

Hamlet

The English reader will feel

~~that a person must have come from the~~ *of all must feel* ~~to choose willingly of all subjects the one which is the most~~ *base down Shakespear library* ~~worn-out Hamlet~~ *of all literary subjects, Hamlet.*

The surmise is correct. I was serving as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army, a little short of thirty years ago, ~~The Russian~~ *feel* winter and the blackish-yellow steppe made me sick at heart. In my desolation I had for companion a volume of Shakespeare's plays. One of them I found myself reading and re-reading: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Altogether I must have gone through it some thirty times. My personal life had taken a turn towards darkness. Daylight seemed bounded in a narrowing ~~circle~~ *disc* which was growing dimmer and dimmer. The cold was so intense that when my horse stumbled and fell, I was too apathetic to get out of the saddle. ~~Fortunately~~ Fortunately - though I myself might not (at the time have thought so) - the gaunt stiff creature, a Cossack mare ~~we~~ had picked up, jerked herself ^{*onto her long legs*} ~~up again~~, and I was saved from being crushed under her, had she rolled over... At that period of my existence my soul was numbed and fell under a spell of a recurrent day-dream. I read my 'Hamlet' and every word, phrase and intonation seemed plain and clear to me.

For many years the memory of these bleak months haunted me. I could not rid myself of the idea that by some weird chance I had possessed myself of Hamlet's secret. I knew why he did not kill the King. I knew what it was he feared. I knew why he ~~waited~~ *slayed* the King so gleefully when he at last did ~~kill~~ *slay* him. I knew why he so swiftly ~~stabbed~~ *ran through his back* Polonius when he mistook him for the King and pretended ~~he~~ *was chasing* was only a rat. I knew what his apparently confused words to Ophelia meant. But while I still, felt I knew, I was already fast forgetting. My days were clearing up and as light broke in, knowledge passed into shadowy recollection, which in its turn faded into a mere intellectual understanding. I was ~~now~~ *now* happy ~~again~~ and could only faintly remember what had once formed part of my being: Hamlet's inhuman sufferings. Yet something in me insisted that my theories on Hamlet -- for that was all my former certainties now amounted to -- were not merely

the morbid offspring of my late ailing.

I hope I will be pardoned for this lengthy digression. Actually, I merely propose to recount to you my reactions to that great English critic's opinion -- I mean the late Andrew Cecil Bradley, of Merton College, who died almost twenty years ago. His views on Hamlet's character, when I came across them, struck me greatly by their resemblance to my own. *But he had not gone all the way, stopped short of the solution.*

Thus ~~the~~ Hamlet ~~of the play~~ *is acting* ~~was~~ under the influence of a 'profound melancholy'. That is why he ~~delays~~ *delays* revenge for his father. All other ingredients of his character -- intellectual genius, moral sensibility, temperamental instability, -- ~~were~~ *are* either the cause or the expressions of this melancholy. It ~~alone~~ *alone* accounted for the course of the play, ~~taken~~ *taken* together with the spates of normalcy, ~~was~~ *was* Hamlet's 'healthy impulses' break forth ~~from~~ *from* ~~his~~ *his* ~~character~~ *remnants of his once-vibrant personality*. ~~It had turned him towards melancholy.~~ *But this is Bradley's account for the contradictions in Hamlet's behaviour.*

②
①

A Rough Copy Bradley said ~~is~~ *is* Hamlet, a person of exceptional moral sensibility and intellectual faculties, is shocked by his mother's gross sensuality and moral shabbiness into utter disgust of life. It is in this frame of mind that his father's command reaches him together with the awful revelation of his foul murder. ~~He is~~ *His mind* ~~poisoned~~ *is* and paralysed, hence his inaction, his endless hesitation. This brings about his undoing as well as that of many others, including those he loves best.

I was thrilled; I recognised in Bradley's Hamlet ~~my~~ *my* Hamlet. ~~But~~ *But* I realised also that Bradley had not made full use of ~~his~~ *his* ~~insight~~ *insight*, ~~he~~ *he* ~~had~~ *had* ~~not~~ *not* unlocked the secrets of ~~the~~ *the* ~~play~~ *play*.

passionately

At the heart of ~~the~~ *it all* ~~play~~ there is the fact that through five long acts Hamlet does not kill the King. This delay of which he accuses himself, ~~and~~ *before himself* which he can not justify, and for which nothing seems to account satisfactorily, is the psychological problem of the play. It is a secret of ~~the~~ *the* human character, ~~the~~ *secret* of Hamlet, the person.

But there is also an entirely different problem. It is artistic or esthetic. How could a good play ~~be~~ *have ever been* written about a person who

Excelling him

fails to do the one thing we are morally and psychologically inter-
ested in his doing? Whatever the reasons of his ~~not attacking~~ ^{refraining from his revenge on} the King,
it remains a mystery how/successful ~~play~~ ^{show} could ~~have been~~ ^{staged} written
about inaction. This is the secret of "Hamlet, the play."

One key serves both locks; The secret of Hamlet the person
~~is also~~ ^{is also} ~~to the secret of "Hamlet, the play, the best play~~
~~ever written.~~ That, in brief, is my argument. ~~Let me first deal with the~~
~~person; then with the play.~~ ^{person; then with the play.} *(Hamlet)*
Bradley's answer to the psychological problem seems at first to
~~explain all that is needed. Hamlet is by nature anything but passive.~~
~~Every time his 'healthy impulses' come into play before he has time~~
~~to subside, he is prone to quick decided action. But the play shows~~
us Hamlet in a state of profound melancholy in which he is averse to
any kind of decision. ~~His motto is~~ 'It does not matter', 'It is not
worth while'; ~~which is English for the Russian~~ ^{is the Russian for the English} ~~Mitchevo.~~
~~of Hamlet's~~ ^{case} this expresses a kind of paralysis of inner life. Mechanical
answers, a sort of back-chat, suit his condition well; ~~many a time~~
~~he returns the words of the speaker, without wit or irony, in~~
~~lifeless~~ ^{lifelessly} ~~like a man too benumbed to think or speak.~~
~~holds no~~ ^{holds no} ~~substance~~

a long-stalked lily

Yet Hamlet's is a virile temperament. He ~~holds no~~ ^{holds no} ~~substance~~
in his hand. This allegedly shrinking flower-like youth,
says Bradley, 'rages through the major part of the play, murdering
and destroying human lives, ruthless, fierce, a terror to the court'.
Bowden remarked on his impulsive ~~nature~~ ^{will} "...he suddenly conceives of
the possibility of unmasking the King's guilt, on the accidental
arrival of the players, and proceeds without delay to put the matter
to the test, suddenly overwhelms Ophelia with his reproaches of
womanhood, suddenly stabs the eavesdropper behind the arras, suddenly
as if under some irresistible inspiration, sends his companions on
shipboard to their deaths, suddenly beards the pirates, suddenly
grapples with Laertes in the grave, suddenly does execution on the
guilty King, plucks the poison from Horatio's hands, and gives his
dying voice for a successor to the throne."

In his lucida intervalla Hamlet is unable to understand 'the
paralyzing pressure' which his melancholy exerts at other times.
This would account ^{so Bradley thought} ~~for another puzzling feature of the play,~~ ^{for} Hamlet's
inability to find reason for his own ~~behaviour,~~ ^{inaction.}

For

in Hamlet

Indeed, Hamlet's intellectual genius and moral sensibility do not account for his behaviour. These qualities tend to reinforce both his irresolution and his over-resoluteness, his inaction, and his hyper-activity. Moral sensibility is at the root of his inaction in the prayer scene, ^{where} ~~when~~ theological niceties intervene at the wrong moment, ^{and} ~~to~~ ^{lightning a back on} of his outbursts of activity as in Polonius or the final scene of revenge.

Genius is the mainspring of his hesitation as in the soliloquy about after-life, or his sophisticated, if somewhat belated, doubts concerning the veracity of the ghost, yet genius also precipitates action ^{environment}, e.g., ^{in regard to} those twin ^{vacuities} Rosencrantz and Guildenstern whom ^{he so} adroitly ^{by} hoists with their own petard. While genius and passion often prompt scruples ^{that} obstruct decision, they also give wings to action. Hamlet never seems to doubt his ability to master any situation, however difficult, once he ^{has made up his mind} ~~is resolved to do so~~. He has ^{much} the life-feeling of a wizard... But ~~his~~ genius and sensibility colour ^{everything} he does, including ^{his} action. They can not explain ^{that} inaction.

Bradley's ^{his} interpretation of Hamlet's character ~~explains~~

~~explains it.~~ ^{his} explains too much. (Hamlet is not inactive all the time, ^{alone} ~~not even most of the time~~.) One action ^{alone} ~~is~~ ^{Hamlet} too irresolute to carry out, while ^{he} ~~with~~ ^{does away with} Polonius, sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to hell, boards the ^{ship} ~~pirated~~ ^{slabs} ~~beats~~ Laertes at his own craft and, in the end, ~~forces~~ the King and forces poison down his throat. Voltaire dubbed this last ~~great~~ scene as worthy of a butcher-boy's imagination. Why then the endless delay before Hamlet kills the King?

Bradley's ^{theory} ~~theory~~ of ~~basically healthy impulses~~ ~~held over by~~

~~profoundly~~ breaks down at ^{the decisive} ~~the~~ point. Why do the healthy impulses arise so frequently as to make Hamlet into a person of almost terrible ruthlessness ~~in action~~ and yet prevent him from doing ^{the} ~~the~~ deed which he has sworn the spirit of his ~~murdered~~ father to do? He has almost depopulated the court having caused the death of at least four persons in the King's entourage ~~Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern~~ and still he does not seem to have come any nearer to the performing of his ~~own~~ ^{supreme} duty.

Why does the 'veil of melancholy', as Bradley calls it, never lift when he has an occasion ^{to take revenge on} ~~to kill~~ the King? Is this a mere accident? The play would then appear to derive its structure from a long series of accidents. That would be hardly satisfactory. The audience ^{seems to know} ~~knows~~ ~~is~~ certain that this is not so, otherwise it would lose interest. There must be some hidden reason for Hamlet's hesitation to do the required deed, a reason Hamlet himself vainly seeks to discover, and which perhaps will be revealed only through his own death.

~~Because~~ ^{But} there is ^{considered more to be} ~~more to be~~ Hamlet's spots of action and inaction are not ^{simply} the freaks of an unstable temperament, which ~~merely~~ alternates between feverish exploits and slothful lethargy. Hamlet often does one thing instead of another, ^{but} a combination ~~which~~ demands an altogether different explanation, ~~since~~ ^{and} no one can be resolute and irresolute, temperamentally active and passive at one and the same time. ^{He} ~~Hamlet~~ does not only refrain from ^{slaying} ~~kill~~ the King in the prayer scene, but almost immediately afterwards ^{slays} ~~kills~~ Polonius mistaking him for the King and, incidentally, shouting 'a rat'. He could not have been too melancholy to make a thrust at the King, yet sufficiently healthy to stab Polonius. 'Healthy impulse' could not have intervened too late to make him act rightly, yet in time to make him act wrongly. ^{That is not possible. No one can be prevented by paralysis of willpower to act in one way while being uninhibited to act eagerly in another way. Similarly is the situation in the last act.} Hamlet makes no preparations whatsoever to ~~kill~~ ^{slay} the King and then ^{does thorough execution on} ~~stabs him and poisons~~ him in an instant. He thus ^{first} performs with zest a variety of actions -- ~~does not forget~~ ^{remember} his glowing account of his adventures at sea -- ~~instead of the more required~~ ^{except the one that} ~~do~~, ~~with~~ suddenly he performs the deed without any sign of hesitation. 'The riddle of the delay in killing the King ~~is~~ still there ^{stares us in the face}'

Bradley missed the right answer by a hair's breadth. He adduced instances of Hamlet's proneness to action, ~~saying~~ ^{and adding} he acts in these cases since it is not ~~the~~ one hateful action on which his morbid self-feeling had centered. ~~As a matter of course, the killing of the King~~ ^{He} did not follow up the clue, ~~that he had found the solution~~ ^{disputed} Hamlet hesitates to ~~kill~~ the King because, by ~~an~~ ^{disputed} conjecture of character and situation, his melancholy has come to be centered on this action.

life, ~~that is,~~ ^{while} continuing to live, he is unable to decide for life. He can live on as long as he is not challenged on this point, ~~that is,~~ as long as he is not forced to decide to do so. Should he by any mischance be constrained to take ~~any~~ a decision, it would be his ^{doom} end, since he could not ~~not~~ deliberately ~~choose~~ to choose the road of life. This is, in terms of drama, the meaning of Hamlet's melancholy.

~~Does this mean that he should~~ ^{not} take Hamlet's frequent professions of wishing to die à la lettre. ~~They are mere phrases which express his mood of melancholy.~~ ^{ways of a mood.} Hamlet does not want to die, he merely hates to live. A dramatic hero who sincerely wishes to be dead ^{could not hold} ~~would~~ ^{our sympathy} ~~lose~~ ^{our interest.} There would be no conflict, ~~and~~ ^{to watch} no play, ^{for} who would or could prevent him from having his way? Hamlet's elaborations on the theme 'I wish I were dead' should mislead no one. All it ~~means~~ ^{means} is that he ~~would~~ ^{had} ~~refuse~~ ^{led} to settle down to the tasks of life, ^{if he} ~~would~~ ^{had} to decide. ^{But most of us have never to decide.} Actually, he is prepared to fight for his life ~~and~~ ^{all} perhaps ^{(the more bravely, because he does not set} ~~his life~~ ^{at a pin's fee)}

Here lie the roots of Hamlet's tragedy.

When the play opens, Hamlet is ~~already~~ ^{already} overcast with melancholy, on account of his mother's shame. But it is the appearance of the ghost which starts the tragedy, for fate itself is now pushing him towards a ~~unavoidable~~ ^{unavoidable} decision. Hamlet merely wished to withdraw from the court, and retire to Wittenberg, though at his mother's entreaties (and perhaps also for Ophelia's sake) he ~~postponed~~ ^{postponed} his ~~departure~~ ^{departure}. Now his father's ghost commands him to kill the King. To obey would involve all that living involves. His fate ~~is~~ ^{would} to be taken out of his hands. Killing the King ^{would} ~~would~~ probably ~~would~~ ^{would} make him King himself, may be with Ophelia as his queen, ~~he would become~~ ^{make him} the princely ruler of the Court at Elsinore, a radiant sun amongst a host of Rosenkranzes and Guildensteres. Hamlet knows in his bones that he will ^{take into his} ~~never comply~~ ^{refusal to} with setting ^{right} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~joint~~ ^{joint} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~world's~~ ^{world's} ~~right~~ ^{right} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~it~~ ^{it} ~~would~~ ^{would} ~~become~~ ^{become} part of a world he now detests more bitterly than ever. He will perish before he fulfills that command, and he knows it. His father's ghost has uttered ^{his} ~~his~~ death sentence. The rest of the play consists in Hamlet's vain ~~attempts~~

at ^{the} evade the execution of that sentence. In delaying the killing of the King at his father's bidding, or, killing the King, if possible, while not doing it at his father's bidding, Hamlet is fighting for his life.

The killing of the King ~~is a mere~~ ^{had become} ~~being~~ for Hamlet -- on cursed spite -- the symbol of deciding to live. This one act on which his morbid self-feeling centers he can not perform. Not the mechanical act itself -- that is irrelevant; but the act as an act of revenge, an act of filial duty enjoined upon him by a dread command, ^{an} act in the fatal sequence of human obligations, ^{as} a symbolic ^{dead} ~~act~~ ~~thing~~ involving him in the will of life. Hamlet could kill the King with ease -- by mistake, off the record, under the cover of an alibi, by a disowned gesture under the pretence of chance, ~~is~~ ^{by} some emphatically unambiguous deed -- or, when the decision had already fallen, and he (was himself) dead. ←

Actually, he attempts both -- to do it, pretending he did not intend it, and to do it when ^{this can no more affect his fate.} ~~it has already lost its fatal signi-~~
~~ficance.~~ He stabs Polonius in a trice, when he mistakes him 'for his better' while denying even this supposed knowledge in the very act by staging a rat-hunt. And again, even more decisively, in the last Act, when he triumphantly, almost as if he exulted in his final safety, repeats to Horatio his 'I am dead'. The sceptical dreamer is ~~entirely~~ transformed into the butcher-boy, once action is ^{no more than} ~~mechanical~~ mechanical action, signifying nothing, since he, Hamlet, is now securely dead.

I felt II.

This throws ^{some} light on Hamlet's feigned madness, and its ~~own~~ rôle in the ^{play} ~~tragedy~~. I do not mean in the plot, ^{alone,} which is obvious, but in the fulfillment of Hamlet's fate. ~~Given his situation,~~ ^{his} anticlimax ^{is} an immediate outcome of his melancholy. The horror of his position after the encounter with the ghost ^{nearly} ~~almost~~ robs him of his ^{sanctity} ~~virtue~~. He ~~is in the course of~~ passionately moving away from the scenes of social obligation, from the court, from conventions, from ^{all that which} ~~the world of~~ 'seems', ^{what is} ~~which is inwardly deadened by habit and custom~~. Fate in the shape of his father's ghost stops his stampede from life and huris him back ~~right~~ into the centre of damnation. He almost loses his mind and is genuinely

~~become~~ afraid of not being able to recover his balance. Yet as soon as this wears off -- and ~~he gets it over~~ ^{he gets it over} very quickly -- an entirely different anxiety ~~dominates his behavior~~ ^{overmasters him} and determines the use he is going to make of his discovery ~~leaning towards the antic~~ ^{the prospect of his appearing to be} appearance of madness. This new anxiety springs from ~~the~~ ^{the} fear to be pushed to take action, ~~lest he cease to be master of his fate.~~ ^{against his will. He} ~~lest~~ ^{lest} ~~let~~ ^{let} Mar- cello, or Bernardo, ~~or~~ maybe even Horatio know of what happened, and the ~~fatal~~ ^{fatal} decision would ~~have~~ ^{have} fallen. Only as long as he alone knows of the ghost's revelation -- or maybe Horatio, whom he learns to trust as his alter ego -- ~~Hamlet's~~ ^{Hamlet's} ~~is~~ ^{is} Hamlet safe. With the end of the first act the battle for his

life ~~has begun.~~ ^{has begun.} It has been ~~noticed~~ ^{noticed} that towards the end of the play Hamlet's assumed derangement becomes less obvious, ~~and that~~ ^{melancholy is lifting and his} For some unaccountable reason he seems ~~more~~ ^{more} placid and composed. His melancholy is ~~lifting~~ ^{lifting}, ~~could it be otherwise?~~ ^{could it be otherwise?}

~~This~~ ^{Yet how} constitutes one of the ~~beauties~~ ^{beauties} of the play. ~~Hamlet~~ ^{that} who in the beginning imagined ~~he~~ ^{ed} wish to die is now ready to go. ~~He~~ ^{It has been also noticed by} ~~makes~~ ^{into the bewildered} ~~no~~ ^{critic} ~~preparations~~ ^{that Hamlet} to kill the King and yet ~~seems~~ ^{appears} more and more certain that the hour of revenge is ~~approaching~~ ^{approaching}. ~~Yet~~ ^{Yet again} how could this be otherwise? Hamlet ~~now~~ ^{now} ~~welcomes~~ ^{welcomes} death, not any more out of a confused mood which denies the meaning of life, but from ~~an~~ ^{of melancholy} a ~~recognition~~ ^{is true} of the meaning of ~~life~~ ^{life} which he ~~has~~ ^{has} gained through his own involvement in guilt and suffering. He strikes down the King, when he himself is already 'dead'; but ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~own~~ ^{own} death comes to him ~~only~~ ^{only} when he is ~~ready~~ ^{ripe} for it. The accidents which seem to regulate the course of the play are ~~a~~ ^{no more than a} ~~mere~~ ^{mere} semblance. Its progress is as clear and simple as Calvary. No wonder that the figure of Hamlet could be interpreted as that of a saint. And yet, no worse misundersta- ding was conceivable. It is a pure tragedy, a story of guilt and expiation.

