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A Structure-Model for the Hamlet-Tradition

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A STRUCTURE-MODEL FOR THE HAMLET-TRADITION

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

Christopher Scott Chiron

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ABSTRACT

The "hero-as-fool" structure-model for the Hamlet-story proposed by William F. Hansen is modified into an "Amlethan" structure-model with five major elements: (1) the Usurpation; (2) the First Test (of the Maiden); (3) the Second Test (of the Mother); (4) the Third Test (of the Journey); and (5) the Revenge. The first and last elements emphasize the "avenging son" aspect of the story whereas the middle three elements emphasize the "hero-as-fool" aspect. The Amlethan structure-model is then re-applied to the two "essential" texts in the tradition, Saxo Grammaticus' narrative of Amleth (c. 1200) and William Shakespeare's play Hamlet (c. 1600). Several contrasting themes within the tradition (truth/seeming, moderation/excess, Christian/pagan) are explored, as is the recurring use of sea and growth-cycle imagery and the effects that these themes and imagery have on characterization. After brief introductions to several Hamlet-texts as they occur in narrative, dramatic, and lyric modes, the Amlethan structure-model and theme-analysis is applied more fully to three Hamlet-texts: Henry Treece's 1966 novel The Green Man; Michael O'Brien's 1995 play Mad Boy Chronicle; and Ambroise Thomas' 1868 opera Hamlet.

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INTRODUCTION

FORTY THOUSAND HAMLETS

In Lee Blessing's 1991 play Fortinbras, the title character asks Horatio to provide him with a written report explaining exactly what happened during that fateful fencing match at Elsinore. Later, Fortinbras asks Horatio to read the report to him aloud while servants busily redecorate the Queen's chambers to suit Fortinbras' tastes:

> HORATIO: May I continue?
> FORTINBRAS: I really wish you wouldn't. This was all pretty unbelievable when I read it last night. I thought maybe if you read it to me yourself, but—
> HORATIO: It's what happened.
> FORTINBRAS: I can't help that.
> HORATIO: I was in a unique position to know.
> FORTINBRAS: So what? I mean, who can understand all this stuff? A ghost appears to Hamlet and tells him his uncle killed his father, so Hamlet pretends to go crazy—or maybe he really does, who cares?—and he decides to kill his uncle. But he stalls around for a long time instead, kills a guy who's not his uncle, gets sent to England, gets rescued by pirates, comes back, and kills everybody— including himself. I mean, come on.
> [. . . . .]
> HORATIO: But there's only the truth.
> FORTINBRAS: That's the problem. You want to tell everyone in Denmark that their entire royal family killed itself, plus a family of reasonably innocent nobles, plus two attendant lords? Good God, Horatio—how much do you think people can take? No one wants to hear their whole royal family's incompetent. Personally, I think we should just replace the whole story.
> HORATIO: Replace it?
> FORTINBRAS: We need a story that'll do something for us: explain the bodies, preserve the monarchy, give the people some kind of focus for all their—I don't know—anger, loss, whatever. And most of all, something that'll show people that everything that's happened up till now had to happen so that I could become king. I know how I'd like to explain it.
> HORATIO: How?
> FORTINBRAS: A Polish spy. (108-09, 110)

Literature Review

Blessing's Fortinbras is not the only one to have desired a retelling of these events, to want "a story that will do something for us." Whether due to adoration, speculation, condemnation, insubordination, or just plain whimsy, Hamlet's story pervades our culture and literature. Be it through new stagings, critical editions, parodies, novelizations, films, verse, or allusions, Hamlet persists. Although the question "Why?" is important, I find myself more enticed to ask, "How?" How does this story survive, grow, wither, strengthen, die, only to be reborn to the cycle again and again? How do these renderings inform our readings of other Hamlets?

