, p. 84.

[15]A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1957), pp. 87-88.

[16]Campbell, pp. 75-78 and 112 ff.

Miss Campbell struggles to be technically precise for she writes:

> Now if, for some reason the humours are subjected to excessive heat, there results an unnatural humour that is to be distinguished from the natural humours and from the unnatural excess of a natural humour. This unnatural humour is generally referred to as melancholy adust. Melancholy adust, then, was the unnatural humour that resulted from any one of the

> humours putrifying or being burnt through excessive heat. (p. 75)

Miss Campbell could cite impressive expertise on adustion. In the Middle Ages, medical nomenclature applied the term the "adust" to a supposed state of the body and its humours characterized by dryness, heat, and black or burnt choler of the blood. Mis Campbell goes on to make a long case for sanguine adust in Hamlet:

> The picture of a man of sanguine humour seems to me to be applicable to Hamlet in all essential details. Indeed, I have read no analysis of Hamlet's character which seems so consistently to sum up his character as do these typical descriptions of the man of sanguine humour. Furthermore, blood makes a man of too, too solid flesh, and no melancholy man was ever fat, as King James rightly argued. (p. 113)

Miss Campbell bases much of her case on a description in Thomas Walkington's The Optick Glasse of Humors (1607):

> They that are of this complection are very affable in speach, and have a gracious faculty in their delivery, very much addicted to witty conceits ... quipping without bitter taunting: hardly taking anything in dogeon, except they be greatly moved, with disgrace especially: wisely seeming eyther to take a thing sometimes more offensively, or lesse greivously than they do, cloaking their true passion: they bee liberaly minded; they carry a constant loving affection to them chiefly unto whom they be endeared, and with whom they are intimate, and chained in the links of true amitie, never giving over till death such a converst friend, except on a capitall discontent... (p. 112)

Although there is much acceptable in Miss Campbell's case, a problem arises out of her insistence on being prescriptive, viz. "In the northern nations the cold and moist humours must prevail, either phlegm or blood." (p. 111) Such a dogmatic assertion hardly considers the literary subtleties in Hamlet. Instead it clearly reveals Miss Campbell's

technique of applying the play to Renaissance microcosmography in a most selective fashion where only certain forms of behaviour are matched with the traditional Renaissance categories of the humors. Whenever it encounters ambiguities or paradoxes, Miss Campbell's argument either generalises sweepingly or ignores the problems. Thus, because Fortinbras comes from Norway, Miss Campbell asserts that he is "of phlegmatic or possibly of sanguine humour". (p. 110) Phlegm is basically a cold humor, while the sanguine is basically a hot one. Miss Campbell does not reconcile the two. Moreover, she fails to grapple with Hamlet's unnatural melancholy, although she admits that it is unnatural. She builds up her case by citing qualities for sanguine adust that could be found in the Prince: his wit, his jesting with horror (5.1), his amity, his solid flesh and fat, and his courage. However, some of these qualities are not foreign to other humors: thus, the Prince's wit is similar to that found in men of hot and dry complexions, and his courage and amity are not the exclusive property of the sanguine temperament. Miss Campbell ignores the references to Hamlet's pale visage ("pale as his shirt" -- 2.1.81), to his wavering self-confidence (O heart, lose not thy nature" -- 3.2. 376), and to his morbid concern with death. (1.2.131-132; 3.1.60-61) Instead, she reads the text with an eye to focus on Hamlet's sanguine characteristics. She takes Gertrude's comment on the Prince's physique (5.2.274) too literally. (p. 113) Hamlet's "fat" need not be associated with bulk; instead, it could mean oily perspiration -- one of the forms of body excrement that implies heat and moisture. There is a parallel in Falstaff who "sweats to death" and "lards the lean earth as he walks along" (I Henry IV, 2.2. 104-105). Here we have an image of an obese rascal whose perspiration drips off like melted butter.

Miss Campbell's diagnosis of Hamlet's humour should be rejected as inadequate. When Shakespeare concentrates on the Extravagances in Hamlet, he employs some form of fire to convey the impression of the disharmonious, the immoderate, the distemperate. There are other elemental symbols as well, but fire appears to be paramount and Miss Campbell minimises this fact.

[17]Lemnius, I, iv, p. 147.