For he who turns away from life is by that very action guilty. Hamlet ^{in the end} is purified through suffering which comes to him as a retri- bution for his own deeds. ~~We will try and unravel the part played~~ ^{This} ~~by his feigned madness in the tragedy.~~ ^{tragedy.}

The second and third Act are Hamlet's innings. He is ^{was} the stage manager, ~~who directs the event~~ as he ~~has~~ ^{said} he would be. ~~his intention~~ at the end of the first Act. With the dumb scene, ~~at the beginning~~ ^{charges} of the second Act, Hamlet takes ~~charge~~; nothing happens ^{hence forth} except by his will; ~~his intellectual genius~~ ^{is the result of} and he makes use of ~~it~~, without let and hindrance. ^{By} the end of his innings he has maltreated and lost the guiltless Ophelia, has killed her father, a ^{poor and} fool but innocent of ~~Hamlet's father's blood~~, ^{father of} any conspiracy against Hamlet ^{in exchange, Hamlet} himself, ~~for this he~~ has gained his mother's remorse and ^{came} proof against the King, who, however, ^{him} is now forwarned ~~of the danger~~ and takes steps to get rid of Hamlet. ^{But what's} ever ~~is~~ the balance, ^{reason and} in the eyes of objective morality, ~~Hamlet has~~ Hamlet has inextricably involved himself in guilt.

~~For what happens in these two acts? And what must these happenings signify to Hamlet?~~

Hamlet aims his antics with deadly precision. The dumb scene sends Ophelia crying into her father's arms, who rushes post-haste to the King, who thereupon sets ~~Hamlet up~~ ^{up which Ophelia herself} as a lawful espial, the trap, ~~in which he himself~~ ^{has been} ~~is~~ ~~set~~. ~~Hamlet, as a~~ ~~producer~~ shows grim humour. He himself ~~sets~~ ^{had} the prize-question, ~~what the cause of his madness~~. He knows his ~~own~~ cast and makes them ~~guess~~ true to character. Polonius, ^{empty shell} ~~his~~ ~~self-assurance~~ ~~of his~~ ~~cheap~~ ~~cynicism~~; Hamlet, ^{by his clumsy errors} ~~absent~~ ~~on~~ ~~seducing~~ Ophelia, ~~was~~ ^{lost his reason} ~~being~~ ~~thwarted~~ ~~in~~ ~~his~~ ~~passion~~. The queen feels guilty of her own over-hasty marriage; ^{and is then respect the King} the King alone is on a par with Hamlet and refuses to be duped by his ~~antic~~ ~~and~~ ~~foiled~~ lover's frenzy. He ^{had} sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, ~~has~~ ^{Later he had} ~~arranged~~ for the trap, ~~puts~~ Hamlet under guard, ^{then despatched} ~~sends~~ him to England, sets Laertes on his trail, conceals ^{ad} the murder plot. Except for the King, all ~~are~~ ^{are} Hamlet's puppets. ~~He~~ ^{Hamlet} enjoys his cruel superiority: - the chastisement of that solemn mediocrity, Polonius, the self-debasement of those slimy gigglers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the anguish of the King ^{caused by} ~~trembling~~ ~~over~~ the ominous ~~tokens~~ ^{hints} ~~dropped~~ in Hamlet's conversational flashes. ~~The climax is~~ of Hamlet's self-revealed ~~secret~~ ~~was~~ ~~reached~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~moment~~ when ^{Hamlet} ~~is~~ ~~dropped~~ ~~down~~ ~~out~~.

Hamlet, in staged madness, stages a play in the play, the effects of which on the King send him into transports of joy. And yet, all the time his helpless self is more and more enmeshed in guilt.

~~Hamlet's tragedy is intertwined with his love for Ophelia, whom he has sacrificed.~~
In spite of his glamorous antics, in his ~~deeply~~ sensitive heart he knows that he has lost his way. Hamlet's ^{guilt} tragedy is ~~inextricably~~ intertwined with his love for Ophelia, whom he has sacrificed.

~~Hamlet has tainted himself with the virus he leached.~~ 'I loved Ophelia', he cries when all is over... The grave scene is one of the few occasions when external events penetrate the anroid of Hamlet's melancholy. It is a long way from ^{the} outside to ^{the} inside.

Listen to his ranting and to the subsequent awakening, ~~when the point of~~ ^{recollection of memory} pierces to the heart, and he ~~identifies~~ ^{identifies} himself in a ~~flash of pain~~ ^{flash of pain}:
Hamlet: '...What is he, whose grief bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I, Hamlet the Dane!'

(He leaps into the grave)

His love for Ophelia was sincere and ardent. It was romantic love, driven to a platonic frenzy by his mother's ~~debasement~~ debasement. ^{noble} ~~his~~ love ^{lay} ~~was~~ like a chasm between him and the others. He knew the putrid atmosphere of the court. He knew his Laertes, this youthful lecher, who depraved his sister's mind. He knew his smutty Polonius who instilled filthy suspicions into her confiding spirit, he knew his Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern whose horizon was ^{l'air du monde} ~~ounded by~~ ^{he knows} the King and Queen who set their hopes on Ophelia's physical beauty, ^{tempting him to} ~~become an idle gossip-monger~~ ^{away from} his mission. He hates them ^{all} for their calumny of all that is ~~not~~ truly ~~pure~~ noble. Not one of them but debased Ophelia's love for him and Hamlet's love for her into a conventional counter, if not into a calculated instrument of policy, relying on what there is of ^{the laws of} ~~meanness in~~ ^{human frame}.

~~Hamlet's tragedy is intertwined with his love for Ophelia, whom he has sacrificed.~~
Yet, who but Hamlet himself conceived of the idea of ^{playing on} ~~being~~ Ophelia's feelings for political ends? Who but he acted the dumb scene in the garb of the despised lover, so grossly conventional in his disordered attire that the ~~more~~ ^{scorned} recounting by ~~the~~ Ophelia led the

He has been haunted with the virus he loathes.

Prime Minister to the hackneyed diagnosis: 'Mad for thy love'?
Who but Hamlet nurtured Polonius' ~~un-suspicious~~ ^{chatters} by harping on his
daughter at every turn of their ambiguous ~~conversations~~? And who
confirmed the ^{sus}suspicious in the nunnery scene by his obscene insults
to Ophelia? Who, but Hamlet the Bane?

At every turn of the screw Hamlet's suffering feeds on the ^{effects} ~~murder~~
of his own actions. ^{not he} Was ~~he~~ himself slandering Ophelia to her
father? Was not he, himself dragging her through the mire of court
intrigue? Did not he himself prompt the idea that she should be made
^{a decoy} ~~the bait~~ in the scene of eavesdropping, in which he ~~was~~
~~most out of her wits, thus taking unjust revenge on her for a part~~
which he himself had ^{pushed} ~~pushed~~ her? And yet, it is in this scene
that Ophelia is most true to him. ^{He arraigns her for} ~~In his imagination she is~~ prostitu-
ting herself ~~and has become a prey to his enemies~~, a worthy
ally of his debauched mother. While all the time Hamlet knows only too
well that he, he ^{himself} ~~is~~ to blame. That ^{what seems} ~~she~~ to bear
out his accusations, ~~or~~ ^{is} in truth of his own doing, and
no better than a crime against his pure and beloved child.

Ophelia's ~~position in the nunnery scene is~~ ^{position} ~~is~~ ^{under-}
~~standable~~ has been promised to marry Hamlet if she can restore him to
his normal self. Beauty and honour, love and marriage are for once in
concord. She loves Hamlet and knows not of the danger that threatens ^{his} ~~her~~
He never confided his burden to her. Her task is to charm him back
to life and happiness, to exorcise the demons that are darkening
his spirit.

In the presence of her father and ~~the~~ the King himself the Queen
^{said} ~~says~~ to Ophelia:

Queen: 'And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours!

Ophelia: ~~Madam, I wish it may.~~

And ~~to set~~ she says at Ophelia's grave, ^{ignorant} not knowing of Hamlet's presence.

O.: 'I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd i thy grave.'

In the nunnery scene the ~~innocent~~ ^{innocent} Ophelia is met by the knowing Hamlet. He winces at the thought that Ophelia ~~is~~ ^{has been} 'let loose' to seduce him -- turn him from allegiance to his dead father, from the path of honour and honesty, ^{through} ~~leading~~ ^{by} her feminine attractions.

His behaviour is as much to the point as it is ^{unfair} ~~unfair~~ to Ophelia:

- H.: 'Ha, ha are you honest?
- O.: My lord?
- H.: Are you fair?
- O.: What means your lordship?
- H.: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit ~~no~~ discourse to your beauty.
- O.: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?
- H.: 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; ~~this was sometime a paradise, but now the time gives to proof. I did love you once. -- and so on.~~

Hamlet alone knows that he must choose between love and honour; that to turn ^{aside} ~~aside~~ for Ophelia's sake from ~~the~~ ^{the} course of duty would dishonour him and her. ^{Things gives his words} ~~He says this with~~ a twist re-vengeful of Polonius and Laertes' low suspicions, and resentful of Ophelia's womanly mission. But in the matter itself he is clear and concise. If Ophelia ^{with returning her love} ~~tried to appeal to his honour, and make him marry her,~~ she would ^{be} merely appeal ^{to} to his lust, and deprave him; if she ^{tried to} follow ^{him} in the path of honour, she would have to sacrifice their love. ~~And that will ever happen.~~ She should go to a nunnery -- which is also slang for brothel, for that is where she belonged. ^{Had} ~~Did~~ she not give ^{my} proof of ^{it} ~~this honesty~~ ^{the offering of} by ~~prostituting~~ ^{it} here in the secret presence of an adulterous murderer and a bawd?

Yet every particle of this is ~~the~~ ^{the} work of Hamlet. Presently he will insult her ~~again~~ in the presence of the Court and, even worse, use her as a smoke-screen in his hunt for the murderer. ^{Eventually} ~~Incidentally,~~ he will ~~kill~~ kill her father, whom she adores. By the time Ophelia drowns herself Hamlet has deserved more than one death. Inwardly, he must have died a hundred deaths.

But how could the mere delaying of revenge, which is the matter of the plot, heap such mountainous guilt upon Hamlet's head? Hamlet's feigned madness is the answer. ^{Born out of his guilty conscience} ~~It breeds~~ it breeds guilt. It tempts him into using not only his enemies but also his friends as tools; it traps him into ^{cowardly evasions} ~~making~~ making insincerity appear as a duty; it confuses him about himself to the point of making him a riddle to himself. ^{But} after his public confession of his love ~~for~~ for Ophelia at her grave, he plays the fool no more. He is preparing for the end. There is only a short interim ^{before} until the news from England of ^{The two countries} ~~Laertes' and Guildenstern's~~ deaths must arrive. Hamlet's quiet composure in this last part of the play is of ^{stunning} ~~great~~ beauty. Ready to die, there is no reason ~~to~~ not to kill the King. That he no more utters the wish to die, ^{proves} shows how ~~very~~ great is the difference between the Hamlet of the first and the last Act of the play. ^{only believed longed for death} Then he thought he wished to die and often said so; now he wants to die and keeps silent, in his quiet readiness. It is the King whose hours are now counted.

III.

So much about the contents of this play which has no less a subject than life and death. Hamlet is in the last Act as near to committing suicide as ^{any} a play allows which is about suicide. This is ^{no} paradox. Othello is about jealousy, Romeo and Juliet is about love; if their heroes commit suicide, it is out of jealousy or love, not out of a wish for suicide. The ^{longing} ~~wish~~ to die is the only passion that is undramatic, since ~~no one who would be sufficiently interested in the person to watch the vagaries of his fate, especially if it consisted in endless inaction.~~ And yet "Hamlet" ^{if anything, is} ~~is~~ a good play. There is nothing more puzzling in the whole realm of ~~the~~ the drama. ^{What is the solution of the aesthetic problem?} ~~the "Hamlet" the play, which is the most important of all?~~

well, you all know the ~~story~~ story of the purloined letter. To hide it safely, it was left right in the middle of the table. For no-one would look for it there.

May I quote a few lines from a ^{passage} ~~part of the play~~ which, one would assume, is too well known to hide a secret. ^(I still remember the day, about 30 years ago, when I first struck one)

'To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die, - to sleep,
No more....'

Some of his amazing

Much has been written about this monologue. Bradley, the
greatest of all critics of Shakespeare's plays, ~~came to the conclusion~~
~~that the soliloquy was rather irrelevant since it certainly did not~~
~~refer to the action itself. Hamlet was philosophising about life and~~
~~death. Bradley said: 'In this soliloquy Hamlet is not thinking of~~
the duty laid upon him at all. He is debating the question of sui-
cide.'

'His reflections have no reference to this par-
ticular moment.' 'What can be more significant than the fact, that he
is sunk in these reflections (on suicide) on the very day which is
to determine for him the truthfulness of the Ghost?' (p. 132).

Bradley had come to the ~~surprising~~ conclusion that the great soliloquy
was of no dramatic importance, *since it certainly did not refer*
to the action plot itself.

Millions of people have listened to that monologue and did not
think so. Hosts of actors have spoken it and they, also, did not
feel so. On the contrary, they all believed, that in some unaccount-
table ^{fashion} way, the very heart of the play is throbbing there.

Bradley was ~~entirely~~ wrong. ^{And} those ~~few~~ lines give ~~him~~
away the secret. ^{surely} The audience ^{justly} assume that the hero ^{when}
stating a clearcut alternative at a moment of high dramatic tension is
~~weighing~~ weighing the alternative on which the play hinges: killing the
King or not? 'To be' ~~is~~ means to ~~kill~~ kill the King; 'Not to be'

means not to kill the King. Yet Hamlet describes 'To be' as ^{passivity} suffering and inactivity, not killing him as armed action and forcible opposition. Almost without exception critics colted at this point and did not follow up the implications. These must appear ~~rather~~ most confusing, until one remembers that Hamlet has turned away from life, of which he can now only think in terms of resignation and passivity. Even if passivity ~~and suffering~~ happens to include a number of so-called actions as killing the King, marrying Ophelia, ruling the country, and so on, the only action worthy of the name falls under the heading 'Not to be'. One can perform it with a bare bodkin, were it not that

'...conscience does make cowards of us all,
and thus the native hue of resolution
is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
with this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.'

With the thought of action this soliloquy opens and closes. Dowden ^{rightly said} ~~says~~ yet ~~it~~ it deals solely of suicide.

You can call those lines confused, but in ^{that seeming confusion} ~~them~~ you have the dramatic truth of the play.

It deals with suicide in terms of killing an enemy. It deals with delay in terms of ^{thickening} ~~hesitation~~ action. Hamlet who feigned madness in order to gain time is endangered by the effects of his stratagem and ~~then~~ forced to take action. By delaying the killing of the King ^{he} ~~Hamlet~~ is prolonging his own life. ^{that} ~~By~~ ^{stopping} Polonius instead of the King, Hamlet fails to free himself from his predicament. And yet when we feel that his end is approaching, we rightly believe that the day of reckoning has come for the King. The whole of Hamlet's inner conflict, his hovering on the confines of life and death, is thus translated into external events, into sharply accentuated dramatic action.

All through the play external events are hardly more than a ~~mere~~ reflection or a confirmation of what Hamlet knows by inward evidence. He is a genius who can play on the human soul as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would have liked to play on him. He foresees Ophelia's report to her father; he is conscious of the eavesdroppers in the nunnery scene; he is on the track of the aging courtiers, he guesses

their mission, he justly appraises the purpose of the fencing match, he correctly instructs the players, and with the one exception of Polonius behind the arras, whom he mistakes for the King, Hamlet is as a person endowed with double sight.

Four times in the play Hamlet's premonitions are translated into reality. He sees his father's figure 'in his mind's eye' even before he is told of the appearance of the ghost; he doubts 'some foul play' before the ghost reveals it to him; his prophetic soul guessed his uncle's guilt, as he knew that the end was coming before it had actually come. You will excuse me for reminding you of this passage:

Hamlet : I shall win at the odds. But though I would not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter.

Horatio: Nay, good my lord,--

Hamlet: It is but foolery; but it is suchkind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Horatio: If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not ill.

Hamlet: Not a whit; we defy augury; there 's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. 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 one knows ^{of aught} what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

Let be.

~~From the tragic soliloquy~~ ^{At the time here} Hamlet, ^{this saves the play.} parts willingly from life; he commits suicide. ~~But~~ Dramatically he does not. He is murdered, and, the certainty of his own death ^{free} ~~releases~~ him to do his duty.

As in Lear, Othello, ^{of} Macbeth, ~~so also is Hamlet~~ with the first Act the tragedy is set. Lear in his vanity and folly has thrown himself on the generosity of his ~~daughters~~ ^{the old king's play, which his} daughters; ~~and he~~ ^{at the} fulfills his fate. The Moor's conquest of Boudemona was ^a triumph of ~~reason and spirit~~ ^{the} over disparity of age and race which ~~can~~ ^{can} never stand the test of ~~brute~~ brute passion; Othello goes to his doom. ~~In~~ In Macbeth the weird sisters ~~draw~~ ^{and} the circle of tragedy around the hero and his ambition; the ~~end~~ ^{end} follows as by

~~geometrical necessity~~. Similarly in Hamlet, ~~Hamlet~~ the opening Act ~~of the play~~ contains the tragedy in nuce. His mother's shame has robbed Hamlet of the faculty to live. When his father's ~~mad~~ command reaches him, ~~Hamlet's~~ ^{his} fate is sealed, ~~and the play does not end with~~ ^{including with an} ~~and~~ ^{the act ends with} "Now to my revenge!" but with: "The time is out of joint, Oh cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right!" Before the ~~tragic fall~~ ^{second act begins, it} has been decreed: Hamlet will lose his life while trying to save it by feigning to be mad.