Shakespeare's Hamlet is by no means the original story of the hero-fool who would be king. Israel Gollancz was the first in-depth investigator of the historical and textual background of Hamlet with two of his works: Hamlet in Iceland (1898) and Sources of Hamlet (1926). The former gives some possible historical origins of the Hamlet character as well as two Icelandic sagas that include Hamlet-like characters: the Ambales Saga and "The Story of Brjám." Sources of Hamlet reprints some of the material in Hamlet in Iceland and includes a parallel text of Saxo Grammaticus' Latin account and Oliver Elton's 1905 English translation, as well as François Belleforest's 1582 French retelling of Saxo set parallel to its 1608 English translation ("Hystorie of Hamblet"). The Variorum of Horace Howard Furness (1905) supplies not only the most extensive critical Hamlet edition of its time but also the text of two related works: the narrative "Hystorie of Hamblet" (1608) and a translation of the German play Der Bestrafte Brudermord (or, Fratricide Punished, dated 1710). William F. Hansen expands

on the work of Gollancz and others in Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet (1983) by delving more critically into Saxo's text and its structural relationship to the northern stories of Brjám, Harald and Halfdan, and to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Hansen also discusses the dyadic narrative elements of the tales that connect the stories strongly to an oral tradition.

Geoffrey Bullough in his expansive series Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (1973) adds further commentary on some of the earlier works in the tradition, including Der Bestrafte Brudermord, but discusses in more detail other possible material that may have informed Shakespeare's text, including accounts on the murder of the real "Gonzago," the opinion on ghosts and spirits in Elizabethan England, and other specifically textual information for Shakespeare's play. The German Corpus Hamleticum (1912) supplies numerous cognate stories of the exchanged letter device, citing Saxo and other stories from around the world. Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend delve deeper into the mythological and astronomical cognates of the Hamlet character in Hamlet's Mill: An Essay Investigating the Origins of Human Knowledge and its Transmission through Myth (1969). Hamlet-parallels from Finland, Persia, the Pacific Islands, and other regions are represented.

A more recent German Corpus Hamleticum (1987) concentrates on the stage tradition and variant Hamlet-texts in performance genres. Helen Phelps Bailey's Hamlet in France from Voltaire to Laforgue (1964) assimilates nearly two hundred years of Hamlet stage history, critical reception, and derivative texts in France from the early eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. James M. Vest takes a similar

approach to the development of the Ophelia in The French Face of Ophelia from Belleforest to Baudelaire (1989). Bernice Kliman's Hamlet: Film, Television, and Audio Performance (1988) offers an extensive understanding of Hamlets found in electronic media. However, this book predates recent film versions of Shakespeare's Hamlet by Franco Zefferelli (1990), Kenneth Branaugh (1996), and Michael Almereyda (2000) as well as Gabriel Axel's Prince of Jutland (a.k.a. Royal Deceit) (1994), a film version of Saxo Grammaticus' history of Amleth.

Other texts that discuss Shakespeare in general have devoted chapters to some of his more prominent individual works, including Hamlet. Jacob Salomon's Nineteenth Century Dramatic Burlesques of Shakespeare: A Selection of British Parodies (1979) reproduces printings of four burlesques, including two from the Hamlet-tradition (John Poole's Hamlet Travestie and W.S. Gilbert's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). More extensive and detailed than Salomon's sketchy study is Stanley Wells' five-volume series Nineteenth Century Shakespeare Burlesques (1978) which offers almost thirty burlesques of Shakespeare's plays, including eight on Hamlet. Henry Jacobs and Claudia Johnson's An Annotated Bibliography of Shakespearean Burlesques, Parodies, and Travesties (1976) provides brief summaries of the burlesques found in Wells and includes additional information on verse parodies, particularly from such periodicals as Punch and Fun. (I have discovered, however, that the text does contain several citation errors.)

In Modern Shakespeare Offshoots (1976) Ruby Cohn summarizes more than a dozen texts from fiction and drama, most of which use Hamlet as motif or character referent rather than protagonist. Gary Schmidgall's Shakespeare and Opera (1990) adds

to the understanding of successful and unsuccessful transformations of Shakespeare's plays into the operatic mode. A detailed and practical index of mediated texts is available in Kenneth S. Rothwell and Annabelle Henkin Melzer's Shakespeare on Screen: An International Filmography and Videography (1991). Lawrence W. Levine's Highbrow Lowbrow (1988) shows Shakespeare to be a central figure in the creation of "High" and "low" culture in the United States. By way of example, Levine supplies references to Hamlet performances, derivative texts and the reception to both in the nineteenth century.