[18]Elyot, The Castel..., III, pp. 62-63.

> Ire is kendlyed in the harte, mordynately chaufynge the spirites there, and than is sent forthe in to the members, and doth superfluously heate them, and disturbeth reason ... Of this affection cometh sometyme apoplexies, or privation of sencis, tremblynge, palseys, madness, francies, deformitie of visage, and that warse it, outragious swearynge, blasphemy, desyre of vengeance, losse of charitie, enmitie, credence, also forgetfulness of benefyte procedynge, and of obedyence, duetie, and reverence.

[19]*Ibid*., I, p. 1.

[20]Furness (ed.), p. 196.

[21]Elyot, The Castel..., I, p. 10.

[22]Bradley, pp. 120-121.

[23]J.M. Robertson, "Shakespeare's Work of Transmutation," Shakespeare Criticism 1919-35, ed. Anne Bradby (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 12.

[24]A.P. Rossiter, Angel With Horns (New York: Theatre Arts, 1961), p. 172.

[25]Harry Levin, The Question of Hamlet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 48, 79-80.

[26]Elyot, The Castel..., I, pp. 3-4.

[27]E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), pp. 63-64.

[28]Campbell, p. 21.

[29]Elyot, The Castel..., III, p. 62.

[30]Lemnius, I, iv, pp. 88 verso-89.

Chapter III

[31]The choleric and the sanguine have a direct relationship to fire because the first humor is hot and dry while the second is hot and moist. The melancholy and the phlegmatic, in adust forms, are also related to fire.

See Rudolph E. Siegel, Galen's System of Physiology and Medicine (Basel, Switzerland: S. Karger, 1968), p. 222, where we note that a Presocratic philosopher, Philoloas of Tarentum (5th c. B.C.) once wrote:

> Although most people say that phlegm is cold, it is basically made up of heat. The term phlegm is said to be derived from phlegein (to burn) ... That what is susceptible to heat will burn (phlegmainei).

Besides being related to all four humors, fire could convert a natural humor to an unnatural form. Thus, yellow bile (hot and dry choler) could be transformed by an excess of heat into black bile (cold and dry melancholy). Since a character is not static, we could expect changes in his humor because of adustion.

[32]"When the day of Pentecost came round, while they were all gathered together in unity of purpose, all at once a sound came from heaven like that of a strong wind blowing, and filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then

appeared to them what seemed to be tongues of fire, which parted and came to rest on each of them; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in strange languages, as the Spirit gave utterance to each." (Acts. 2:1-5)

[33]See Furness (ed.), pp. 146-150.

The sun is a fire capable of operating as a principle of good and evil. In this sense, it is like the God of the Old Testament who can also operate as a dual fire. He lights the world with His power and glory, guides the just and destroys His enemies:

> A fire precedes him as he goes,
> devouring all enemies around him;
> his lightning lights up the world,
> earth observes and quakes. (Ps. 97:3-4)

[34]Plato, 86-A, p. 233.

[35]Elyot, The Castel..., I, pp. 3-4.

[36]Timothy Bright, A Treatise of Melancholy (London: John Windet, 1586), pp. 2-3.

[37]I am indebted to Caroline Spurgeon for citing these references in her book Shakespeare's Imagery, p. 112.

[38]Newton, I, iv, p. 38 verso.

[39]Martin Holmes, The Guns of Elsinore (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), pp. 123-124.

[40]Maurice Charney, Style In Hamlet (Princeton: New Jersey University Press, 1969), pp. 23-24.

Chapter IV

[41]C.S. Lewis, "Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?", Shakespeare's Tragedies, ed. Laurence Lerner (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 72.

[42]Herbert Randolph Coursen, Jr., "The Rarer Action: Hamlet's Mousetrap," Literary Monographs - Volume 2 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 77.

[43]To have tragic equilibrium there should be balanced two contrary readings of life and their sequent emotions at work in the poet's mind. Within this equilibrium we find tragic circumstance which involves catastrophe, either material or spiritual, arising from the action and forming an integral part of it. This circumstance is to make us aware of pain and evil although it need not remain irremediable.

Refer to Una Ellis-Fermor, "The Equilibrium of Tragedy," The Frontiers of Drama (London: University Paperbacks, 1964), pp. 127-147.

[44]Lewis, p. 72.

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