Seneca Grammaticus' s Amblet pretends ^{s. makes} ~~madness~~ in order ^{before} to prepare ^{for} his revenge on the King. Shakespeare's Hamlet ^{on the contrary} seeks instruments of delay. This is the true function of his madness in the plot. ~~But for this~~ ^{his feigned madness} Hamlet could not have put off his decision without a conflict with his friends and supporters. Such an external conflict would have dragged his own ~~inner~~ ^{inner} conflict into ~~the~~ light and ~~would~~ ^{have} been artistically fatal. A Hamlet who ~~would~~ ^{refused} to obey the behest of the ghost or deliberately ^{to act} hesitate when pressed by his friends ~~would~~ ^{he} lose ~~the~~ ^{the} sympathy ^{of the audience} just as he would lose ~~the~~ ^{them} admiration, ~~if~~ ^{he well deserved} ~~any~~ ^{obstacles} which ~~is~~ ^{in his quest for revenge} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~set~~ ^{set} ~~him~~ ^{him} ~~back~~ ^{back} from the King and the Court. ~~and~~ ^{that} Hamlet himself is the ^{only} ~~only~~ obstacle both to ~~his~~ ^{of a person} decision to take revenge and to the carrying out of ~~that~~ ^{decision} revenge. This raises the play to the highest levels of universality ~~and~~ ^{in terms of human life} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~transposed~~ ^{transposed} by Shakespeare's art into the ~~stage~~ ^{stage} of blood, fire, and brimstone. ~~Small wonder that it is a good play!~~ ^{makes good free.}

Hamlet is about the human condition. We all live and refuse to die, but we are not all the time decided to live and be happy certainly not in all the essential respects in which life invites us. ~~unhappily~~ To some extent we are all the time delaying happiness and putting off life, because we fear to commit ourselves to live. Our self-feeling (we should not call it morbid) may then often center on an action which ~~to~~ ^{to} our dismay we find ourselves not doing. ~~This is~~ ^{symbolic}. Life is man's missed opportunity. ~~Life fulfills itself~~ ^{readiness to live.} ~~readiness to live.~~ ^{readiness to live.} ~~readiness to live.~~ ^{readiness to live.}

*How hardy would
one to give the
the*

make the
 I realise that I have not given you what I promised ~~some of~~
~~me~~ ~~inner~~ assurance that I ever understood the Prince in that easy con-
 versational manner in which one imagines one understands ~~oneself~~. *one's own*
indeed In writing down my recollections, I ~~found~~ *find* that it may have all been
 no more than a ~~dream~~ *fantasy*. You know the curious fashion
 in which one imagines one has learnt in one's sleep the secret of
 life, yet on awakening finds that most of it has evaporated. I thought
 I would tell you before it is too late and I find myself too happy ~~in~~
~~life~~ to remember anything of Hamlet's secrets.

Hamlet

Mr. Chairman,

The English reader will feel

*that a man must have come from afar
to have struck in the most out worn of all
subjects, Hamlet.*

The surmise is correct. I was serving as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army, a little short of thirty years ago. The Russian winter and the blackish-yellow steppes made me ^{fed} sick at heart. In my desolation I had for companion a volume of Shakespeare's plays. One of them I found myself reading and re-reading: The tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Altogether I must have gone through it some thirty times. My personal life had taken a turn towards darkness. Daylight seemed bounded in a narrowing ~~minima~~ disc which was growing dimmer and dimmer. The cold was so intense that when my horse stumbled and fell, I was too apathetic to get out of the saddle. ~~Fortunately~~ Fortunately - though I myself might not (at the time have thought so) - the gaunt stiff creature, a Cossack mare ~~we~~ had picked up, jerked herself ^{out her long legs} ~~up~~ and I was saved from being crushed ~~by her~~, had she rolled over... At that period of my existence my soul was numbed and fell under ^{the} spell of a recurrent day-dream. I read my "Hamlet" and every word, phrase and intonation seemed plain and clear to me.

For many years the memory of these bleak months haunted me. I could not rid myself of the idea that by some weird chance I had possessed myself of Hamlet's secret. I knew why he did not kill the King. I knew what it was he feared. I knew why he ^{slew} ~~hit~~ the King so gleefully when he at last did ^{execution on} ~~kill~~ him. I knew why he so swiftly ^{through his bow} ~~struck~~ Polonius when he mistook him for the King and ^{was} ~~pretended~~ ^{to be} was only a rat. I knew what his ^{classic} ~~apparently~~ confused words to Ophelia meant. But while I still ^{felt}, I knew, I was already fast forgetting. My days were clearing up and as light broke in, knowledge passed into shadowy recollection, which in its turn faded into a mere intellectual understanding. I was now happy ~~and~~ and could only faintly remember what had once formed part of my being: Hamlet's inhuman sufferings. Yet something in me ^{indication and fierce madness} insisted that my theories on Hamlet - for that was all my former certainties now amounted to - were not merely

the morbid offspring of my late ailing.

I hope I will be pardoned for this lengthy digression. Actually, I merely propose to recount to you my reaction to that great English critic's opinion -- I mean the late Andrew Cecil Bradley of Morten College, who died almost twenty years ago. His views on Hamlet's character, when I came across them, struck me greatly by their resemblance to my own. *But he stopped short of the solution.*

That Hamlet ~~is a~~ ^{is a} ~~person~~ ^{person} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~profound~~ ^{of} ~~melancholy~~. ~~That is why he delays~~ ^{under the influence of} ~~revenge for his father.~~ ^{of the} All other ingredients of his character -- intellectual genius, moral sensibility, temperamental instability, -- ~~are~~ ^{are} either the cause or the expression of this melancholy. It alone ~~explains~~ ^{accounts for} the course of the play, ~~taken~~ ^{when} taken together with the spates of normalcy ~~in~~ ^{during which} Hamlet's 'healthy impulses' ~~break~~ ^{break} forth ~~as~~ ^{are} remnants of a ~~more~~ ^{more} virile personality. ~~But he had turned him towards melancholy. This alone, Bradley thought,~~ ~~accounts for the contradictions in Hamlet's behavior.~~

Roughly Bradley said: ~~very~~ ^{very} ~~often~~ ^{often} ~~diagnosed~~. Hamlet, a person of exceptional moral sensibility and intellectual faculties, is shocked by his mother's gross sensuality ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~moral~~ ^{moral} ~~shoddiness~~ ^{shoddiness} into utter disgust of life. It is in this frame of mind that ~~his father's command~~ ^{together with the ghostly command} reaches him ~~the awful revelation of his father's~~ ^{his father's} ~~foul murder.~~ ^{his mind is} ~~He is~~ ^{he is} ~~poisoned~~ ^{poisoned} and paralysed, hence his inaction, his endless hesitations.

This brings about his undoing as well as that of many others, including those he loves best.

I was thrilled; I recognised in Bradley's Hamlet my Hamlet. ~~But~~ ^{But} ~~I realised~~ ^{I realised} also that Bradley had not made full use ~~of his insight, he~~ ^{of his insight, he} ~~had not~~ ^{had not} unlocked the secrets of ~~Hamlet, the man and the play.~~ ^{Hamlet, the man and the play.}

For at the heart of ~~it all~~ ^{it all} there is the fact that through five long acts Hamlet does not kill the King. This delay of which he ~~accuses~~ ^{accuses} himself, ~~and~~ ^{and} which he can not justify, and for which nothing seems to account satisfactorily, is the psychological ~~problem~~ ^{problem} of the play. It is a secret of ~~the~~ ^{the} human character, ~~the~~ ^{the} secret of Hamlet, the person.

But there is also an ~~entirely~~ ^{entirely} ~~different~~ ^{different} ~~problem.~~ ^{problem.} ~~How~~ ^{How} ~~can~~ ^{can} ~~we~~ ^{we} ~~understand~~ ^{understand} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~secret~~ ^{secret} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~Hamlet?~~ ^{Hamlet?}

to take revenge

~~fails to do the one thing~~ ^{the public audience is expecting him} ~~to do?~~ ^{are morally and psychologically inter-}
~~ested in his ideas~~ ^{for the refrained} ~~Whatever the reason for his not killing the king,~~
^{is} ~~It is a mystery how~~ ^{ever staged} ~~successful play could have been written~~
~~about inaction.~~ ² ~~This is the secret of "Hamlet", the play.~~

One key serves both locks; ~~the secret of Hamlet the person is~~
~~also the secret of Hamlet, the play.~~ ^{This in brief is my}
~~assignment - I will first deal with Hamlet, the person.~~
 I.

^{appears at first sight to} ~~Bradley's answer to the psychological problem seems at first to~~
~~explain all that is needed. Hamlet is by nature anything but passive.~~
~~Every time his unhealthy impulses come into play before he had time~~
~~to subside, he is prone to quick decided action.~~ ^{The drama}
~~us Hamlet in a state of~~ ^{deep dejection} ~~profound melancholy~~ ^{in which he is averse to}
~~any kind of~~ ^{action:} ~~action. His mood is~~ ^{'It does not matter', 'It's not,}
~~worth while.~~ ^{Nitchevo is the Russian for it.} ~~In~~ ^{Hamlet's}
~~case~~ ^{of} ~~this expresses a kind of analysis of inner life. Mechanical~~
~~answers, a sort of back-chat suit his condition well;~~ ^{Sometimes}
~~he returns the words of the speaker, without wit or irony,~~
~~lifeless~~ ^{by} ~~like a man too benumbed to think or speak.~~

Yet Hamlet ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~variable temperament.~~ ^{Recalls} ~~no Oscar Wilde with~~
~~a lily in his hand. This allegedly shrinking flower-like youth,~~
~~says Bradley, 'rages through the major part of the play, murdering~~
~~and destroying human lives, ruthless, fierce, a terror to the court'.~~
~~Bowden remarked on his impulsive~~ ^{ness!} ~~...he suddenly conceives of~~
~~the possibility of unmasking the King's guilt, on the accidental~~
~~arrival of the players, and proceeds without delay to put the matter~~
~~to the test, suddenly overwhelms Ophelia with his reproaches of~~
~~womanhood, suddenly stabs the eavesdropper behind the arras, suddenly~~
~~as if under some irresistible inspiration, sends his companions on~~
~~shipboard to their deaths, suddenly boards the pirates, suddenly~~
~~grapples with Laertes in the grave, suddenly does execution on the~~
~~guilty King, plucks the poison from Horatio's hands, and gives his~~
~~dying voice for a successor to the throne."~~

In his lucida intervalla Hamlet is unable to understand 'the
 paralyzing pressure' which his melancholy exerts at other times.
~~This~~ ^{So Bradley thought} ~~account for another puzzling feature of the play~~
^{his} ~~inability to find reason for his own~~ ^{behavior, inaction.}
 (a good)

Indeed, Hamlet's intellectual genius and moral sensibility can not account for his behaviour. These qualities tend to reinforce both his irresolution and his overresoluteness, his inaction, and his hyper-activity. Moral sensibility is at the root of his inaction in the prayer scene, when theological niceties intervene at the wrong moment to bar action, but also of his outbursts of activity as in the stabbing of Polonius or the final scene of revenge. In the same manner genius is the mainspring of his hesitation as in the soliloquy about after-life, or his sophisticated if somewhat belated doubts concerning the veracity of the ghost. Yet genius also precipitates action tremendously, e.g., in the case of the players or in that of those twin mediocrities Rosencrantz and Guildenstern whom with extreme adroitness he hoists with their own petards. While genius and passion often prompt impulses which obstruct decision, they also give wings to action. Hamlet never seems to doubt his ability to master any situation, however difficult, once he is resolved to do so. He has the life feeling of a wizard... But ~~his~~ genius and sensibility colour all he does, ~~including~~ including inaction. They do not explain it.

But ^{this} ~~Bradley's~~ ~~own~~ ~~interpretation~~ ~~of~~ ~~Hamlet's~~ ~~character~~ ~~explains~~ ~~too~~ ~~much~~
~~is~~ ~~not~~, if we look closer into the matter. Hamlet's melancholy accounts for his inaction, ^{his surviving health impulses for his} ~~but~~ ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~his~~ ~~action~~ ~~only~~ ~~he~~ ~~is~~ ~~too~~ ~~irresolute~~ ~~to~~ ~~carry~~ ~~out~~. ~~He~~ ~~does~~ ~~away~~ ~~with~~ Polonius, sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to hell, boards the pirate ship, beats Laertes at his own craft and in the end, ^{stabs} ~~runs~~ ~~through~~ the King and forces poison down his throat. Voltaire dubbed this last gory scene as worthy of a butcher-boy's imagination. Why then the endless delay before Hamlet kills the King?

Bradley's theory ~~of~~ ~~basically~~ ~~healthy~~ ~~impulses~~ ~~laid~~ ~~over~~ ~~by~~ ~~profound~~ ~~melancholy~~ breaks down at ^{The secret} ~~the~~ ~~secret~~ point. Why do the healthy impulses arise so frequently as to make Hamlet into a person of almost terrible ruthlessness ~~in~~ and yet prevent him from doing the ~~the~~ deed which he has sworn the spirit of his murdered father to do? He has almost depopulated the court having caused the death of at least four persons in the King's entourage ~~Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern~~ and still he does not seem to have come any nearer to the performing of his ~~the~~ supreme duty.

Why does the 'veil of melancholy', as Bradley calls it never lift when he has an occasion ^{to take his revenge on} ~~to kill~~ the King? Is this a mere accident?

The play would then appear to derive its structure from a long series of accidents. That would be hardly satisfactory. The audience ^{seems to} ~~feels~~

^{know} ~~knows~~ that this is not so, otherwise it would lose interest. There must be some hidden reason for Hamlet's hesitation to do the required ^{act} ~~deed~~, a reason Hamlet himself vainly seeks to discover, and which perhaps will be revealed only through his own death.

~~However~~, There is ^{even} ~~more to~~ ^{it}. Hamlet's spasms of action and inaction are not the freaks of an unstable temperament, which ~~simply~~ alternates between feverish exploits and slothful lethargy. Hamlet often does ~~one thing instead of another~~ ^{Such} ~~of a~~ combination ~~which~~ demands

an altogether different explanation since no one can be resolute and irresolute, temperamentally active and passive at one and the same time ~~and~~ ^{he} does not only refrain from ~~attacking~~ the King in the prayer scene, but almost immediately afterwards ^{slamming} Polonius mistaking

him for the King ^{col bloodedly} ~~shouting~~ 'a rat'. He could not have been too melancholy to make a thrust at the King, yet sufficiently healthy to stab Polonius. 'Healthy impulse' could not have intervened too late to make him act rightly, yet in time to make him

act wrongly. ^{A general Paradox of willpower cannot prevent a man from acting in one way while leaving him free of willpower to act in another way while being prohibited to act eagerly in another way. Similar is the situation in the last act.}

^{past act} Hamlet makes no preparations whatsoever to ~~kill~~ ^{destroy} the King and then ^{does through execution on} ~~stabs him and~~ ^{first} in an instant, he takes ~~performs~~ with zest

a variety of actions -- ^{remember his} ~~to not forget his~~ glowing account of his exploits ^{except} ~~at sea~~ ^{one} ~~the~~ ^{glory and} ~~required~~ ^{glory and} suddenly he performs the deed without any sign of hesitancy. The riddle of the delay in killing the King ~~is~~ ^{still} ~~states us in the face~~

Bradley missed the right answer by a hair's breadth. He adduced instances of Hamlet's proneness to action, ^{and added} ~~and~~ he acts in these cases since it is not ~~the~~ ^{and added} one hateful action on which his morbid self-feeling had centered. ~~He~~ ^{But} ~~is aware, of course, of the killing of his King -- unfortunately, he did not follow up the clue. Yet he has found the solution. Hamlet~~ ^{does not} ~~hesitates~~ ^{to} ~~kill the King because~~ ^{is} ~~by~~ ^{is} ~~conjunction~~ ^{is} ~~of~~ ^{is} ~~character~~ ^{is} ~~and~~ ^{is} ~~situation~~ ^{is} his melancholy has come to be centered on this action.

Let me elaborate. Hamlet has turned away

from life. ~~that is, while~~ while continuing to live, he is unable to decide
for life. He can live on as long as he is not challenged on this point,
that is, as long as he is not forced to decide to do so. Should he
by any mischance be constrained to take such a decision, it would be
his ~~doom~~ ^{doom} since he could not ~~deliberately~~ ^{deliberately} choose the
road of life. This is, in terms of drama, ^{by content} the ~~meaning~~ ^{content} of Hamlet's
melancholy.

~~These~~ ^{not} ~~should~~ ^{not} take Hamlet's frequent professions
of wishing to die à la lettre. ~~They are mere~~ ^{They are mere} ~~expressions~~ ^{expressions} of mood. ~~He~~ ^{He} does not want to die,
he merely hates to live. A dramatic hero ^{merely} who ^{sincerely} wished to
be dead ^{could not} ~~lose~~ ^{our} sympathy ~~our~~ ^{our} interest.
There would be no conflict ^{to follow}, no play ^{to watch}. ~~For who~~ ^{For who} could prevent
him from having his way? Hamlet's elaborations on the theme 'I wish I
were dead' should ^{not} ~~mislead~~ ^{no} ~~one~~. All ^{they} ~~mean~~ ^{is} that
he ~~for~~ ^{he} would refuse to settle down to the tasks of life, if ~~he~~
~~a decision had ever to be taken~~ ^{but most of us have never to decide.} Actually he is prepared to fight
~~for~~ ^{for} ~~perhaps~~ ^{perhaps} ~~the~~ ^{the} more bravely, because he does
not set ~~at~~ ^{at} a pin's fee.

Here lie the roots of Hamlet's tragedy.

When the play opens, Hamlet ^{has turned away from life} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~struggling~~ ^{struggling} with
~~an~~ ^{an} account of his mother's shame. But it is the appearance of
the ghost which starts the tragedy. For fate itself is now pushing
him towards a ~~tragic~~ ^{tragic} decision. ~~He~~ ^{He} merely wished to withdraw from
the court, and retire to Wittenberg, though at his mother's entreaties
(and perhaps also for Ophelia's sake) he postponed his ~~departure~~ ^{departure}.
Now his father's ghost commands him to kill the King. To obey would
involve all that ^{life} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~loyalty~~ ^{loyalty}. His fate is to be taken out of his
hands. Killing the King ^{would} ~~most probably~~ ^{most probably} make him King himself,
may be with Ophelia as his queen, ~~he would become~~ ^{he would become} the princely ruler
of the Court at Elsinore, a radiant star amongst a host of Rosen-
crantz and Guildensterns. Hamlet knows in his bones that he will

fall into line / He refused to set his hand to the world's faults
spring from his fear of ~~that~~ ^{that} ~~is~~ ^{is} that ~~it~~ ^{it} would ~~become~~ ^{become} part of a world he now de-
tests more bitterly than ever. ~~He~~ ^{He} will perish before he fulfills
that command and he knows it. His father's ghost has uttered ~~his~~ ^{his}
death ~~sentence~~ ^{warrant}. The rest of the play consists in Hamlet's vain ~~attempt~~ ^{attempt}

~~is~~ afraid of not being able to recover his ^{senses} ~~balance~~. Yet as soon as this wears off -- and ^{he gets it over} ~~he recovers~~ quickly -- an entirely different anxiety ^{overmasters him, he and} ~~determines~~ determines the use he is going to make of his discovery of his ^{beast for antics} ~~secretive~~. This new anxiety springs from ^{the} ~~fear~~ fear to be pushed to take action, ^{against his will, he} ~~Hamlet instantly turns towards~~ ~~secretive~~ lest he cease to be ^{free} ~~secretive~~. Let Marcellus, or Bernardo, ^{or} ~~perhaps even~~ Horatio, know of what happened, and the dread decision would ~~already~~ have fallen. Only as long as he alone knows of the ghost's revelation -- ^{later} ~~or~~ ~~may~~ Horatio, whom he learns to trust as his alter ego -- ~~Hamlet's~~ ~~is~~ Hamlet safe. With the end of the first act the battle for his

life ^{has begun.} ~~is~~. It has been often noticed that towards the end of the play Hamlet's assumed ^{gloom is lifting and his} ~~corange~~ corange becomes less obvious. For some unaccountable reason he ^{one would rather expect the opposite} ~~seems~~ more placid and composed. ^{his} ~~melancholy is lifting~~. How could it be other

^{yet how could it be otherwise?} ~~This~~ This constitutes one of the ^{chief} ~~most~~ beauties of the Play. ~~Hamlet~~ Hamlet who in the beginning ^{of the play he wished} ~~imagined~~ to die is now ^{ready} ~~ready~~ to go. ^{It has been also noticed by hundreds of critics} ~~that~~ ~~is~~ also why he ~~makes~~ ~~no~~ preparations to kill the King and yet ^{appears} ~~more~~ more and more certain that the hour of revenge is ^{approaching} ~~near~~. ^{How} ~~could~~ this be otherwise?