Often, these discussions of other Hamlet stories presuppose an absoluteness of Shakespeare's Hamlet as the authoritive telling of the tale, and any changes to the story made by other authors are presumed to be merely bastardizations of the great tragedy. But Hamlet the Story is much older than Hamlet the Shakespearean Dane, and we would be remiss to begin each investigation into a Hamlet-story with, "Oh, look what they've done to Shakespeare!" This thesis is not about Shakespeare; it is about Hamlet. Traditionally, that distinction has been greatly blurred. A better question to ask when approaching a Hamlet-story would be, "What are they doing with Hamlet?"

Textual comparisons that do exist are more evident regarding earlier texts, particularly in works on the oral traditions and folktales by Gollancz, Hansen, and de Santillano and Dechend. These works, however, have placed a greater emphasis on seeking origins than in expanding their analysis beyond Shakespeare. Although these investigations have included versions of later oral tales (written after Shakespeare but assumed to be much older) for all practical purposes their research goes no further than 1623 and the First Folio of Shakespeare's work.

In addition, while several generic listings of Hamlet-texts exist, their restrictions based on medium or style (only the parodic literature, only the films, only the dramatic texts) discourage the existence of a broad-based catalog. Moreover, those sources that attempt to collect Hamlet-texts across genre often limit themselves to title and author listings without offering additional background or source information. While for certain genre the listings are already extensive, new renderings of the story continue to be produced. Hamlet persists. What has not occurred to any extent is an interplay between these texts, a discussion of them as texts related not only to Shakespeare, but to each other—a disscussion of a Hamlet-tradition.

Thesis Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is five-fold: (1) to modify the "hero-as-fool" structure-model of William F. Hansen into an "Amlethan Structure" for use in discussing Hamlet-texts; (2) to re-apply the model to the two "essential" texts in the tradition, Saxo Grammaticus' story of Amleth and William Shakespeare's play Hamlet; (3) to explore several themes that recur in the tradition; (4) to offer a brief introduction to Hamlets as they occur in narrative, dramatic, and lyric forms; and (5) to apply the structure-model and thematic analysis more fully to three Hamlet-texts: Henry Treece's 1966 novel The Green Man; Michael O'Brien's 1995 play Mad Boy Chronicle; and Ambroise Thomas' 1868 opera Hamlet. My goal is to provide a method of analysis that will promote the further identification and criticism of Hamlet-texts.

In this research, I have relied heavily upon the critical works noted in the literature review to learn what Hamlet-texts have already been identified. I also used MLA and other Humanities-based research databases and catalogs in looking for articles that might discuss other versions of the story. As is often the case in such research, I relied heavily upon the footnote trail to find the primary texts. One handicap of this method is that it ties me to looking for texts that are overtly related; that is, I searched the catalogs and databases for references to recognizable keywords such as Hamlet, Amleth, Ophelia, Gertrude, Horatio, Fortinbras, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Saxo Grammaticus. Searching by Saxo, for example, yielded a reference to Treece's novel The Green Man, which might have escaped my attention otherwise since neither Hamlet nor any of the other keywords appear in the title. Works in languages other than English that have not been translated necessarily have been excluded. Titles that do not refer overtly to Hamlet or other recognizably related words are understandably harder to locate, though my awareness of the story is now heightened, and I see aspects of the story popping up most anywhere (recently, for example, in Disney's The Lion King).

Nor is this a study in the performance-history of Shakespeare's play. Although the stage tradition of this tragedy is both extensive and varied, with few exceptions it does not fall under the charge of this research, since the language of the piece—corrupted, edited, and warped as it often may be—is identifiably and consciously Shakespeare's work. The texts explored in this thesis are distinguishable from, yet often referential to, either Saxo or Shakespeare, and the discussion that follows elaborates how these texts relate as well as differ.

There are few well-known or well-respected Hamlet-texts in circulation, but seemingly countless parodies, send-ups, allusions, speculations, and modifications. It is not surprising that due to the relative obscurity or passing novelty of these texts, there is a corresponding dearth of secondary references. In many cases, even the primary texts are difficult or impossible to locate. Yet, there is value in looking at the available texts because the modifications contained in them to the Hamlet-story and its plot can amplify and inform our understanding of other texts found in the Hamlet-tradition. Each retelling of Hamlet's life calls into question "all trivial fond records" (I.v.99) of the story, and each change or adherence to the structure develops new critical perspectives vis à vis the story. Even a "bad" retelling offers us occasion to note what it is that might make yet another telling "good."