Hamlet ^{now welcomes} ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~more~~ ~~ready~~ ~~for~~ ~~death~~, not any more ^{for} ~~from~~ ~~an~~ ~~out~~ ~~of~~ ~~an~~ ~~abstract~~ ~~idea~~, which denies the meaning of life, but from ^{an} ~~an~~ a ~~real~~ recognition of ^{the true} ~~meaning~~, ~~which~~ ~~he~~ ~~has~~ ~~gained~~ through his own involvement in guilt and suffering. He strikes down the King, when he himself is already 'dead'; ^{and} ~~death~~ death comes to him ^{ripe} ~~when~~ when he is ~~ripe~~ for it. The accidents which seem to regulate the course of the play are ^{no more than} ~~semblance~~ semblance. Its progress is as clear ~~as~~ ~~Calvary~~ as Calvary. No wonder that the figure of Hamlet could be interpreted as that of a saint. And yet, no worse misunderstanding was conceivable. It is a pure tragedy, a story of guilt and ^{of this play} ~~expiation~~.

^{Ultimately} ~~For~~ For he who turns away from life is by that very action guilty. Hamlet is purified through suffering which comes to him as a retribution for his own deeds. ^{involves him} ~~We~~ ~~will~~ ~~try~~ ~~and~~ ~~analyze~~ ~~the~~ ~~part~~ ~~played~~ ~~by~~ ~~him~~. ~~His~~ ~~feigned~~ ~~madness~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~tragedy~~.

called forth from the

Prime Minister ~~the~~ the hackneyed diagnosis: 'Mad for thy love?' *And he*

~~has~~ nurtured Polonius' vile suspicions, ~~and~~ harping on his

daughter at every turn of their ambiguous conversations? And who *but*

Hamlet himself

confirmed the suspicions in the nunnery scene by his obscene insults

to Ophelia? *Who is* ~~she~~, but Hamlet the same?

At every turn of the screw Hamlet's suffering feeds on the ^{effects} ~~fruit~~
not he

of his own actions. *He has himself* ~~was~~ ~~himself~~ ~~plandering~~ Ophelia to her

father, was not he, himself, dragging her through the mire of court

intrigue? ~~Did not he himself~~ prompt the idea that she should be made

a *decoy* ~~the bait~~ in the ~~scene~~ ~~of~~ ~~carvedropping~~ in which he tortures her al-

most out of her wits, thus taking unjust *revenge* ~~revenge~~ on her for a role

which he himself had devised for her? And yet, it is in this scene

that Ophelia is most true to him: *He avenges her for* ~~in his indignation~~ ~~she~~ is prostitu-

ting herself, ~~and has become~~ ~~a spy of his vile enemies,~~ a worthy

ally of his debauched mother. While all the time Hamlet knows only too

well that he, he alone is to blame. That ~~all which~~ ^{what} appears to bear

out his accusations, ~~is~~ ~~is~~ in truth of his own doing, and

no better than a crime against ~~his~~ ~~pure~~ and beloved child.

~~Ophelia's position in the nunnery scene is but little under-~~

~~stood. She has been promised to marry Hamlet if she can restore him to~~

his normal self. Beauty and honour, love and marriage are for once in

concord. She loves Hamlet and knows not of the danger that threatens ~~him~~

He never confided his burden to her. Her task is to charm him back

to life and happiness, to exorcise the demons that are darkening

his spirit.

In the presence of her ^{no} father and ~~of~~ the King himself the Queen

said

to Ophelia:

Queen: 'And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours!

Ophelia: 'Madam, I wish, it may'.

And in Act IV she says at Ophelia's grave, ^{ignorant} not knowing of Hamlet's presence

'I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave.'

In the nunnery scene the ^{ignorant} Ophelia is met by the knowing Hamlet. He winces at the thought that Ophelia ^{has been} 'let loose' to seduce him -- turn him from allegiance to his dead father, from the path of honour, and honesty, ^{relying} on her feminine attractions.

His behaviour is as much to the point as it is ^{unfair} to Ophelia:

- H.: 'Ha, ha are you honest?
- O.: My lord?
- H.: Are you fair?
- O.: What means your lordship?
- H.: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.
- O.: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?
- H.: 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; this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof ~~and it is~~

^{in his scene} Hamlet alone knows that he must choose between love and honour; that to turn ^{back} for Ophelia's sake from ^{the} his course of duty would dishonour ^{them both. True, he goes to his words} him and her. He says this with a twist re-vengeful of Polonius and Laertes' low suspicions and resentful of Ophelia's ^{feminine} mission. But in the matter itself he is clear and concise. If Ophelia ^{(who is returning his tokens) appealed} to his honour, and ^{to} make him marry her, she would ^{try} merely appeal ^{ing} to his lust, and deprave him; ^{attempted to} if she follow ^{ed} him in the path of honour, she would have to sacrifice their love. ~~That all ever happen.~~ She should go to a nunnery -- ^{punish} also slang for brothel ^{for} that is where she belonged. ^{Had} she not give proof of ^{it} ~~her~~ by ^{offering} ~~her~~ ^{parental} in the secret presence of an adulterous murderer and a bawd?

Yet every particle of this is ^{own work.} Hamlet's. Presently he will insult her ~~in~~ in the presence of the Court and, even worse, use her as a smoke-screen in his hunt for the murderer. ^{Eventually,} he will ~~kill~~ kill her father, whom she adores. By the time Ophelia drowns herself Hamlet has deserved more than one death. Inwardly, he must have died a hundred deaths.

But how could the mere delaying of revenge, which is the matter of the plot heap such mountains of guilt upon Hamlet's head? Hamlet's feigned madness is the answer. ~~It~~ ^{From out of his sinful contempt of life it} breeds guilt. It tempts him into using not only his enemies but also his friends as tools; it traps him into ~~committing~~ ^{committing} by making insincerity appear as a duty. It confuses him about himself to the point of making him a riddle to himself. ~~But~~ ^{But after} his public confession of his love ~~for~~ ^{for} Ophelia at her grave, he plays the fool no more. He is preparing for the end. There is only a short interim ^{before} ~~with~~ the news from England of ~~Hamlet's~~ ^{the two conferees'} death must arrive. Hamlet's ~~serene~~ ^{serene} composure in this last part of the play is of ~~an~~ ^{exquisite} beauty. Ready to die, there is no reason ~~why~~ ^{any more} ~~he~~ ^{proves} must to kill the King, that he no more utters the wish to die, ~~how~~ ^{how} great ~~is~~ ^{is} the difference between the Hamlet of the first and the last Act of the play. Then he ~~only~~ ^{only} ~~imagined~~ ^{imagined} he ~~longed~~ ^{longed} spoke of it often; ~~now~~ ^{now} he wants to die and keeps silent, in his quiet readiness. It is the King ^{actually} whose hours are now counted.

III.

So much about the contents of this play which has no less a subject than life and death. Hamlet is in the last Act as near to committing suicide as ~~any~~ ^{any} play allows which is about suicide. This is ~~no~~ ^{no} paradox. Othello is about jealousy, Romeo and Juliet is about love; if their heroes commit suicide, it is out of jealousy or love, not out of a wish for suicide. The ~~only~~ ^{longing for death} ~~passion~~ ^{passion} is the only passion that is undramatic ~~since~~ ^{since} ~~one~~ ^{one} ~~can~~ ^{can} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~sufficiently~~ ^{sufficiently} ~~inter-~~

~~ted~~ ^{it} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~business~~ ^{business} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~watch~~ ^{watch} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~vanities~~ ^{vanities} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~his~~ ^{his} ~~own~~ ^{own} ~~existence~~ ^{existence} ~~if~~ ^{if} ~~it~~ ^{it} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~hands~~ ^{hands} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~manager~~ ^{manager} ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~actor~~ ^{actor} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~able~~ ^{able} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~spoil~~ ^{spoil} ~~it~~ ^{it}. ~~There~~ ^{There} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~nothing~~ ^{nothing} ~~more~~ ^{more} ~~puzzling~~ ^{puzzling} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~whole~~ ^{whole} ~~realm~~ ^{realm} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~drama~~ ^{drama} ~~than~~ ^{than} ~~this~~ ^{this}. ~~There~~ ^{There} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~nothing~~ ^{nothing} ~~more~~ ^{more} ~~puzzling~~ ^{puzzling} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~whole~~ ^{whole} ~~realm~~ ^{realm} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~drama~~ ^{drama} ~~than~~ ^{than} ~~this~~ ^{this}. ~~There~~ ^{There} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~nothing~~ ^{nothing} ~~more~~ 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'To be, or not to be; that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die, - to sleep,
No more....'

Some of it is amazing

Much has been written about this monologue. Bradley, the greatest of all critics of Shakespeare's plays, ~~came to the conclusion~~ ^{thought} that the soliloquy was rather irrelevant since it ~~did not~~ did not refer to the action itself. Hamlet was philosophising about life and death... ~~Bradley says~~ 'In this soliloquy Hamlet is not thinking of the duty laid upon him at all. He is debating the question of suicide.' Hamlet proceeds to discuss man's possible fortune in another life. 'And then, generalising, he says, (what applies to himself, no doubt, though he shows no consciousness of the fact) that such speculation or reflection makes men hesitate and shrink like cowards from great actions and enterprises' (p. 98, footnote). Bradley ~~took~~ ^{took} regarded this ~~as~~ ^{to be} a proof that Hamlet had by this time forgotten about his sacred promise. 'His reflections have no reference to this particular moment.' 'What can be more significant than the fact, that he is sunk in these reflections (on suicide) on the very day which is to determine for him the truthfulness of the Ghost?' (p. 132). Bradley had ~~come to the~~ ^{actually} ~~unmistakable~~ conclusion that the great soliloquy was of no dramatic importance.

Millions of people have listened to that monologue and did not think so. Hosts of actors have spoken it and they, also, did not feel so. On the contrary, they ~~all~~ ^{were convinced} ~~felt~~, that in some unaccountable ^{fashion} ~~way~~ the very heart of the play is throbbing there.

They were emphatically right. 'To be or not to be' is about ~~the problem of the play~~ ^{the problem} ~~of the play~~. But suicide is just ~~an~~ ^{an} ~~impossible~~ ^{is} ~~subject~~ ^{subject} for a drama as inaction ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~unsuitable~~ ^{is} as a plot. The mystery of the successful play thickens.

Bradley was, of course, wrong. Those five lines give ~~away~~ ^{must} away the secret. ~~The audience~~ ^{she} assumes that the hero ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~weighing~~ ^{weighing} the alternative at a moment of high dramatic tension is weighing the alternative on which the play hinges: killing the King or not? 'To be' ~~means~~ ^S ~~to live and kill the King~~; 'Not to be'

means not to kill the King. Yet Hamlet describes 'to be' as *passive*,
 suffering ~~with the sword~~, not killing him as armed action and
 forcible opposition. Almost without exception critics bolted at
 this point and did not follow up the implications. These must appear
~~indeed~~ most confusing until one remembers that Hamlet has turned
 away from life, of which he can now only think in terms of resignation
 and passivity. (Even if passivity ~~happened~~ happen to include a
 number of so-called actions as killing the King, marrying Ophelia,
 ruling the country, and so on. ^{For the} only action worthy of the name
 falls under the heading 'Not to be'. One can perform it with a
 bare bodkin. Were it not that

'...conscience does make cowards of us all,
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pith and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry
 And lose the name of action.'

With the thought of action this soliloquy opens and
 closes. ~~Dowd~~ ^{as the said} says. ~~It, actually, it deals solely of suicide.~~
 You can call those lines confused, but in ~~them~~ ^{that strong current} you have the
 dramatic truth of the play.

It deals with suicide in terms of killing an enemy. It deals
 with delay in terms of ~~procrastination~~ ^{thickening} action. Hamlet who feigned mad-
 ness in order to gain time is endangered by the effects of his
 stratagem and thus forces to take action. By delaying the killing of
 the King ~~that~~ ^{he} is prolonging his own life. By stabbing Polonius
 instead of the King, Hamlet fails to free himself from his predicament.
 And yet when we feel that his end is approaching, we rightly
 believe that the day of reckoning has come for the King. The whole of
~~Hamlet's~~ inner conflict, his hovering on the confines of life and
 death, is thus translated into external events, into sharply accentuated
 dramatic action.

All through the play external events are hardly more than a ~~mere~~
 reflection or a confirmation of what Hamlet knows by inward evidence.
 He is a genius who can play on the human soul as Rosencrantz and
 Guildenstern would have liked to play on him. He foresees Ophelia's
 report to her father; he is conscious of the eavesdroppers in the nunnery
 scene; he is on the track of the spying courtiers, he guesses

their mission, he justly appraises the purpose of the fencing match, he correctly instructs the players, and with the one exception of Polonius behind the arras, whom he mistakes for the King, Hamlet is as a person endowed with double sight.

Four times in the play Hamlet's premonitions are translated into reality. He sees his father's figure 'in his mind's eye' even before he is told of the appearance of the ghost; he doubts 'some foul play' before the ghost reveals it to him; his prophetic soul guessed his uncle's guilt, as he knew that the end was coming before it had actually come. You will excuse me for reminding you ^{the divine} of the passage:

Hamlet : I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter.

Horatio: Nay, my good lord, --

Hamlet : It is but foolery; but it is such gaingiving as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Horatio: If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

Hamlet : Not a whit; we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. 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 one knows of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?

~~the~~ ^{the} From the tragic point of view: Hamlet parts willingly

from life; he commits suicide. But dramatically he does not. He is murdered, and, the certainty of his own death releases him to do his duty.

~~as in Lear, Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear~~ with the first Act the tragedy is set. Lear in his vanity and folly has thrown himself on the generosity ^{- the rest of the play fulfills his} of his heartless daughters; then he

~~fulfills his~~ fate. The Moor's conquest of Desdemona was a triumph ^{the} of ~~the~~ ^{the} spirit over disparity of age and race which ~~was~~ ^{can}

never stand the test of ~~the~~ brute passion; Othello goes to his doom. ~~Hamlet~~ In Macbeth the weird sisters ~~draw~~ ^{and} the circle of tragedy around the hero and his ambition; the ~~end~~ follows as by

geometrical necessity. Similarly in Hamlet. ~~Here also~~ The opening Act of ~~the play~~ contains the tragedy in nuce. His mother's shame has robbed Hamlet of the faculty to live. When his father's ~~mad~~ ^{mad} command reaches him, ~~Hamlet's~~ ^{his} fate is sealed. ~~The first Act~~ ^{Instead of} does not end with 'And now to my revenge!' ~~but~~ ^{Hamlet's words are:} 'The time is out of joint, Oh cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right!' ~~Before the curtain falls on the first Act,~~ ^{second Act begins, it} this has been decreed: ~~Hamlet~~ ^{But} will lose his life while trying to save it by feigning to be mad.

Hamlet

If an English reader should suspect that a man must come from afar indeed to have hit upon that most outworn of all subjects, "Hamlet," that reader's surmise will be correct.

I was serving as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army some thirty years ago and the Russian winter and the blackish-yellow steppe made me feel sick at heart. In my desolation I had for companion a volume of Shakespeare's plays. I found myself reading and re-reading one of them: "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." Altogether I must have read it over some three dozen times. My personal life had taken a turn towards darkness. Daylight seemed bounded in a narrowing disc which was growing dimmer and dimmer. I remember at one time the cold was so intense that when my horse stumbled and fell, I was too apathetic to get out of the saddle. Fortunately - though I myself might not have thought so - the giant stiff creature, a Cossack mare we had picked up, jerked herself onto her long legs and I was saved, for had she rolled over I should have been crushed. At that period of my existence my soul was numbed and fell under the spell of a recurrent day-dream. I read my "Hamlet" and every word, phrase and intonation of its blank verse seemed plain and clear to me.

For many years the memory of these bleak months haunted me. I could not rid myself of the idea that by some weird chance I had possessed myself of Hamlet's secret. I knew why he did not kill the King. I knew what it was he feared. I knew why he so swiftly ran Polonius through the body when he mistook him for the

King pretending he was only chasing a rat. I knew what his confused words to Ophelia meant. But even while I still felt I knew, I was already fast forgetting. My days were clearing up and, as light broke in, knowledge passed into shadowy recollection, which in its turn faded into a mere intellectual understanding. I was now happy and could only faintly remember what had once formed part of my being: Hamlet's inhuman sufferings. Yet something in me insisted that my theories on Hamlet's indecision and feigned madness were not merely the morbid offspring of my late melody.

However, I merely propose to recount my reaction to the opinion of that great English critic, Andrew Cecil Bradley, whose views on Hamlet's character, when I came across them, struck me by their resemblance to my own. But Bradley had stopped short of the solution.

Hamlet's inaction, so Bradley thought, was to be explained by the influence of a profound melancholy. He is shocked by his mother's gross sensuality into utter disgust of life. It is in this frame of mind that the revelation of his father's murder and the command of revenge reaches him. His mind is poisoned and paralysed, hence his endless hesitations. The other components of his character - intellectual genius, moral sensibility, temperamental instability - were either cause or expression of this melancholy. It alone accounts for the course of the play if taken together with the periods of normal behavior during which Hamlet's "healthy impulses", those remnants of a virile personality, break forth.

In this picture I recognized my Hamlet. At the same time, I knew that Bradley had not unlocked the double secret of Hamlet, the person and the play. For at the heart of it all, there is inaction which the here cannot justify and for which nothing seems to him to account satisfactorily. But there is also the riddle of how a successful play could ever have been staged about inaction. As one would expect, one key served both locks.

I.

Hamlet's melancholy seems at first to offer a full and satisfactory explanation, both of his dilatory behavior and of his own lack of comprehension of himself. The play shows him in a state of deep dejection in which he is averse to any kind of action. Hitchcock is the Russian for it. It finds its medium of expression in mechanical answers, a sort of back-chat; sometimes he repeats the words of the speaker without irony or wit, like a man too benumbed to consider what he is saying. And yet "this allegedly flower like youth", Bradley said, "rages through the major part of the play, murdering and destroying human lives, ruthless, fierce, a terror to the Court." And as Bowden remarked of the extreme impulsiveness of this peculiar dreamer, "he suddenly conceives of the possibility of unmasking the King's guilt on the accidental arrival of the players, and proceeds without delay to put the matter to the test, suddenly overwhelms Ophelia with his reproaches of womanhood, suddenly stabs the eavesdropper behind the arras, suddenly as if under some irresistible inspiration, sends his companions on shipboard to

their deaths, suddenly boards the pirates, suddenly grapples with Laertes in the grave, suddenly does execution on the guilty King, plucks the poison from Horatio's hands and gives his dying voice to a successor to the throne." Yet in his lucida intervalla Hamlet is unable to understand the paralyzing pressure which his melancholy exerts on him at other times. This accounts for his inability to find a good reason for his inaction.

But why then, we cannot help asking ourselves, do the healthy impulses arise so frequently as to make Hamlet into a person of almost terrible ruthlessness and yet prevent him from doing the deed which he has sworn the spirit of his father to do? Having caused without remorse the deaths of at least four persons in the King's entourage, why does he still seem to have come no nearer to the performance of his supreme duty? Why does the "veil of melancholy" never lift when he has an opportunity to take his revenge on the King? Is this a mere coincidence? The audience seems to think it is not so, otherwise it would lose interest. There must be some hidden reason for Hamlet's hesitation to perform the required act, a reason which Hamlet himself cannot fathom and which perhaps will be revealed only through his own death.

But there is more to it than this. Hamlet's spurts of action and inaction are no freaks of a temperament which alternate between feverish exploits and slothful lethargy. He often does one thing instead of another. He not only refrains from slaughtering the

King in the prayer scene, but also slays Polonius mistaking him for the King, coldbloodedly shouting "a rat". Yet he could not have been too melancholy to make a thrust at the King and still be sufficiently healthy to stab Polonius. "Healthy impulse" could not have intervened at once too late to make him act rightly and yet in time to make him act wrongly. Paralysis of will power should not prevent a man from acting in one way but leave him uninhibited to act eagerly in another. On the other hand, in the last act Hamlet, having made no preparations to destroy the King, kills him on the instant. He thus performs with zest a number of actions except the one required of him, and then suddenly does the deed without any sign of hesitation. The riddle of the delay in killing the King still stares us in the face.

Bradley missed the answer by a hair's breadth. He adduced instances of Hamlet's proneness to action and added, "he acts in these cases since it is not the one hateful action on which his morbid self-feeling had centered." He meant, of course, the killing of Claudius. Unfortunately, he did not follow up the clue.

The truth is that Hamlet does not kill his uncle, because through the force of circumstances and by reason of his character his averseness to live has become centered on this "one hateful action". While continuing to live he is unable to decide for life. He can live only as long as he is not forced to resolve to do so. Challenged to take a decision, it would be his undoing, since he could not deliberately choose life. This, in terms of drama, is the purport of Hamlet's melancholy.

We should not take Hamlet's professions of wishing to die ~~to be~~ in the letter; they are only the expressions of a mood. He does not want to die, he merely hates to live. A hero who stubbornly insisted on dying would be insupportable. There would be no conflict to follow, no play to watch; for who would care to prevent him from having his way? Hamlet's elaborations on the theme "I wish I were dead" simply mean that he would refuse to settle down to the job of life, should such a decision have to be taken by him. But most of us never have to make such a decision. Hamlet is, like all of us, prepared to fight for his life, and maybe all the more bravely because he does not set it "at a pin's fee".

Here lie the deepest roots of the delay.

Hamlet is out of time with life, but only the appearance of the ghost starts the tragedy. He merely wished to withdraw from the Court and retire to Wittenberg, though at his mother's entreaties (and perhaps for Ophelia's sake) he postponed his departure. Now his father's ghost commands him to kill the King. Fate is pushing him towards a decision; his fate is to be taken out of his hands. To obey would involve all that life involves. He is to become King himself, perhaps with Ophelia for his queen, the princely ruler of the Court of Elsinore, a radiant sun amongst a host of Rosencranzes and Guildensternes. Hamlet knows in his bones that he will not comply. His refusal to "set the world right" springs from his dread of becoming part of a world he now detests more bitterly than ever. The ghost has uttered

his death sentence. He will perish before he fulfills that command and he knows it. This, in a sense, is Hamlet's most personal secret.

The killing of the King, "oh cursed spite", now stands for the decision to live. This action, on which his morbid self-feeling centers, he cannot perform; not the mechanical act itself - that is different - but the act of filial duty enjoined upon him by his father's tearful command, involving him in a fatal sequence of obligations, a deed that would plunge him into the maelstrom of life. Hamlet could kill the King secretly by mistake, off the record, under the cover of an alibi, by a disowned gesture, under the pretence of chance, by some emphatically unsymbolic act - or when the end was secured and he himself was already doomed to die, but not as a conscious meaningful act, as long as he is alive.

Actually, he attempts both - to do it, pretending it is unintentional and to do it, when this can no more affect his own fate. He stabs Polonius in a trice, when he mistakes him for his better, while instinctively denying any deliberate purpose in the very act. And, even more decisively at the end, when he almost exultantly repeats three times his "I am dead", and the sceptical dresser becomes Voltaire's butcher boy, whose slaughters are no more than mechanical actions, signifying nothing, since he, Hamlet, is now securely dead.

II.

Hamlet's feigned madness was, I suspect, the vortex

attracting me in my melody. I mean the role of his pretended fancies in the fulfilment of his tragedy. His antics are the instrument of his doom.

Hamlet's excited doings after the encounter with the ghost are a mere sham of his melancholy. He is moving away with all his being from the Court, from convention, from all that which "seems", when fate arrests his flight and hurls him back into the center of damnation. He almost loses his senses for sheer horror of the apparition and fears that he will not be able to recover them. As soon as the fit wears off - and he gets over it quickly - a definite concern overmasters him and determines the use he will make of his discovery of his bent for antics. This anxiety springs from the fear of being pushed to action against his will. His first reaction is to turn secretive, so as to remain free. This is not an act of political caution; by confiding the secret of his feigned madness to them, he proves that he trusts his friends implicitly. But should they but learn of what happened between him and the ghost, and the dread decision could no longer be deferred. Only if he alone knows of the awful revelation - later maybe Horatio, his alter ego - is he, Hamlet, safe. In delaying the decision, Hamlet is fighting for his life. Feigned madness was his most personal response to this situation. The whole rhythm of the tragedy is set by this.

It has been noted that towards the end of the play Hamlet's gloom is lifting and the assumed derangement fades away. For some unaccountable reason - one would rather expect the opposite -

he now appears more placid and composed. This anticlimax is one of the chief beauties of the play. Yet how could it be otherwise? Hamlet who at the beginning of the play imagined that he wished to die, is now ready to go. He makes no preparations to kill the King and yet seems certain that the hour of revenge is approaching. Yet again, how could this be otherwise? He now welcomes death not any more from a confusion of moods which denies the meaning of life, but from a recognition of its true meaning. He strikes down the King, when he himself is "dead" and death come to him when he is ripe for it. The accidents which appear to control the course of the play are a mere semblance; its progress is as plain as Calvary. No wonder that the figure of Hamlet could be interpreted as that of a saint, and yet, no worse misunderstanding is conceivable. It is true tragedy, the story of guilt and expiation. And it is his feigned madness, chosen by him as a tool of his just revenge, which involves Hamlet deeper and deeper in guilt.

Hamlet staged his antics with deadly precision and with a grim sense of humour. The "cumb scene" sends Ophelia crying into her father's arms, her father rushes post-haste to the King, the King decides to set a trap with Ophelia herself as bait. Hamlet now excels in feats of romantic irony. He sets them the riddle: what is the cause of his own madness? Hamlet knows his crew and make them guess true to character. Polonius, that pompous vacuity, displays all the self-assurance of his wordy cynicism; Hamlet thwarted in seducing Ophelia has gone mad. The Queen, somewhat nearer the truth, is made to feel the guilt of her overhasty marriage. The King alone is on a par with

Hamlet and refuses to be duped by his feiled lover's frenzies. He sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, arranges for the trap, orders Hamlet to be put under guard, dispatches him to England, sets Laertes on his trail and conceals the murder plot. But for him, they are all Hamlet's puppets. Hamlet at first enjoys his cruel superiority; the chastisement of that solemn mediocrity, Polonius, the self-debasement of those fawning gigglers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, even the anguish of the King caused by Hamlet's ominous conversational flashes. Eventually, Hamlet, playing the madman, stages a play in the play, the effects of which on the King send him into transports of joy. And yet, all the time his helpless self is more and more ensnared in guilt. In spite of his glamorous antic he knows, in his most sensitive heart, that he has lost his way.

Hamlet's tragedy is ensnared in his love for Ophelia, whom he has sacrificed. "I loved Ophelia", he cries at her grave when all is over. It is the turning point of Hamlet's drama. Up to this time external events failed to penetrate the shroud of his melancholy. His inner isolation was complete. Suddenly in a flash of pain, it happens. Listen to his ranting and to his awakening when he knows himself:

Hamlet: "...What is he, whose grief
Bears such an emphasis? Whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? - This is I,
Hamlet the Dane!"

(He leaps into the grave.)

His love for Ophelia was pure and ardent. Hamlet is driven

to the point of platonic frenzy by his mother's sexual debasement, which has tarred Ophelia with the same brush. But not even his mother is beyond redemption, terribly though she has sinned, how much less the innocent Ophelia who he must feel is merely a victim of his imaginations! His love for her lies like a chasm between him and the others. He knows the patric atmosphere of the Court. He knows his Laertes, the youthful lecher who is depraving his own sister's mind. He knows his crafty Polonius, who inculcates vile suspicions into her confiding soul. He knows his Rosencranz and Guildenstern whose horizon is bounded by lasciviousness. He knows his King and Queen who set their hopes on Ophelia's physical charms which shall tempt him to become untrue to his mission. He hates them for their calumny of all that is most truly noble. Not one but debased Ophelia's love for him and his for her into a political counter, speculating on what there was of weakness in either.

He hates and despises them, yet of all men he, Hamlet, has the least right to do so. For who else but he himself had conceived of the idea of using Ophelia's feelings for political ends? Who fooled her in the garb of the distracted lover, so grossly conventional in his disordered attire, that the mere recounting of the scene called forth from the Prime Minister the hackneyed diagnosis "Mad for thy love"? And who fed Polonius' suspicions, harping on his daughter at every turn of their ambiguous dialogue? and who confirmed those suspicions in the nunnery scene by his insults to Ophelia? Who but he, Hamlet the Dane?

At every turn of the screw Hamlet's sufferings feed on the effect of his own actions. Was he not slandering Ophelia to her father? Tainting himself with the virus he leached, dragging her through the mire of court intrigue, prompting the King to make her a decoy in the eavesdropping scene, in which he takes unjust revenge on her for playing the very role he devised for her? Yet it is in this scene that Ophelia is most true to him. She is wronged by him, as Cordelia, whom she resembles, is wronged by her complacently ever-generous father. Hamlet arraigns her for prostituting herself, a worthy ally of his debauched mother, while all the time he knows only too well that he alone is to blame. What seems to bear out his accusations is in truth of his own doing, and no better than a crime against this pure and beloved child.

Ophelia has been promised that she shall marry Hamlet if she restores him to his normal self. Beauty and honor, love and marriage, are for once in concord. She loves Hamlet and knows not of the danger that threatens him. He never confided his burden to her. Her task is to charm him back to life and happiness, to exorcise the demons that are darkening his spirit. What role could be more appropriate to her selfless devotion?

In the presence of her own father and of the King himself the Queen had said to Ophelia:

Queen: "And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honors!

Ophelia: Madam, I wish it may."

And later at Ophelia's grave she says, ignorant of Hamlet's presence:

Queen: "I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
and not have strew'd thy grave."

In the nunnery scene Ophelia, who knows nothing, is met by Hamlet, who knows everything. He winces at the thought that Ophelia has been "let loose" upon him to seduce him from the allegiance to his dead father and turn him away from the path of honor and honesty. His words are as much to the point as they are unfair to Ophelia:

Hamlet: "Ha, ha are you honest?"

Ophelia: My lord?

H Are you fair?

O What means your lordship?

H That if you be honest and fair, your honesty
should admit no discourse to your beauty.

O Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce
than with honesty?

H Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner
transfer honesty from what it is to a bad
than the force of honesty can translate beauty
into his likeness; this was sometime a paradox,
but now the time gives it proof."

Hamlet knows that for him to turn back for Ophelia's sake from the course of duty would dishonor them both. True, resentful at the role cast for Ophelia, and desirous of revenge for Polonius' and Laertes' low aspersions, he gives a twist to his words. But on the matter itself, he is clear and concise. If Ophelia (who is offering to return his tokens) were to try and make him marry her, she would be merely depraving him; if, on the contrary, she were to attempt to follow him in the path of honor, she would have to sacrifice their love. She should go to a nunnery - also slang for brothel - for that is where she

belongs. Has she not given proof of it by offering herself in the secret presence of an adulterous murderer and a parental band?

Yet all this is Hamlet's own work. Presently he will insult her in the presence of the Court and use her as a smoke-screen in his hunt for the murderer. Eventually, he will kill her father, whom she adores. By the time Ophelia drowns herself, Hamlet has deserved more than one death. Inwardly, he must have died a hundred.

But why did the mere delaying of revenge involve Hamlet in such monstrous guilt? His feigned madness is the answer. Born of hatred of life and a wish to delay the doing of his duty, it breeds guilt. It must tempt him into using not only his enemies but also his friends as tools; it traps him into cowardly evasions and makes insincerity appear as an obligation. It confuses him and makes him a riddle unto himself.

But after that public confession of his love for Ophelia, he plays the fool no more. He is preparing for the end. There is but a short "interim" before the news from England must come of the death of the King's agents. Hamlet's composure in the last part of the play is of supreme beauty. Reconciled to death he need no longer hesitate to kill the King. He now utters no wish to die which shows the difference between the Hamlet of the first and of the last act. Then he only imagined that he longed for death and spoke of it often; now he wants to die and keeps silent in quiet readiness. It is the King whose hours are numbered.

III.

So much for the contents of this play which has no less a subject than refusal to live. But that precisely is why its theatrical success is a puzzle. Longing for death is the only passion that is undramatic. And yet "Hamlet" if anything, is a good play. No manager, no actor is able to spoil it. Where to seek for a solution of this riddle?

Everybody knows the history of the purloined letter which was left in full view on the table where no one would think of looking for it. May I quote a passage which, one would assume, is too well known to hide a secret. (I still remember the day, more than thirty years ago, when it first struck me.)

"To be, or not to be; that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
and by opposing end them? To die, - to sleep-
No more"

Much has been written about this monologue. Some of it is amazing. "In this soliloquy", Bradley said, "Hamlet is not thinking of the duty laid upon him at all. He is debating the question of suicide." Hamlet, he thought had by this time forgotten his sacred promise. "What can be more significant than the fact that he is sunk in these reflections (on suicide) on the very day which is to determine for him the truthfulness of the Ghost?" And so Bradley, like some others before him, came to the conclusion that the great soliloquy was of no dramatic importance.

Millions of people have listened to it and did not feel so. Nor did the hosts of actors who spoke it. They were all convinced that in some unaccountable fashion the very heart of the play was throbbing there.

They were right, of course, since "To be or not to be" is about suicide, the problem of the play. But the mystery of the successful play only deepens, for suicide is as impensable as the subject of a drama as inaction is unsuitable for a plot.

Yet these five lines give away the secret of the stage success. "To be or not to be, that is the question." A clear cut alternative stated by the hero at a moment of high dramatic tension. The hero must be weighing the alternative on which the play hinges: killing the King or not? Yet Hamlet refers to the first as passivity, to the second as armed action and feasible condition! This sounds absurd and most critics bolted instead of following up the implications of the seeming paradox: Hamlet has turned away from life, of which he can think only in terms of passivity, even if this happens to involve a number of so-called actions such as killing the King, marrying Ophelia, ruling the country and so on. For the one and only true action falls under the heading of "Not to be". One can perform it with a bare backin, were it not that

".....conscience does make cowards of us all,
and thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
and enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
and lose the name of action."

With the thought of action the soliloquy opens and ends. Yet it deals solely with suicide. In this apparent confusion you

have the dramatic truth of the play. The alternative is killing the King or killing himself. Inward and outward are bridged by Hamlet's visionary gifts. He sees his father's figure "in his mind's eye" even before he is told of the appearance of the ghost; he doubts "some foul play" before the ghost reveals it to him. His prophetic soul guessed his uncle's guilt. He foresees Ophelia's report to her father; he is conscious of the eavesdroppers in the nunnery scene; he is on the track of the spying courtiers; he guesses their mission; he justly apprises the purpose of the fencing match; he correctly instructs the players; and with the one exception of Polonius behind the arras, whom he mistakes for the King, he is as a person endowed with double sight.

Until the very end his premonitions are translated into reality:

Hamlet: "I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter."

Horatio: Nay, my good lord . . .

Hamlet: It is but foolery; but it is such gaining as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Horatio: If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

Hamlet: Set a whit; we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. 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 one knows of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"

From the tragic point of view, Hamlet parts willingly from life; he commits suicide. Dramatically he does not. He is murdered and the certainty of his own death releases him to do his duty.

As in Lear, Othello or Macbeth, with the first act the tragedy is set. Lear in his vanity and folly has thrown himself on the generosity of his heartless daughters - in the rest of the play he fulfills his fate. The Moor's conquest of Desdemona was a triumph of spirit over disparity of age and race which can never stand the test of brute passion; Othello goes to his doom. In Macbeth the weird sisters draw the circle of tragedy around the hero and his notorious ambition; the end follows as by geometrical necessity. Similarly, as I see it, in "Hamlet". The opening act contains the tragedy in micro. When his father's command reaches him, Hamlet's fate is sealed. Instead of "Now to my revenge", his words are: "The time is out of joint, oh cursed spite that ever I was born to put it right!" Before the curtain rises on the second act, it has been decreed that Hamlet will lose his life while delaying action by feigning to be mad.

We need not go far to understand why Hamlet is a good play. Hamlet's whole inner conflict, his hovering on the confines of life and death, is translated here into external events, into sharply accentuated dramatic action. This play is about suicide in terms of killing an enemy; it is about endless delay in terms of incessant action.

The plot is extremely clever. Some Dramaticus' Hamlet pretended madness in order to prepare for his revenge on the King. Shakespeare's Hamlet, on the contrary, seeks instruments of delay. This is the true function of his madness in the plot. But for his feigned madness, Hamlet could not have put off his decision without a clash with his friends and supporters. This would have dragged

his own inner conflict to light and been artistically fatal. For a Hamlet who refused to obey the behest of the ghost or deliberately hesitated to act when pressed by his friends, would lose the sympathy of the audience, just as he would lose their admiration if he were defeated in his quest for revenge by King and Court. As matters are, Hamlet himself is the only obstacle both to the decision to take revenge on the King and to the carrying out of that decision. This raises the play to the highest level of universality in terms of inner life, while spelling it out through Shakespeare's art into blood, fire and brimstone. Small wonder that it makes a good play!