It is important to note that although this thesis seeks in part to destabilize the equation of Hamlet = Shakespeare, the Bard's contribution to the tradition cannot be understated. The majority of works found in the Hamlet-tradition do devolve from elements found in Shakespeare's version of the story. What is argued here, however, is that if we limit our understanding of Hamlet to Shakespearean elements, we are prone to miss other story-elements that are just as much a part of the Hamlet legacy.

This thesis emphasizes works that retell the full story of the Hamlet-character; however, I will discuss other texts in the tradition that pursue different parts of the story. Chapter One defines the new structure-model for the tradition. Chapter Two examines the foundations of the tradition, the narrative of Saxo Grammaticus and the drama by William Shakespeare, and it details and contrasts the manner in which each uses the

Amlethan structure to different effect. A discussion follows on several themes that reoccur throughout the tradition and, therefore, might serve as useful points of comparison. Chapter Three explores the life of Hamlet as a narrative, particularly in Henry Treece's 1966 novel The Green Man. Chapter Four observes the comic and tragic Hamlet worlds found in drama, then provides a more detailed account of the use of the tradition in Michael O'Brien's 1995 play Mad Boy Chronicle. Chapter Five briefly surveys some Hamlets in the lyric mode, and features an analysis of Ambroise Thomas' 1868 opera Hamlet.

CHAPTER ONE

THE STRUCTURAL HAMLET

The Story-Structure

I position this new structure-model for the Hamlet story between the two principal texts within the tradition: Saxo Grammaticus' narrative of Amleth in Books 3 and 4 of his Gesta Danorum (c. 1200) and William Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet (c. 1600). Saxo's is the first complete telling, and Shakespeare's is the most well-known and referenced text. Israel Gollancz, in his Hamlet in Iceland (1898) and later in Sources of Hamlet (1926) gave the first strong exploration of the folklore tradition that led to Saxo's account. William F. Hansen furthered this exploration with his Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet (1983) by supplying additional historical information on the legendary and historical Hamlet, and by providing a structural breakdown of the dominant folktale texts and of Shakespeare's play.

Hansen regards the Hamlet story as constituting a "hero-as-fool" tradition that follows a three-part structure: Front Frame, Central Tension, and Back Frame (12-13). The general plot concerns a father, generally of high social status, who is murdered by his brother. The usurper then takes the slain brother's throne and wife as his own. The son, fearing for his life, feigns madness while planning revenge. The uncle, suspicious of his nephew's behavior, first tests his sanity by observing his interactions with a maiden, but the hero avoids the trap. A henchman of the uncle sets a second snare, but while he spies on the hero and his mother, the hero kills him. The uncle finally tries to send his nephew

away to be killed, but the hero foils the plan and returns to complete his revenge. Order is reestablished.

Hansen uses the qualifier "hero-as-fool" as the key factor in relating the texts to a tradition since the principal names for the Hamlet character (for example, Amloði, Ambløthæ, Ambluþe, Amlæd, Amblet, and Amleth) are words which in various Northern European languages or dialects mean fool. However, it is unknown which came first, the word or the hero (Hansen 6). Other less Hamlet-looking names are also significant. In both the Icelandic folktale of Brjám (in which the peasant father is killed, not for his kingdom, but for his prize milkcow) and Livy's account of Junius Lucius Brutus (famous for defending the honor of Lucretia by overthrowing and ousting Tarquin and the rule of Kings in early Rome) the name of each hero in his native tongue means fool or dullard.

My modification of Hansen's model follows two shifts in thinking about the tradition. First, in Hansen's structure-model, the hero has a specific motivation (the murder of his father) with specific obstacles (the three tests) and a specific goal (revenge); for these reasons, I disagree with Hansen's labeling of the model as "Hero as Fool"—the masquerade is only one aspect of the story structure. I have designated the revenge-plot as equal in importance to the the hero-type, one being situation and telos (avenging son), the other being method and action (hero-as-fool). I think this second, equally important qualifier will more easily differentiate Hamlet-texts from other fool/trickster-type heroes. Thus, I have changed Hansen's subcategory "hero as fool" into a basic component because this middle element of the story is concerned fully with proving or disproving the hero's "antic disposition." Since the manner of the hero's homecoming varies

considerably (indeed, if he ever leaves at all) I have added "Return" to the third component in order to delineate further the story-characteristics. The Usurpation category is principally expositional while the Hero as Fool and Avenging Son components carry most of the action. Any texts that include these three components command attention as potential members of the tradition. A comparative outline is provided in Figure 1, in which the two models are contrasted.

Hansen's Hero As Fool	Amlethan Model
Front Frame	I. Usurpation
1. Murder	A. Murder
2. Throne	B. Throne
3. Marriage	C. Marriage
4. Hero as Fool	II. Hero as Fool
Central Tension	D. Test of the Maiden
5. Woods episode	E. Test of the Mother
6. Bedroom episode	F. Test of the Journey
7. Foreign-land episode	III. Avenging Son
Back Frame	G. Return
8. Revenge	H. Revenge
9. Throne	I. Throne

Fig. 1. Hansen's Hero-as-Fool Model contrasted with an Amlethan Model

The second change to Hansen's model concerns the distribution of the structure-elements. Although the version of the Amlethan model in Figure 1 satisfies the components of the story, it fails to indicate the prominence of each story-element within the context of the Hamlet-story. Parts I and III (Usurpation and Revenge) are key for the

avenging son. However, Part I in many instances is quickly summarized as prologue and often consumes very little of the telling. Part III does tend to carry more active elements than Part I; however, after the revenge has been completed, the ascension to the throne is highly problematic and usually treated in brief, if at all. In contrast, the dynamics of each of the three tests under Part II (the Hero-as-Fool component) carry most of the action of the story. Therefore, to indicate the prominence of these three tests, I have raised each test to the position of a separate component. The result is a more familiar five-act structure (see fig. 2).

Types of Hamlet-Texts

In addition to the structure-model, there are other ways to catalogue Hamlet-texts. Toward a taxonomy, I have delineated three descriptive categories: (1) story elements; (2) central perspective; and (3) Hamlet's name. As discussed in Chapter Two, Saxo's and Shakespeare's works constitute the primary texts within the tradition, so that other Hamlet-texts will follow one of four basic story structures: (1) a story based principally on Saxo's account; (2) a story based principally on Shakespeare's account; (3) a story combining both Saxonian and Shakespearean elements; or (4) a story deviating from both Saxo and Shakespeare either by adding or substituting substantial exterior elements or by underdeveloping a majority of the standard structure.

Since Shakespeare-related texts are the most prevalent in the tradition, particularly in parodies (see Chapter Four), and since Shakespearean referents are for most people the more easily identifiable, attention to Saxo-like stories needs particular attention. As will

be pointed out in Chapter Two, the Amleth of Saxo has so drastically a different relationship to the story's structural elements that a novel like Treece's The Green Man might not otherwise be recognizable as being related to Shakespeare's Hamlet. Other works, such as O'Brien's Mad Boy Chronicle, identifiably blend elements of both story variants.

In the central perspective category, the three types include: (1) the Hamlet character as protagonist; (2) the Hamlet character present but without the central point-of-view, or (3) Hamlet as a passing character, literary motif, or allusion (that is, lacking a substantive character perspective). The fullest Hamlet-texts are those that tell Hamlet's story centrally. However, many other works in the tradition have sidelined the hero in order to draw attention to other characters. The principal action may remain, but it is often tangential to the character's story as it unfolds. For example, John Updike's Gertrude and Claudius (2000) narrates the events from just before Gertrude's marriage to Hamlet's father up to the wedding banquet of Gertrude and Claudius. Hamlet is an incidental character in this telling, but while most of the Usurpation story elements are detailed, the remainder of the story-elements are presumed to follow after the conclusion of the novel.

Works that use Hamlet as allusion or motif are by far the largest category in the taxonomy. Certain works that utilize Hamlet as allusion also incorporate Hamlet qualities into one or more characters, combining two points-of-view, that is, a Hamlet-like character within a text that includes Hamlet allusions. For example, Hamlet in Goethe's Wilhelm Meister is principally allusory: Wilhelm performs Hamlet at Weimar.