"Hamlet" is about the human condition. We all live and refuse to die, but we are not decided to live and be happy in all the essential respects in which life invites us. To some extent we are delaying happiness and putting off life, because we fear to commit ourselves to live. This makes the hero's delay so symbolic. Life is man's missed opportunity. Yet Hamlet's life fulfills itself, for readiness to die is readiness to live.

3 copies
HAMLET

Hamlet

If the ~~English~~ reader should suspect that a man ^{have} ~~came~~ from afar ~~in~~ to ~~reach~~ upon that most outworn of all subjects, "Hamlet," that reader's ^{would} ~~suspect~~ ~~is~~ ~~be~~ correct.

I was serving as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army ^{forty} ~~some~~ years ago. The Russian winter and the blackish-yellow steppes made me feel sick at heart. In my desolation I had for company a volume of Shakespeare's plays. I found myself reading and re-reading one of them; "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." Altogether I must have read it over some three dozen times. My personal life had taken a turn towards darkness. Daylight seemed bounded in a narrowing disc which was growing dimmer and dimmer. I remember at one time the cold was so intense that when my horse stabled and fell, I was too apathetic to get out of the saddle. Fortunately - though I myself might not have thought so - ^{at the time} the ~~most~~ stiff creature, a Cossack ^{that} ~~she~~ ~~had~~ ~~picked~~ ~~up~~, jerked herself onto her long legs and I was saved, for had she rolled ^{as she would have} ~~over~~, I would have been ^{crushed by} ~~crushed~~ ~~by~~ ~~death~~. ^{at that period of my existence my soul was numbed and} ~~fell~~ ~~under~~ ~~the~~ ~~spell~~ ~~of~~ ~~a~~ ~~recurrent~~ ~~day-dream~~. I read my "Hamlet" and every word, phrase and intonation of its black verse seemed plain and clear to me.

For many years the mystery of those black months haunted me. I could not rid myself of the idea that by some weird chance I had possessed myself of Hamlet's secret. I knew why he did not kill the King. I knew what it was he feared. I knew why he so swiftly ran Polonius through the body when he mistook him for the

huge

crushed by death

King pretending he was only chasing a rat. I knew what his confused words to Ophelia meant. But even while I still felt I knew, I was already fast forgetting. My days were clearing up and, as light broke in, knowledge passed into shadowy recollection; ^{This} ~~which~~ in its turn faded into a mere intellectual understanding. I was now happy ^{again} and could only faintly remember what had once formed part of my being: Hamlet's inhuman sufferings. Yet something in me insisted that my theories on Hamlet's indecision and feigned madness were not merely the morbid offspring of my late malady.

However, I merely propose to recount ^{here} my reaction to the opinion ^{of the} ~~of the~~ great ~~critic~~ Andrew Cecil Bradley, whose views on Hamlet's character, when I came across them, struck me by their resemblance to my own. But Bradley ~~was~~ ^{just} stopped short of the solution. ^{Who was on the right hand?}

Hamlet's inaction, as ^{he} ~~was~~ thought, was to be explained by the influence of a profound melancholy. He is shocked by his mother's gross sensuality into utter disgust of life. It is in this frame of mind that the revelation of his father's murder and the command of revenge reaches him. His mind is poisoned and paralysed, hence his endless hesitations. The other components of his character - intellectual genius, moral sensibility, temperamental instability - were either cause or expression of this melancholy. It alone accounts for the course of the play if taken together with the periods of normal behavior during which Hamlet's "healthy impulses", those remnants of a virile personality, break forth.

In this picture I recognized my Hamlet. At the same time, I knew that Bradley had not ~~mastered~~ ^{mastered} the double secret of Hamlet, ~~that of "Hamlet's"~~ ^{the character} the person and the play. ~~At~~ ^{At} the heart of ~~the~~ ^{the} there is inaction which the hero cannot justify and for which nothing seems to him to account ^{for} satisfactorily. ~~And~~ ^{And} there is also the riddle of how a successful play could ever have been staged about inaction. ~~Let me~~ ^{Let me}

put this in a reasoned way.

The key to the riddle, clearly, would have to fit both locks.

At the first glance

Hamlet's melancholy seems ~~unwilling~~ ^{unwilling} to offer ~~any~~ ^{any} explanation both of his dilatory behavior and of his own lack of comprehension of himself. The play shows him in a state of deep dejection in which he is averse to any kind of action. Hitchcock is the Russian for it. ~~He indulges in~~ ^{He indulges in} ~~of expression in~~ ^{trivial} mechanical answers; a sort of back-chat; sometimes he repeats ^{ing} ~~the words of the~~ ^{words} speakers without irony or wit, like a man too benumbed to consider what he is saying. and yet

"this allegedly flower-like youth", Bradley said, "rages through the major part of the play, murdering and destroying human lives, ruthless, fierce, a terror to the court," ~~as Dowden remarked~~ ^{as Dowden remarked} ~~of the extreme ingenuity of this~~ ^{almost paralyzed and} ~~suddenly conceives of the possibility of unmasking the King's~~ ^{suddenly conceives of the possibility of unmasking the King's} guilt on the accidental arrival of the players, and proceeds without delay to put the matter to the test, suddenly overwhelms Ophelia with his reproaches of womanhood, suddenly stabs the eavesdropper behind the arras, suddenly as if under some irresistible inspiration, sends his companions on shipboard to

gives the whole way

Hamlet's peculiar desire, get in another way: "Yet this flower like you," he wrote.

their deaths, suddenly boards the pirates, suddenly grapples with Laertes in the grave, suddenly does execution on the guilty King, plucks the poison from Horatio's hands and gives his dying voice to a successor to the throne." ~~But~~ In his lucida intervalla Hamlet is unable to understand the paralyzing pressure which his melancholy exerts on him at other times. This accounts for his inability to find a good reason for his inaction.

Delia

But why then, we cannot help asking ourselves, do the healthy impulses arise so frequently as to make Hamlet into a person of almost terrible ruthlessness and yet prevent him from doing the good which he has sworn the spirit of his father to do? Having caused without remorse the deaths of at least four persons in the King's entourage, why does he still seem to have come no nearer to the performance of his supreme duty? Why does the "veil of melancholy" never lift when he has an opportunity to take his revenge on the King? Is this a mere coincidence? The audience

must feel that

~~it is not so, otherwise it would lose interest.~~ There must be some hidden reason for Hamlet's hesitation to perform the required act, a reason which Hamlet himself cannot fathom and which perhaps will be revealed only through his own death. ~~And so the audience keeps~~ *This keeps the audience waiting is ~~constant~~ expectant -*

The

But there is more to it than ~~this~~. Hamlet's spurts of action and inaction are no freaks of a temperament which alternates between feverish exploits and slothful lethargy. *Rather he* ~~often~~ *often* does one thing ~~instead~~ *instead* of another. He not only refrains from slaughtering the

King in the prayer scene, but also slays Polonius mistaking him for the King, coldbloodedly shouting "a rat". Yet he could not have been too melancholy to make a thrust at the King and still be sufficiently healthy to stab Polonius. "Healthy impulse" could not have intervened at once too late to make him act rightly and yet in time to make him act wrongly. Paralysis of will power should not prevent a man from acting in one way but leave him uninhibited to act eagerly in another. On the other hand, in the last act Hamlet, having made no preparations to destroy the King, kills him on the instant. He thus performs with next a number of actions except the one required of him, and then suddenly does the deed without any sign of hesitation. The riddle of the delay in killing the King still stares us in the face.

Bradley missed the answer by a hair's breadth. He adduced instances of Hamlet's proneness to action and added, "he acts in these cases since it is not the one hateful action on which his morbid self-feeling had centered." He meant, of course, the killing of Claudius. Unfortunately, he did not follow up the clue.

67 The truth is that Hamlet does not kill his uncle, because through the force of circumstances and by reason of his character his averseness to live has become centered on this "one hateful action". While continuing to live he is unable to decide ^{to live} ~~to live~~. He can live only as long as he is not forced to resolve to do so. Challenged to take a decision, it would be his undoing, since he could not deliberately choose life. This, in terms of drama, is the purport of Hamlet's melancholy.

We should not take Hamlet's professions of wishing to die
 "I ~~am~~ ~~rather~~: they are only the expressions of a mood. He does
 not want to die, he merely hates to live, a hero who stubbornly
 insisted on dying would be insupportable, ^{there would be no con-}
 flict to follow, no play to watch; ~~he would have to prevent~~
~~him~~ from having his way. Hamlet's elaborations on the theme "I
 wish I were dead" ^{merely} mean that he would refuse to settle
 down to the job of life, should such a decision have to be taken
 by him. But most of us never have to make such a decision.
 Hamlet is, like all of us, prepared to fight for his life, and
 maybe all the more bravely because he does not set it "at a
 pin's fee".

for there
 would be
 no one to
 prevent
 him

Here lie the ~~roots~~ roots of the delay.

Hamlet is out of ^{tune} with life, but only the appearance
 of the ghost starts the tragedy. He merely wished to withdraw
 from the Court and retire to Wittenberg, though at his mother's
 entreaties (and perhaps for Ophelia's sake) he postponed his
 departure. Now his father's ghost commands him to kill the King.
 Fate is pushing him towards a decision. His fate is to be taken
 out of his hands. To obey would involve all that ^{looming} involves.
 He is to become King himself, perhaps with Ophelia for his queen,
 the princely ruler of the Court of Alsinore, a radiant sun
 amongst a host of Rosencranzes and Guildensterns. Hamlet knows
 in his bones that he will not comply. His refusal to "set the
 world right" springs from his dread of becoming part of a world
 he now detests more bitterly than ever. The ghost has uttered

~~attending to his by~~ I mean the role of his pretended
fancies in the fulfilment of his tragedy. ~~For those~~ ~~antic~~ ~~was~~

merely the instruments of his doom.

Hamlet's excited doings ^{in the first Act,} after the encounter with the ghost,
~~was~~ ^{were no more} ~~of~~ ^{ferent} his melancholy. He is moving away with all
^(than a) his being from the Court, from convention, from all that which
"seems", when fate arrests his flight and hurle him back into
the center of damnation. ^{making him} ~~he~~ almost loses his senses ~~never~~

~~he~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~apparition~~ ~~and~~ ~~feels~~ ~~that~~ ~~he~~ ~~will~~ ~~not~~ ~~be~~ ~~able~~ ~~to~~
~~recover~~ ~~them~~, as soon as the fit wears off - and he gets over
it quickly - a definite concern overmasters him and determines

the use he will make of his discovery of his bent for antics. ^{new} ^{that} This anxiety springs from the fear of being pushed to action
against his will. ~~He~~ ^{unexpected} ~~secret~~ ~~is~~ ~~to~~ ~~turn~~ ~~secretive~~, so
as to remain free. This is not an act of political caution. ^{he} ^{of} ^{that}

by confiding the secret of his feigned madness to ^{his friends} ~~them~~, he proves
that he trusts ^{them} ~~friends~~ implicitly. But should they ~~be~~

learn of what happened between him and the ghost, ~~the~~ the dread
decision could no longer be deferred. Only if he alone knows
of the awful revelation ^{and} ~~after~~ maybe Horatio, his ~~alter~~ ~~ego~~ -
is he, Hamlet, safe. In delaying the decision, Hamlet is

fighting for his life. Feigned madness was his most personal
response to this situation. ^{critical} The whole rhythm of the tragedy is
set by this, ^{fact}

It has been noted that towards the end of the play Hamlet's
gloom ~~is~~ ^{is} lifting and the assumed derangement fades away. For
some unaccountable reason - one would rather expect the opposite -

there is no need;

John G. Hall

he now appears more placid and composed. This anticlimax is one of the chief beauties of the play. Yet how could it be otherwise? Hamlet who at the beginning of the play imagined that he wished to die, is now ready to go. He makes no preparations to kill the King and yet seems certain that the hour of revenge is approaching. Yet again, how could this be otherwise? He now welcomes death not any more from a confusion of needs which denies the meaning of life, but from a recognition of its true meaning. He strikes down the King, when he himself is "dead" and death come to him when he is ripe for it. The accidents which appear to control the course of the play are a mere semblance; its progress is as plain as Calvary. No wonder that the figure of Hamlet could be interpreted as that of a saint, and yet, no worse misunderstanding is conceivable. It is true tragedy, the story of guilt and expiation. And it is his feigned madness, chosen by him as a tool of his just revenge, which involves Hamlet deeper and deeper in guilt.

Hamlet staged his antics with deadly precision and with a grim sense of humour. The "dumb scene" sends Ophelia crying into her father's arms, her father rushes post-haste to the King, the King decides to set a trap with Ophelia herself as bait. Hamlet now excels in feats of romantic irony. He sets them the riddle: what is the cause of his own madness? Hamlet knows his crew and makes them guess true to character. Polonius, that pompous vacuity, displays all the self-assurance of his wordy cynicism; Hamlet thwarted in seducing Ophelia has gone mad. The Queen, somewhat nearer the truth, is made to feel the guilt of her overhasty marriage. The King alone is on a par with

Hamlet and refuses to be duped by his foiled lover's frenzies. He sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, arranges for the trap, orders Hamlet to be put under guard, dispatches him to England, sets Laertes on his trail and conceals the murder plot. But for him, they are all Hamlet's puppets. Hamlet at first enjoys his cruel superiority; the chastisement of that solemn mediocrity, Polonius, the self-debasement of those fawning gigglers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, even the anguish of the King caused by Hamlet's enigmatic conversational flashes. Eventually, Hamlet, playing the madman, stages a play in the play, the effects of which on the King send him into transports of joy. And yet, all the time his helpless self is more and more ensnared in guilt. In spite of his glamorous antics he knows, in his most sensitive heart, that he has lost his way.

Hamlet's tragedy is ensnared in his love for Ophelia, whom he has sacrificed. "I loved Ophelia", he cries at her grave when all is over. It is the turning point of Hamlet's drama. Up to this time external events failed to penetrate the shroud of his melancholy. His inner isolation was complete. Suddenly in a flash of pain, it happens. Listen to his ranting and to his awakening when he knows himself:

Hamlet: "...What is he, whose grief
Bears such an aspersion? Whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? - This is I
Hamlet the Dane!"

(He leaps into the grave.)

His love for Ophelia was pure and ardent. Hamlet is driven

to the point of platonic frenzy by his mother's sexual debasement, which has tarred Ophelia with the same brush. But not even his mother is beyond redemption, terribly though she has sinned, how much less the innocent Ophelia who he must feel is merely a victim of his imagination! His love for her lies like a chain between him and the others. He knows the putrid atmosphere of the Court. He knows his Leartes, the youthful lecher who is degrading his own sister's mind. He knows his smatty Polonius, who instills vile suspicions into her confiding soul. He knows his Rosencrans and Guildenstern whose horizon is bounded by lasciviousness. He knows his King and Queen who set their hopes on Ophelia's physical charms which shall tempt him to become untrue to his mission. He hates them for their calumny of all that is most truly noble. Not one but debased Ophelia's love for him and his for her into a political counter, speculating on what there was of weakness in either.

He hates and despises them, yet of all men he, Hamlet, has the least right to do so. For who else but he himself had conceived of the idea of using Ophelia's feelings for political ends? Who fooled her in the garb of the distracted lover, so grossly conventional in his disordered attire, that the mere recounting of the scene called forth from the Prime Minister the hackneyed diagnosis "Mad for thy love"? And who fed Polonius' suspicions, harping on his daughter at every turn of their ambiguous dialogue? And who confirmed these suspicions in the nunnery scene by his insults to Ophelia? Who but he, Hamlet the Dane?

At every turn of the screw Hamlet's sufferings feed on the effect of his own actions. Was he not slandering Ophelia to her father? Tainting himself with the virus he loathed, dragging her through the mire of court intrigue, prompting the King to make her a decess in the eavesdropping scene, in which he takes unjust revenge on her for playing the very role he devised for her? Yet it is in this scene that Ophelia is most true to him. She is wronged by him, as Coriolia, whom she resembles, is wronged by her complacently over-generous father. Hamlet arraigns her for prostituting herself, a worthy ally of his debauched mother, while all the time he knows only too well that he alone is to blame. What seems to bear out his accusations is in truth of his own doing, and no better than a crime against this pure and beloved child.

Ophelia has been promised that she shall marry Hamlet if she restores him to his normal self. Beauty and honor, love and marriage, are for once in concord. She loves Hamlet and knows not of the danger that threatens him. He never confided his burden to her. Her task is to charm him back to life and happiness, to exorcise the demons that are darkening his spirit. What role could be more appropriate to her selfless devotion?

In the presence of her own father and of the King himself the Queen had said to Ophelia:

Queen: "And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honors!

Ophelia: Madam, I wish it may."

and later at Ophelia's grave she says, ignorant of Hamlet's presence:

Queen: "I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife,
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
and not have strew'd thy grave."

In the nunnery scene Ophelia, who knows nothing, is met by Hamlet, who knows everything. He winces at the thought that Ophelia has been "let loose" upon him to seduce him from the allegiance to his dead father and turn him away from the path of honor and honesty. His words are as much to the point as they are unfair to Ophelia:

Hamlet: "Ha, ha are you honest?
Ophelia: My lord?
H: Are you fair?
O: What means your lordship?
H: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty
should admit no discourse to your beauty.
O: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce
than with honesty?
H: Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner
transpire honesty from what it is to a tawd
than the force of honesty can translate beauty
into his likeness; this was something a paradox,
but now the time gives it proof."

Hamlet knows that for him to turn back for Ophelia's sake from the course of duty would dishonor them both. True, resentful at the role cast for Ophelia, and desirous of revenge for Polonius' and Laertes' low aspersions, he gives a twist to his words. But on the matter itself, he is clear and concise. If Ophelia (who is offering to return his tokens) were to try and make him marry her, she would be merely depraving him; if, on the contrary, she were to attempt to follow him in the path of honor, she would have to sacrifice their love. She should go to a nunnery - also slang for brothel - for that is where she

belonge. Has she not given proof of it by offering herself in the secret presence of an adulterous murderer and a parental blood?

Yet all this is Hamlet's own work. Presently he will insult her in the presence of the Court and use her as a smoke-screen in his hunt for the murderer. Eventually, he will kill her father, whom she adores. By the time Ophelia drowns herself, Hamlet has deserved more than one death. Inwardly, he must have died a hundred.

But why did the mere delaying of revenge involve Hamlet in such monstrous guilt? His feigned madness is the answer. Born of hatred of life and a wish to delay the doing of his duty, it breeds guilt. It must tempt him into using not only his enemies but also his friends as tools; it traps him into cowardly evasions and makes insincerity appear as an obligation. It confuses him and makes him a riddle unto himself.

But after that public confession of his love for Ophelia, he plays the fool no more. He is preparing for the end. There is but a short "interim" before the news from England must come of the death of the King's agents. Hamlet's composure in the last part of the play is of supreme beauty. Reconciled to death he need no longer hesitate to kill the King. He now utters no wish to die which shows the difference between the Hamlet of the first and of the last act. Then he only imagined that he longed for death and spoke of it often; now he wants to die and keeps silent in quiet readiness. It is the King whose hours are numbered.

III.