I. USURPATION	The King/father is murdered by his brother, who then takes the throne/possessions and marries the Queen/mother (formerly his sister-in-law). The son of the dead king, nephew to the new king, knows of the murder and feigns madness to protect his own life while plotting revenge.
II. FIRST TEST	The King is not convinced of his nephew/son's madness. With a henchman, he devises to arrange a meeting between the son and a maiden in order to observe his interaction with her and decide whether it constituted sanity or not. The son learns of the spying and avoids detection.
III. SECOND TEST	Still not convinced of the son's sanity, the henchman devises a second test in the absence of the King: he will observe the son and the Queen alone to see if he speaks sanely with her. The son again learns of the spying and kills the henchman. He brow-beats the Queen (his mother) for betraying his father. She repents. The son then disposes of the henchman's body.
IV. THIRD TEST	As a final measure, the King sends the son to a foreign land with two traveling companions bearing a letter that the son should be executed. The son exchanges the letter for another which says that the companions should be executed.
V. REVENGE	The son returns to his homeland to some sort of funerary event or festival and kills the King. A new order is established.

Fig. 2. The five-part expanded Amlethan structure of Hamlet-texts.

However, Wilhelm also recognizes the Hamlet elements within himself, making him a Hamlet-type. Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's Ulysses also speaks about Hamlet and exhibits Hamlet characteristics. In both of these cases, Hamlet is not only a narrative device but also an indicator of character. (For further discussion of these and other works that contain similar Hamlet elements, consult Ruby Cohn's Modern Shakespeare Offshoots, 108-185.) Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) is peppered with Hamlet quotations as well as a Miss Ophelia and a Hamlet-like Augustine St. Clare. Huckleberry Finn smacks of Hamlet, most notably in the "Soliloquy" performance and in Huck's "Prayer Scene." (James Hirsh's discussion of the prayer scene and other Shakespearean elements in Clemens' work can be found his "Samuel Clemens and the Ghost of Shakespeare" [1992].)

Finally, in the name category, texts can utilize Hamlet proper (or similarly, Amleth, Amleto) as royalty in Denmark, or utilize Hamlet-story elements in distinctly different locations and with distinctly different character names. As noted earlier, Hamlet-works often will have a protagonist whose name is connected to the central "Hero as Fool" concept. Amleth is close to amloði, Brjám to brjáni, and both of the latter words are akin to fool, imbecile, or dullard. Brutus carries a similar meaning. Interestingly, the name "Hamlet" is not related etymologically to "Amleth" (Hansen 40) but occurred presumably due to its similarity in orthography.

In some instances authors do not follow this traditional name-path. For example, in Michael O'Brien's Mad Boy Chronicle (1995) the Hamlet character is named Horvendal to echo the Shakespearean pattern of Old Hamlet/Young Hamlet while using

the name of the Saxonian Amleth's father, Horvendal. Additional story elements in this play are recognizably derivative of Saxo (e.g., the names Feng and Gerutha) and Shakespeare (e.g., the Ghost and the "House of Polonius") and therefore make the play identifiably Amlethan. The taxonomy for cataloging Hamlet-texts is outlined in Figure 3.

I. The Story Elements
   - A. Primarily Saxo's version
   - B. Primarily Shakespeare's version
   - C. Elements of both Saxo and Shakespeare
   - D. Fragmentary use of, or substantial deviation from, either Saxo or Shakespeare

II. The Central Perspective
   - A. Hamlet as central point-of-view
   - B. Hamlet as a substantive but not central character
   - C. Hamlet as a cursory character, allusion, or motif

III. The Hamlet Character
   - A. Named Hamlet, Amleth, or other "fool"-related name
   - B. Named something other than Hamlet or Amleth

Fig. 3. Three categories useful for cataloging types of Hamlet-texts

As noted above, literary allusion will bring to the surface more characters with names akin to Amleth, Hamlet, or other Shakespearean characters but the works that contain the allusions may not retell the significant components of the Hamlet story. The taxonomic structure I propose easily allows for the inclusion of any text with a character named Hamlet, because by its Shakespearean connection, the name (at least in our culture) cannot escape a host of connotations that attach it to the tradition. Other tangent-

elements also appear. For example, the character Cousin Ophelia in The Addam's Family television series (complete with daisies pushing up out of her head), or the inhabitants of Gilligan's Island putting on a musical revue of Hamlet for a stranded Broadway director, both perpetuate visions of the story but do not retell the story per se. While these Hamlet-allusions are legion in the Hamlet-tradition, they are of cursory interest to the current study.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ESSENTIAL HAMLET

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, two texts in the tradition are seen as essential because most Hamlet-texts have sprung either openly or at least recognizably from them as source material, and because their treatment of the story differs greatly. Saxo's telling offers a heroic, clever, down-to-business hero-as-fool named Amleth; Shakespeare's rendition supplies a melancholic, intellectual, distracted-to-flaw avenging son named Hamlet. Saxo's protagonist is epically heroic; Shakespeare's, dramatically tragic. They are two sides of the same coin or, as Stoppard's Player might note, "the same side of two coins" (1037). Perhaps the most significant difference in the tellings is that in Saxo, he wins (lives); in Shakespeare, he loses (dies).

Saxo's Amleth

Saxo Grammaticus began composing his Gesta Danorum c. 1185 at the request of Absalon, Archbishop of Lund and close friend of Valdemar I, King of Denmark. Saxo completed the sixteen books around 1216. His design was to create for Denmark what Livy, Bede, and others had done for their nations: a glorious pedigree of kings from whom the current ruler descends. Saxo weaves together the elements of the oral tradition with his hodge-podge patchworking of Northern European myth, legend, and history to create his Gesta Danorum. The text is in Latin, not Danish, and some of the source materials were found in Old Icelandic, Old Norse, Old Danish, and other languages and

dialects. This complicates the story of Amleth in that the important puns are lost or horribly mangled in translation, not only for us in receiving the text from Latin to English, but originally in the translation from the various dialects to Latin. Hansen, as well as de Santalliana and Dechend, have in their studies supplied several possible tales which may fill in the gaps created by the translated puns. For example, the Kalevala of Finland has a hero named Kullervo, a wonder-child who also plays with hooks and avenges his father, but who also unknowingly has sex with his sister and places wolves in a stable, events which are vaguely similar to events in Amleth's life (Hamlet's Mill 26-35).

The hero-as-fool story recurs within the Gesta Danorum again with Harald and Halfdan (Book Seven). A similar story appears in the Saga of Hrolf Kraki (c.1400) with Hroar and Helgi as the main characters. In these stories the Hamlet-character is bifurcated into two brothers who both feign foolishness. Story-elements are consistent with Amleth, which leads Hansen to believe that all are variants of the same story. Depending on the reader's judgment of Saxo's skills, this gives him credit for the reutilization of a motif, discredits him for lack of imagination, or reflects a wider circulation of Hamlet stories that, through the oral tradition, have developed into several accounts that Saxo could implement separately. The significance of the Amleth story in Saxo is that it is the first of these similar stories in Saxo, and therefore the "oldest" in the construction Saxo's Danish history. This would allow for the speculation that it might have been a cultural referent for the other events (assuming that it occurred or was in circulation prior to the latter events) therefore making it closer to the "source" of the

story. Most significantly, the name Amleth (and similar names in different areas) means "fool," again probably making that story closer to an "original" than the others, such as Harald and Halfdan.

The Story of Amleth

Orvendil, king of Jutland, has defeated King Coller of Norway and now reigns in Jutland. He marries Gerutha and they have a son, Amleth. Fengi openly kills his brother Orvendil, presumably for mistreating Gerutha, and in doing so assumes the throne of Jutland, thereby taking his late brother's wife as his own. Knowing the threat to his own life, the son of the slain king, Amleth, pretends to be a fool and spends his time carving wooden staves. The king, not trusting the antics of Amleth, decides to test him to see if he truly is mad.

First, Fengi sends a maiden to tempt him, believing that if Amleth were sane, he would have sex with her. Amleth is warned of the plot by a foster-brother, and he runs off into the woods with the girl, thereby evading the watchers. He does have sex with her, and she swears to keep the tryst a secret. The watchers eventually catch up to them and ask what happened. Amleth proudly claims they had outrageous sex, but the girl flatly denies it. The watchers believe her, so Amleth passes the test.

Next, a confidant hides in the queen's chamber to eavesdrop on Gerutha and Amleth. When the confidant is missing at a feast, Amleth grows suspicious, so he goes to his mother's chamber and runs around the room driving his sword into everything, systematically finding and killing the confidant. He chops up the confidant's body and

feeds him to the swine. Amleth returns to chastise his mother for her infidelity. She repents, and swears to do as he asks. When questioned about the confidant's whereabouts, Amleth says he saw him fall into the sty and be eaten by the swine. Thinking the man was drunk, the questioners accept Amleth's answer, so Amleth passes the second test.