Thus far
~~search for~~ the contents of ~~the~~ ^{the} play which has no less a subject than ^{the} refusal to live. But that precisely is why its theatrical success is a puzzle. Longing for death is the only passion that is undramatic. And yet "Hamlet" if anything, is a good play. ~~No manager, no actor is able to spoil it. It is to seek for a mistake of this kind.~~

Everybody knows the history of the purloined letter which was left in full view on the table where ~~no one~~ ^{no one} would think of looking for it. ~~The words and the scene, one would expect, is too ~~secret~~ a secret.~~ ^{The words and the scene, one would expect, is too ~~secret~~ a secret.} (I still remember the day, ~~almost a lifetime~~ ^{almost a lifetime} ago, when it first struck me.)

Dramatically exposed to hold

"To be, or not to be; that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The stings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles; and by opposing end them? To die, - to sleep - No more *****"

②

Much has been written about ~~the~~ ^{the} monologue. Some of it is amazing. "In this soliloquy", Bradley said, "Hamlet is not thinking of the duty laid upon him at all. He is debating the question of suicide." Hamlet, he thought had by this time forgotten his sacred promise. "What can be more significant than the fact that he is sunk in these reflections (on suicide) on the very day which is to determine for him the truthfulness of the Ghost?" and so Bradley, like some others before him, came to the conclusion that the great soliloquy was of no dramatic importance.

have the dramatic truth of the play. The alternative is killing the King or killing himself. *All through the play the inner and outer scenes are bridged by* Hamlet's visionary gifts. He sees his father's figure "in his mind's eye" even before he is told of the appearance of the ghost; he doubts "some foul play" before the ghost reveals it to him. His prophetic soul guessed his uncle's guilt. He foresees Ophelia's report to her father; he is conscious of the eavesdroppers in the nunnery scene; he is on the track of the spying courtiers; he guesses their mission; he justly appraises the purpose of the fencing match; he correctly instructs the players; and with the one exception of Polonius behind the arras, whom he mistakes for the King, he is as a person endowed with double sight.

Until the very end his premonitions are translated into reality:

Hamlet: "I shall win at the odds, but then wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter."

Horatio: Nay, my good lord . . .

Hamlet: It is but foolery; but it is such gaining as would perhaps trouble a woman.

Horatio: If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

Hamlet: Not a whit; we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. 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 one knows of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"

From the tragic point of view, Hamlet parts willingly from life; he commits suicide. *is* Dramatically he does not, he is *Hamlet* murdered and the certainty of his own death releases him to do his duty. The inner stage and the outward stage coincide with each other to the end.

That in despair, but in fulfillment. For readiness to die is readiness to live in this unique life.
HERE CASE READINESS TO ACCEPT LIFE.

As in Lear, Othello or Macbeth, with the first act the tragedy is set. Lear in his vanity and folly has thrown himself on the generosity of his heartless daughters - in the rest of the play he fulfills his fate. The Moor's conquest of Desdemona was a triumph of spirit over disparity of age and race which can never stand the test of brute passion; Othello goes to his doom. In Macbeth the weird sisters draw the circle of tragedy around the hero and his notorious ambition; the end follows as by geometrical necessity. Similarly, as I see it, in "Hamlet". The opening act contains the tragedy in brief. When his father's command reaches him, Hamlet's fate is sealed. Instead of "How to my revenge", his words are: "The time is out of joint, oh cursed spite that ever I was born to put it right!" Before the curtain rises on the second act, it has been decreed that Hamlet will lose his life while delaying action by feigning to be mad.

We need not go far to understand why Hamlet is a good play. Hamlet's whole inner conflict, his hovering on the confines of life and death, is translated here into external events, into sharply accentuated dramatic action. This play is about suicide in terms of killing an enemy; it is about endless delay in terms of incessant action.

The plot is extremely clever. Saxe Grammaticus' Hamlet pretended madness in order to prepare for his revenge on the King. Shakespeare's Hamlet, on the contrary, seeks instruments of delay. This is the true function of his madness in the plot. But for his feigned madness, Hamlet could not have put off his decision without a clash with his friends and supporters. This would have dragged

his own inner conflict to light and been artistically fatal. For a Hamlet who refused to obey the behest of the ghost or deliberately hesitated to act when pressed by his friends, would lose the sympathy of the audience, just as he would lose their admiration if he were defeated in his quest for revenge by King and Court. As matters are, Hamlet himself is the only obstacle both to the decision to take revenge on the King and to the carrying out of that decision. ~~This makes the play~~ The highest level of

is here reached
universality in terms of inner life, while spelling ~~it~~ ^t out ~~in~~
in the media of popular art in
~~the~~ ~~media~~ ~~of~~ ~~popular~~ ~~art~~ ~~in~~
~~the~~ ~~media~~ ~~of~~ ~~popular~~ ~~art~~ ~~in~~ blood, fire, and brimstone. ~~It~~ ^{we} wonder
~~that~~ ~~it~~ ~~makes~~ ~~a~~ ~~good~~ ~~show~~,
that it makes a good ~~show~~ *show*,

"Hamlet" is about the human condition. We all live and refuse to die, but we are not decided to live and be happy in all the essential respects in which life invites us. To some extent we are delaying happiness and putting off life, because we fear to commit ourselves to live. This makes the hero's delay so symbolic. Life is man's missed opportunity. Yet ~~right at the very~~

in the end ~~the~~ ~~hero~~ ~~has~~ ~~not~~ ~~missed~~ ~~it~~ ~~quite~~. ~~The~~ ~~audience~~
~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~of~~ ~~mind~~, ~~but~~ ~~feels~~ ~~also~~ ~~happier~~ ~~for~~
~~the~~ ~~play~~. ~~The~~ ~~curtain~~ ~~leaves~~ ~~us~~ ~~with~~ ~~also~~ ~~only~~
~~wisdom~~, ~~but~~ ~~also~~ ~~reconciled~~.

THE CURTAIN LEAVES ~~US~~ ~~NOT~~ ~~ONLY~~
WISDOM, BUT ALSO RECONCILED.

Hamlet

1 copy + 5 carbons
of an
The English reader ~~may perhaps feel~~ ^{should suspect} that a man must ~~not~~ come from afar to have ~~chosen that~~ ^{indeed hit upon that} most outworn of all subjects, Hamlet, ^{That reader's surmise will be correct.}

~~The surmise is correct.~~ I was serving as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army, ~~a little short of~~ ^{some} thirty years ago, ~~The~~ ^{and the} Russian winter and the blackish-yellow steppe made me feel sick at heart. In my desolation I had for companion a volume of Shakespeare's plays. I found myself reading and re-reading one of them: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Altogether I must have read it over some ~~thirty~~ ^{three dozen} times. My personal life had taken a turn towards darkness. Daylight seemed bounded in a narrowing disc which was growing dimmer and dimmer. I remember at one time the cold was so intense that when my horse stumbled and fell, I was too apathetic to get out of the saddle. Fortunately - though I myself might not have thought so - the gaunt stiff creature, a Cossack mare we had picked up, jerked herself onto her long legs and I was saved, for had she rolled over I should have been crushed. At that period of my existence my soul was numbed and fell under the spell of a recurrent day-dream. I read my "Hamlet" and every word, phrase and intonation, ^{of its blank verse} seemed ~~plain and~~ ^{clear to me, and deep beneath the} ~~to me~~

For many years the memory of these bleak months haunted me. I could not rid myself of the idea that by some weird chance I had possessed myself of Hamlet's secret. I knew why he did not kill the King. I knew what it was he feared. I knew why he so swiftly ran Polonius through the body when he mistook him for the King, ~~and why~~ ^{he} pretended ^{ing} he was only chasing a rat. I knew what his confused words to Ophelia meant. But even while I still felt I knew, I was already fast forgetting. My days were clearing up and, as light

broke in, knowledge passed into shadowy recollection, which in its turn faded into a mere intellectual understanding. I was ^{now} happy and could only faintly remember what had once formed part of my being: Hamlet's inhuman sufferings. Yet something in me insisted that my theories on Hamlet's indecision and feigned madness ~~for that was all my former certainties now amounted to~~ were not merely the morbid offspring of my late malady.

However, let me finish
I ~~hope I shall be pardoned for this lengthy introduction, for I merely propose to~~ recount my reaction to the opinion of that great English critic, Andrew Cecil Bradley, ^{whose} ~~who~~ died almost ~~twenty years ago.~~ His views on Hamlet's character, when I came across them, struck me by their resemblance to my own. But ~~he~~ ^{Bradley} ~~had~~ stopped short of the solution.

Hamlet's inaction, so Bradley thought, ^{was} ~~is~~ to be explained by the influence of a profound melancholy. He is shocked by his mother's gross sensuality into utter disgust of life. It is in this frame of mind that the revelation of his father's ~~fatal~~ murder and the ~~ghostly~~ command of revenge reaches him. His mind is poisoned and paralysed, hence his endless hesitations. ~~At~~ The other components of his character - ~~his~~ intellectual genius, moral sensibility, ~~and~~ temperamental instability - were either cause or expression of this melancholy. It alone accounts for the course of the play, if taken together with the periods of normal behavior during which Hamlet's "healthy impulses", those remnants of a virile personality, break forth.

In this picture I recognized my Hamlet. ^{Bradley} ~~at~~ the same time, I knew that Bradley had not unlocked the ^{double} secret of Hamlet, ^{the} ~~the~~

person and the play.) For at

at the heart of it all, there is ~~inaction~~ inaction which the hero cannot justify and for which nothing seems to him to account satisfactorily.

But there is also the ^{riddle} ~~aesthetic mystery~~ of how a successful play could ever have been staged about inaction.

As one would expect, one key ~~to the mystery~~ served both locks. I will first deal with Hamlet, the person.

I.
Hamlet's melancholy seems at first to offer a full and satisfactory explanation, both of his dilatory behavior and of his own lack of comprehension of himself. The play shows him in a state of deep dejection in which he is averse to any kind of action. Nitcheve is the Russian for it. It finds its medium of expression in mechanical answers, a sort of back-chat; sometimes he repeats the words of the speaker without irony or wit, like a man too benumbed to consider what he is saying. And yet "this allegedly flower like youth", Bradley said, "rages through the major part of the play, murdering and destroying human lives, ruthless, fierce, a terror to the Court." ^{And, as} ~~and, as~~ Dowden remarked, of the extreme impulsiveness of this peculiar dreamer, "he suddenly conceives of the possibility of unmasking the King's guilt on the accidental arrival of the players, and proceeds without delay to put the matter to the test, suddenly overwhelms Ophelia with his reproaches of womanhood, suddenly stabs the eavesdropper behind the arras, suddenly as if under some irresistible inspiration, sends his companions on shipboard to their deaths, suddenly boards the pirates, suddenly grapples with Laertes in the grave, suddenly

does execution on the guilty King, plucks the poison from Horatio's hands and gives his dying voice to a successor to the throne." Yet in his lucida intervalla Hamlet is unable to understand the paralysing pressure which his melancholy exerts ^{on him} at other times. This ~~seems to~~ accounts for his inability to find a good reason for his inaction.

But why then, we cannot help asking ourselves, do the healthy impulses arise so frequently as to make Hamlet into a person of almost terrible ruthlessness and yet prevent him from doing the deed which he has sworn the spirit of his father to do? Having caused without remorse the deaths of at least four persons in the King's entourage, why does he still seem to have come no nearer to the performance of his supreme duty? Why does the "veil of melancholy" never lift when he has an opportunity to take his revenge on the King? Is this a mere ^{coincidence?} accident? The audience seems ^{to think it is} to know that this is not so, otherwise it would lose interest.

There must be some hidden reason for Hamlet's hesitation to ~~do~~ ^{perform} the required act, a reason which Hamlet himself cannot fathom and which perhaps will be revealed only through his own death.

But there is more to it than this. Hamlet's spurts of action and inaction are ~~not mere~~ freaks of ^a temperament, which alternate between feverish exploits and slothful lethargy. He often does one thing instead of another. He not only refrains from slaughtering the King in the prayer scene, but ^{also} ~~actually~~ slays Polonius, mistaking him for the King, coldbloodedly shouting "a rat". Yet he could not have been too melancholy to make a thrust at the King and still be sufficiently healthy to stab Polonius. "Healthy impulse" could

not have intervened at once too late to make him act rightly and ^{yet} in time to make him act wrongly. Paralysis of will power should not prevent a man from acting in one way ^{yet} ~~and at the same time~~ ^{but} leave him uninhibited to act eagerly in another. On the other hand, in the last act Hamlet, having made no preparations ~~whet-~~ ~~soever~~ to destroy the King, kills him on the instant. He thus performs with zest a number of actions except the one required of him, and then ~~suddenly~~ does the deed without any sign of hesitation. The riddle of the delay in killing the King still stares us in the face.

Bradley missed the ~~right~~ answer by a hair's breadth. He adduced instances of Hamlet's proneness to action and added, "he acts in these cases since it is not THE one hateful action on which his morbid self-feeling had centered." ^{He} ~~Bradley~~ meant, ^{of course,} ~~here~~ the killing of Claudius. Unfortunately, he did not follow up the clue.

The truth is that Hamlet does not kill his uncle, because through the force of circumstances and by reason of his character his averseness to life has become centered on this "one hateful action".

~~This defines the precise meaning of his so-called melancholy:~~
While continuing to live he is unable to decide for life. He can live only as long as he is not forced to resolve to do so. ~~Should~~ ~~he by any mischance be~~ (challenged to take a decision, it would be his undoing, since he could not deliberately choose ~~the good~~ life. This, in terms of drama, is the purport of Hamlet's melancholy.

Accordingly ^{Hamlet's} We should not take ~~his~~ professions of wishing to die à la lettre; they are ^{only the} ~~merely~~ expressions of a mood. ~~He~~ Hamlet does not ~~actually~~ want to die, he merely hates to live. A ~~dramatic~~ hero who stubbornly ^{insisted on dying} ~~wished to die~~ would be insupportable. There would be no conflict to follow, no play to watch; ~~anyhow~~ ^{for} who would care to prevent him from having his way? Hamlet's elaborations on the theme "I wish I were dead" should ~~not~~, therefore, ~~mislead anybody~~. What they ^{simply} mean is that he would refuse to settle down to the job of life, ^{if} ~~if~~ ^{should} such a decision ^{had} ~~had~~ to be taken, ^{by himself}. But most of us never have to make such a decision. ^{like all of us, we} Hamlet is ~~pre-~~ ^{maybe} ~~pared~~ to fight for his life, and ~~perhaps~~ all the more bravely because he does not set it "at a pin's fee."

Here lie the ^{deepest} ~~deepest~~ ~~psychological~~ roots of the delay. Hamlet ^{is out of time with} ~~has turned away from~~ life, but ~~it is~~ ^{only} the appearance of the ghost ~~which~~ starts the tragedy. ~~But Fate is now pushing him towards a decision.~~ He merely wished to withdraw from the Court and retire to Wittenburg, though at his mother's entreaties (and perhaps for Ophelia's sake) he postponed his departure. Now his father's ghost ^{Fate is pushing him towards a decision.} commands him to kill the King. To obey would involve all that life involves. His fate is to be taken out of his hands. He is to become King himself, perhaps with Ophelia ^{for} ~~as~~ his Queen, the princely ruler of the Court of Elsinore, a radiant sun amongst a host of Rosencrantzes and Guildensterns. Hamlet knows in his bones that he will not comply. His refusal to "set the world right" springs from his ^{dread} ~~fear~~ of becoming part of a world he now detests more bitterly than ever. His ~~father's~~ ^{The} ghost has uttered his death sentence. He will perish before he

fulfills that command, and he knows it. This, in a sense, is Hamlet's most personal secret.

now stands for The killing of the King, *the "oh cursed spite" A, has become to mean* *decision* ~~for Hamlet~~ *the symbol of deciding to live.* This action, on which his morbid self-feeling centers, he cannot, ~~therefore~~ perform; *not* ~~Not~~ the mechanical act itself - that is indifferent - but the act of filial duty enjoined upon him by his father's tearful command, involving him in a fatal sequence of obligations, a deed *that would plunge* ~~plunging~~ him into the maelstrom of life. Hamlet could kill the King easily by mistake, off the record, under the cover of an alibi, by a disowned gesture, under the pretence of chance, by some emphatically unsymbolic act - or when the end was assured and he himself was already doomed to die. ~~in delaying the killing of the King at his father's behest, Hamlet is fighting for his life. But not as a conscious meaningful act, as long as he is alive.~~

Actually, he attempts both - to do it, pretending it is unintentional and to do it, when this can no more affect his own fate. He stabs Polonius in a trice, when he mistakes him for his better, while *instinctively* ~~denying~~ any deliberate purpose in the very act. And, even more decisively at the end, when he almost exultantly repeats *three times* ~~to Horatio~~ his "I am dead", *and the* ~~the~~ sceptical dreamer ~~is~~ *becomes* ~~transformed into~~ Voltaire's butcher boy, whose slaughters are no more than mechanical action, signifying nothing, since he, Hamlet, is now securely dead.

II.

~~all this, I felt, threw much light on the rôle Hamlet's feigned madness played in *the* his tragedy. This, I confess, had~~

His antics are the instrument of his doom.

was, I suspect, the vortex attracting me in my malady. I do not mean the ~~role~~ ^{role} of his pretended fancies in the ~~plot of the play (which is obvious), but in the fulfillment of Hamlet's fate.~~ ^{his tragedy.} His excited doings after the encounter with the ghost ~~were~~ ^{are} a mere shunt of his melancholy. He ~~was just~~ ^{is} moving away with all his being from the scenes of social obligation, from the Court, from convention, from all that which "seems," when fate arrests his flight from ~~life~~ and hurls him back into the center of damnation. ~~He~~ ^{Dark ghost scene of} almost loses his senses for sheer horror ~~of the apparition~~ ^{of the apparition} and ~~is afraid~~ ^{seems that} of not being able to recover. ~~them.~~ ^{them} As soon as the fit wears off - and he gets over it quickly - ~~an entirely different concern~~ ^{a definite} overmasters him and determines the use ~~he is going to make of his~~ ^{he will make of his} opportune discovery of his bent for antics. ~~This new anxiety~~ ^{his}

HA
he will

springs ~~immediately~~ from the fear of being pushed to action against his will. ~~He~~ ^{his first reaction} turns secretive, ~~but he ceases to be~~ ^{so as to remain} free. ~~By confiding~~ ^{By confiding} in the secret of his feigned madness, he shows that to them ~~he confides~~ ^{he trusts} implicitly in his friends. ~~But should they know of but~~ ^{But should they know of but} ~~let them~~ ^{let them} know

he proves that

of what happened between him and the ghost, ~~and~~ ^{and} the dread decision could ~~no longer~~ ^{no longer} be deferred. Only ~~as long as~~ ^{if} he alone knows of the ~~fatal~~ ^{awful} revelation - later, maybe, Horatio, ~~when he learns of~~ ^{in delaying} Hamlet's ~~trust~~ ^{is fighting for his life} at his alter ego - is he, Hamlet, safe. ~~Feigned madness was his~~ ^{the decision} response to this ~~situation.~~ ^{situation.}

Hamlet's gloom is lifting and ~~his~~ ^{the} assumed derangement becomes ~~less~~ ^{rather} ~~obvious.~~ ^{now appears} For some unaccountable reason - one would ~~rather~~ expect the opposite - he ~~now~~ ^{is} ~~seems~~ more placid and composed. This anticlimax ~~constitutes~~ ^{is} one of the chief beauties of the play. Yet how could it be otherwise? Hamlet who at the beginning of

The whole rhythm of the tragedy is set by this.

the play imagined that he wished to die, is now ready to go. He makes no preparations to kill the King and yet ^{seems} ~~appears more~~ ~~and more~~ certain that the hour of revenge is approaching. Yet again, how could this be otherwise? He now welcomes death not any more from a confusion of moods which denies the meaning of life, but from a recognition of its true meaning. He strikes down the King, when he himself is ~~already~~ "dead" and death comes to him when he is ripe for it. The accidents which ^{appear} ~~seem~~ to ~~control~~ ~~regulate~~ the course of the play are ~~no more than~~ ^{a mere} semblance; its progress is as ~~plain~~ ^{plain} as Calvary. No wonder that the figure of Hamlet could be interpreted as that of a saint. And yet, no worse misunderstanding ~~of the play~~ is conceivable. It is ~~true~~ ^{true} ~~tragedy, the~~ ~~tragedy, the~~ story of guilt and expiation. ~~and it is his~~ ^{and it is his} feigned madness ^{which} involves ^{Hamlet} ~~the~~ deeper and deeper in guilt.

~~Hamlet~~ ^{Hamlet} staged his antics with a grim sense of humour, With deadly precision ^{and} the "dumb scene" sends Ophelia crying into her father's arms, her father rushes post-haste to the King, the King ~~instantly~~ decides to set a trap with Ophelia herself ^{now} bait. Hamlet ^{now} excels in feats of romantic irony. He ~~himself~~ ^{he} sets ^{the} riddle: What is the cause of his own madness? ^{Hamlet} ~~he~~ knows his crew and makes them guess true to character. Polonius, that pompous vacuity, displays all the self-assurance of his wordy cynicism: Hamlet ~~went on~~ ^{thwarted in} seducing Ophelia ~~and having been~~ ^(Somewhat nearer to the truth) ~~thwarted~~ has gone mad. The Queen is made to feel the guilt of her ~~past~~ overhasty marriage ~~(which is nearer the truth)~~. The King alone is on a par with Hamlet and refuses to be duped by

chosen by him as a tool of his just revenge,

his foiled lover's ^{frenzies.} ~~frenzy~~. He sends for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, arranges for the trap, orders Hamlet to be put under guard, dispatches him to England, sets Laertes on ^{his} ~~his~~ trail and concocts the murder plot. ^{But} ~~Except~~ for him, they are all Hamlet's puppets. Hamlet ^{at first} enjoys his cruel superiority, ^{the} chastisement of that solemn mediocrity, Polonius, the self-debasement of those fawning gigglers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, ^{even} the anguish of the King caused by Hamlet's ominous conversational flashes. ^{Eventually,} ~~The climax is reached when~~ Hamlet, playing the madman, stages a play in the play, the effects of which on the King send him into transports of joy. And yet, all the time his helpless self is more and more enmeshed in guilt. In spite of his glamorous antics he knows, in his most sensitive heart, that he has lost his way.

Hamlet's ^{tragedy} ~~guilt~~ is enmeshed in his love for Ophelia, whom he has sacrificed. "I loved Ophelia", he cries ^{at her grave.} when all is over. It is the turning point of ^{Hamlet's drama. Up to this time} ~~the play~~ external events fail to penetrate the shroud of ^{his} ~~his~~ melancholy. His inner isolation ^{was} complete. ^{in a flash of pain, it} ~~until~~ suddenly happens. Listen to his ranting and ~~then~~ to his ~~awakening~~ when ~~in a flash of pain, Hamlet~~ he knows himself:

Hamlet: "...What is he, whose grief
Bears such an emphasis? Whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars, and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? - This is I
Hamlet the Dane!"

(He leaps into the grave.)

His love for Ophelia was pure and ardent. Hamlet is driven to the point of platonic frenzy by his mother's sexual debasement, which has Ophelia tarred with the same brush. But not even his

mother is beyond redemption, terribly though she has sinned, ^{how} much less the innocent Ophelia ^{he must feel} who is merely a victim of his imaginations! His love for her lies like a chasm between him and the others. He knows the putrid atmosphere of the Court. He knows his ~~father~~ Laertes, the youthful lecher, who ^{is} depraving his own sister's mind. He knows his smutty Polonius, who instilled vile suspicions into her confiding soul. He knows his Rosencrantz and Guildenstern whose horizon ~~was~~ bounded by lasciviousness. He knows his King and Queen who set their hopes on Ophelia's physical ^{charms} attractions, which ~~would~~ ^{shall} tempt him to become untrue to his mission. He hates them for their calumny of all that is most truly noble.

Not one but debased Ophelia's love for him and his for her into a political counter, ^{speculating} ~~relying~~ on what there was of ^{weakness} ~~meanness~~ in either.

He ^{despises} ~~hates~~ them, yet of all men ^{he, the Hamlet, has the} ~~has~~ least right to do so. For who ^{else} ~~but~~ he ^{himself} had conceived of the idea of using Ophelia's feelings for political ends? Who fooled her in the garb of the ~~despised~~

distracted

lover, so grossly conventional in his disordered attire, that the mere recounting of the scene called forth from the Prime Minister the hackneyed diagnosis "Mad for thy love"? And who fed Polonius' suspicions, harping on his daughter at every turn of their ambiguous dialogue? And who ~~but Hamlet himself~~ confirmed those suspicions in the nunnery scene by his insults to Ophelia? ^{Yes,} ~~Yes,~~ ^{who} ~~but~~ ^{he,} Hamlet the Dane?

At every turn of the screw Hamlet's sufferings feed ^{on} the effect ^s of his own action ^s. Was he not slandering Ophelia to her father? Tainting himself with the virus he loathed, dragging her through the mire of court intrigue, prompting the King to make her

a decoy in the eavesdropping scene, in which he take^s unjust revenge ^{on her} ~~on her~~ for playing the very rôle he devised for her? Yet it is in this scene that Ophelia is most true to him. She is wronged by him, as Cordelia, whom she resembles, is wronged by her complacently over-generous father. Hamlet arraigns her for prostituting herself, a worthy ally of his debauched mother, while all the time he ^{knows} ~~knows~~ ~~only~~ only too well that he ~~is~~ alone is to blame. What seems to bear out his accusations is in truth of his own doing, and no better than a crime against this ~~is~~ pure and beloved child.

Ophelia has been promised that she shall marry Hamlet, if she ~~can~~ restore him to his normal self. Beauty and honor, love and marriage, are for once in concord. She loves Hamlet and knows not of the danger that threatens him. He never confided his burden to her. Her task is to charm him back to life and happiness, to exorcise the demons that are darkening his spirit. What rôle could be more appropriate to her selfless devotion?

In the presence of her own father and of the King himself the ^{had} Queen said to Ophelia:

Queen: "And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honors!

Ophelia: Madam, I wish it may."

^{later} And at Ophelia's grave she says, ignorant of Hamlet's presence:

Queen: "I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave."

In the nunnery scene Ophelia, who knows nothing, is met by Hamlet, who knows everything. He winces at the thought that Ophelia has been let loose upon him to seduce him from the allegiance to his dead father and turn him away from the path of honor and honesty.

~~His behavior is~~ as much to the point as ~~it is~~ unfair to Ophelia: *words are* *they are*

Hamlet: "Ha, ha are you honest?"

O My lord?

H Are you fair?

O What means your lordship?

H That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.

O Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?

H 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; this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof."

Hamlet knows that, *for her* to turn back for Ophelia's sake from the course of duty would dishonor them both. True, ~~deeply~~ resentful at the rôle cast for Ophelia, and desirous of revenge for Polonius' and Laertes' low aspersions, he ~~does~~ *gives* a twist to his words. But ~~on~~ *in* the matter ~~itself~~ *itself* he is clear and concise. If Ophelia (who is offering to return his tokens) were to ~~appeal to him~~ and try to make him marry her, she would be merely depraving him; *on the contrary,* if she were to attempt to follow him in the path of honor, she would have to sacrifice their love. She should go to a nunnery - also slang for brothel - for that is where she belongs. Had she not ~~given proof of it by~~ *given proof of it by* offering herself in the secret presence of an adulterous murderer and a parental bawd?

Yet all this is Hamlet's own work. Presently he will insult her in the presence of the Court and ~~use her as a~~ use her as a smoke-screen in his hunt for the murderer. Eventually, he will kill her father, whom she adores. By the time Ophelia drowns herself, Hamlet has deserved more than one death. ~~and~~ ^{and} inwardly, he must have died a hundred.

But ~~why~~ ^{how} ~~did~~ ^{why} the mere delaying of revenge involve Hamlet in such monstrous guilt? This feigned madness is the answer. Born of ~~the~~ ~~sinful~~ hatred of life and ~~of~~ ^{the} wish to delay the doing of his duty, it breeds guilt. It ~~tempts~~ ^{must} him into using not only his enemies but also his friends as tools; it traps him into cowardly evasions ~~and~~ ^{and} making ~~insincerity~~ ^{insincerity} appear as an obligation. It confuses him ~~to the~~ ^{as} ~~point~~ ^{point} of making him a riddle unto himself.

But after that public confession of his love for Ophelia, he plays the fool no more. He is preparing for the end. There is ~~to~~ ~~be~~ but a short "interim" before the news from England must come of the death of the King's agents. Hamlet's composure in the last part of the play is of supreme beauty. Reconciled to death he need no longer hesitate to kill the King. ~~That~~ ^{which} ~~he~~ now utters no wish to die ^{shows} ~~excess how great is~~ the difference between the Hamlet of the first and of the last act. Then he only imagined that he longed for death and spoke of it often; ~~but~~ now he wants to die and keeps silent in quiet readiness. It is the King whose hours are numbered.

III. ^{this}

So much for the contents of ~~the~~ play which has no less a subject than ~~the~~ refusal to live. But that precisely is why its theatrical success is a puzzle. ~~Othello is about jealousy, Romeo and Juliet is~~

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~~about love, not out of a wish for suicide. Hamlet is in the last act as near to committing suicide as any play allows which is about suicide. This is no paradox.~~ *The* longing for death is the only passion that is undramatic. And yet "Hamlet" if anything, is a good play. No manager, no actor is able to spoil it. Where to seek for *a solution of* ~~an answer to this paradox?~~ *riddle?*

Everybody knows the history of the purloined letter ^{which was} left in full view ^{on} ~~in the middle~~ of the table where no one would think of looking for it.

May I quote ~~the few lines from~~ a passage which, one would assume, is too well known to hide a secret. (I still remember the day, more than thirty years ago, when it first struck me.)

"To be, or not to be: that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die, - to sleep-
No more"

Much has been written about this monologue. Some of it is amazing. "In this soliloquy", Bradleye said, "Hamlet is not thinking of the duty laid upon him at all. He is debating the question of suicide." Hamlet, he thought, had by this time forgotten his sacred promise. "What can be more significant than the fact that he is sunk in these reflections (on suicide) on the very day which is to determine for him the truthfulness of the Ghost?" *And so*
like some others before him,
Bradleye came to the conclusion that the great soliloquy was of no dramatic importance.

Millions of people have listened to it and did not feel so. Nor did the hosts of actors who spoke it. ~~On the contrary,~~ *they* were ^{all} convinced that in some unaccountable fashion the very heart

of the play was throbbing there.

They were, ^{of course!} ~~synthetically~~ ^{since} right, "To be or not to be" is about suicide, the problem of the play. ^{Hamlet's} ~~But~~ the mystery of the successful play ^{only} ~~obviously~~ deepens, ^{for} ~~for~~ suicide ~~is~~ ^{as} impossible as ^{the} ~~a~~ subject ~~for~~ ^{of a} drama as inaction is unsuitable for a plot.

Yet these five lines give away the secret of ^{the stage} ~~aesthetic~~ success. "To be or not to be, that is the question." A clear cut alternative stated by the hero at a moment of high ~~dramatic~~ ^{dramatic} tension. The hero must be weighing the alternative on which the play hinges: killing the King or not? Yet Hamlet refers to the first as passivity, to the second as armed action and forcible opposition! This sounds ~~almost unbelievable~~ ^{and} ~~most critics bolted and did not follow up~~ ^{instead of following} the ~~implications of the seeming paradox!~~ ^{implications of the seeming paradox!} ~~the implications of the apparent absurdity.~~ ^{They are clear and simple.} ~~as clear and simple as can be.~~ ^{Yet the position is} Hamlet has turned away from life, of which he can think only in terms of ~~passivity and suffering~~, even if this happens to involve a number of so-called actions, such as killing the King, marrying Ophelia, ruling the country and so on. For the one and only true action falls under the heading of "Not to be". One can perform it with a bare bodkin, were it not that

".....conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action."

With the thought of action the soliloquy opens and ends. Yet it deals solely ^{with} ~~of~~ suicide. ~~One can call those lines confused, but in that this~~ ^{apparent} ~~seeming~~ confusion you have the dramatic truth of the play. The alternative is killing the King or killing himself. ~~Thus Hamlet's~~

In this way

passivity,

ad 18m
~~whole inner conflict, his hovering on the confines of life and death, is translated into external events, into sharply accentuated dramatic action. This ~~translation~~ ^{linking} ~~from the inward to the outward~~ ^{with and} ~~is greatly~~ ^{greatly} ~~helped~~ ^{care bridged} by Hamlet's visionary gifts. He sees his father's figure "in his mind's eye" even before he is told of the appearance of the ghost; he doubts "some foul play" before the ghost reveals it to him. His prophetic soul guessed his uncle's guilt. He foresees Ophelia's report to her father; he is conscious of the eaves-droppers in the nunnery scene; he is on the track of the spying courtiers, he guesses their mission, he justly appraises the purpose of the fencing match, he correctly instructs the players, and with the one exception of Polonius behind the arras, whom he mistakes for the King, he is as a person endowed with double sight.~~

~~Over and over again his premonitions are translated into reality. This is so until the very end:~~

- * Hamlet: "I shall win at the odds. But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter.
- Horatio: Nay, my good lord...
- Hamlet: It is but foolery; but it is such gaingiving as would perhaps trouble a woman.
- Horatio: If your mind dislike anything, obey it; I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit.
- Hamlet: Not a whit; we defy augury; there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. 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 one knows of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?"

From the tragic point of view, Hamlet parts willingly from life; he commits suicide. Dramatically he does not. He is murdered and the certainty of his own death releases him to do his duty.

As in Lear, Othello or Macbeth, with the first act the tragedy is set. Lear in his vanity and folly has thrown himself on the generosity of his heartless daughters ⁱⁿ the rest of the play ^{he} fulfills his fate. The Moor's conquest of Desdemona was a triumph of ~~the~~ spirit over disparity of age and race which can never stand the test of brute passion; Othello goes to his doom. In Macbeth the weird sisters draw the circle of tragedy around the hero and ^{uxorious} his ambition; the end follows as by geometrical necessity. ^{as I see it,} Similarly, in "Hamlet". The opening act ~~of the play~~ contains the tragedy in nuce. When his father's command reaches him ^{Hamlet's} fate is sealed. Instead of "Now to my revenge", ^{his} Hamlet's words are: "The times is out of joint, oh cursed spite that ever I was born to put it right!" Before the ^{action} second act ^{begins}, it has been decreed that Hamlet will lose his life while delaying ~~his duty~~ by feigning to be mad.

We need not go far to understand why Hamlet is a good play. ^{note} ~~It deals of a matter of life of the most universal interest in a manner that is most universally understandable.~~ ^{as I see it,} ~~It deals with suicide in terms of killing an enemy, it deals with continuous delay in terms of incessant action.~~ ^{it is about endless} The plot is extremely clever.

Saxo Grammaticus's Amblet pretended madness in order to prepare for his revenge on the King. Shakespeare's Hamlet, on the contrary, seeks instruments of delay. This is the true function of his madness in the plot. But for his feigned madness, Hamlet could not have put off his decision without a ^{decisively fatal} conflict with his friends and supporters. ^{This} ~~Such a conflict~~ ^{in clash} would have dragged his own inner conflict to light and been artistically fatal. ^{fore} A Hamlet who refused

^{whole} Hamlet's inner conflict, his hovering on the confines of life and death, is translated ^{here} into external events, ^{events} into sharply accentuated dramatic action.

I believe

action is on the

~~note~~

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to obey the behest of the ghost or deliberately hesitated to act when pressed by his friends, would lose the sympathy of the audience *just as he would lose their* and ~~its~~ admiration, if he were defeated in his quest for revenge ~~from~~ *As matters are,* ~~outside~~ by the King and the Court. ~~actually~~, Hamlet himself is the only obstacle both to the decision to take revenge on the King and to the carrying out of that decision. This raises the play to the highest level of universality in terms of inner life, ~~and this yet whole~~ *translating spelling out the me it set out through* massively external play is transposed by Shakespeare's art into blood, fire, and brimstone. Small wonder that it makes a good play!

"Hamlet" is about the human condition. We all live and refuse to die, but we are not ~~all the time~~ decided to live and be happy, ~~certainly not in~~ *all* the essential respects in which life invites us. To some extent we are ~~all the time~~ delaying happiness and putting off life, because we fear to commit ourselves to live. Our self-feeling ~~(we should not call it morbid)~~ may then ~~center~~ center on an action which to our dismay we find ourselves not doing. This makes *the hero's* ~~Hamlet's~~ delay so symbolic. Life is man's missed opportunity. Yet ~~in spite of all,~~ Hamlet's life fulfills itself, for readiness to die is readiness to live.

2

I realize that I have not given you what I promised: some of my inner assurance that I ever understood the Prince in that easy conversational manner in which one imagines one understands oneself. I now find that it may have all been no more than a dream of bad days. One imagines one has learned in one's sleep the secret of life, yet on awakening finds that it has all evaporated.

HAMLET

by Karl Polanyi

A brief reminiscence at the outset will serve a twofold purpose. It should reduce to the vanishing point the literary claims of this piece of amateur writing, while adding a note of authenticity to the author's reasons for putting off publication for almost a lifetime.

Nearly forty years ago I was serving as an officer in the old Austro-Hungarian Army. The Russian winter and the blackish steppe made me feel sick at heart. It happened that at the time my personal life had taken a turn towards darkness; daylight seemed bounded in a narrowing disk that grew dimmer and dimmer. At one time, I remember, the cold was so intense that when my horse stumbled and fell I was too apathetic to get out of the saddle. Fortunately -- though I may not have thought so then -- the gaunt stiff creature, a yellow Cossack mare that we had picked up, jerked herself onto her long legs and I was saved, for had she rolled over I might have been crushed to death. For companionship I had nothing but a volume of Shakespeare's plays; in my desolation I found myself reading and re-reading one: "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." Altogether I must have read it through well over a score of times. My soul was numbed and fell under the spell of a recurrent daydream. I read my "Hamlet" and every word, phrase, and intonation of the hero's ravings came through to me, simple and clear.

For many years the memory of those bleak months haunted me. I could not rid myself of the idea that by some weird chance I had possessed myself of Hamlet's secret. I knew why he did not kill the King. I knew what it was he feared. I knew why he so swiftly ran Polonius through the body when he mistook him for the King, pretending he was only after ~~an~~ a rat. I knew