But the king, still suspicious, decides to send Amleth to England accompanied by two henchmen who hold a sealed letter to the King of England in which the King demands that Amleth be killed out of England's due loyalty to the Jutish throne. On the voyage, however, Amleth changes the letter so that it instead requires that his traveling companions be killed. When the King of England fulfills the agreement, Amleth protests the deaths, and is placated through receiving wergild for the lives of the two men. This gold he requests to be poured into the hollowed shafts of two sticks. He wins the favor of the King of England and marries the king's daughter.

Amleth returns to Denmark a year later, as he had earlier planned with his mother to do, to a drunken celebration of his "death" in England. When asked the whereabouts of his companions, he shows them the gold-filled sticks. They think he his mad, and Amleth joins in the revelry, playing cupbearer for the entire crowd. When he cuts himself several times with his own sword, some party-goers have his blade nailed into its sheath. Finally the crowd falls into a drunken stupor, and Amleth uses the staves he had fashioned earlier to fasten a tapestry (which he had instructed his mother to make) over the drunkards and sets fire to the hall. The revelers, trapped under the pinned tapestry, all die.

Amleth finds Fengi (who had left the party when Amleth arrived) in his bedchamber. Amleth replaces his bolted sword with Fengi's, which rested near the king's bed. When the king awakens, he attempts to draw the sword, cannot, and Amleth kills him. After giving a rousing speech to the populace that explains his actions, Amleth becomes King of Jutland.

Shakespeare's Hamlet

Much ado has been made about the sources for Shakespeare's drama Hamlet (c. 1600). It is generally believed that Shakespeare's play, as we have received it, stems from Saxo's narrative via François Belleforest's story-collection Histoires Tragiques (c.1570), which provides an elaborated account of Saxo's tale. Most critics doubt that Shakespeare read Saxo's history, though it had been available in print since 1514, but do find it reasonable that Shakespeare may have read Belleforest. References to Hamlet in correspondences from Elizabethan England suggest the existence of a so-called "Ur-Hamlet" play, written in the late 1580s or early 1590s that may have been the direct source for Shakespeare's tragedy. Due to the debate over the specific origins of the play, it is difficult to assess how actively the structural elements unique to Shakespeare's play are attributable to Shakespeare as playwright. (For a discussion and examples of other works that may have influenced the production of an Elizabethan Hamlet, consult Geoffrey Bullough's Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare.)

Three principal variants of Shakespeare's Hamlet exist. The First "Bad" Quarto , the Second Quarto, and the First Folio. Although the First Quarto has substantial

differences from the Second Quarto and First Folio, for the purposes of this study, the textual differences between these versions will not be addressed because collectively they are attributed to Shakespeare, and this thesis is focused more on Hamlet-stories by other authors. Most editions of Shakespeare's work will offer a textual introduction (e.g., Harold Jenkins introduction to the Arden Shakespeare [18-74]). For a complete textual comparison, consult Bernice Kliman's The Three-Text Hamlet (1991), which supplies all three texts in a parallel-column format.

The Story of Hamlet

Unknown to the populace, Claudius has killed his brother, Old Hamlet, King of Denmark. Claudius ascends to the throne of Denmark and takes Gertrude, his "sometime sister, now our queen" (I.ii.8) as his wife, ostensibly to shield Denmark from perceptions of national weakness and thereby prevent a war with Norway. Hamlet's behavior is marked in the beginning with sorrow and distrust. He is informed by confidants that his father's ghost has appeared on the ramparts, and Hamlet agrees to hold the watch with them that night to see if the Ghost will appear again. The Ghost does appear and speaks in private with Hamlet, informing the Prince that "the serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown" (I.v.39-40). The ghost calls Hamlet to avenge his death. Hamlet puts "an antic disposition on" (I.v.180).

Old companions of Hamlet are sent for, so that the King may have some informants on Hamlet's behavior, but Hamlet thwarts them. To test the cause of Hamlet's madness, Claudius and his counselor, Polonius, send Polonius' daughter,

Ophelia, to tempt the prince. The counselor believes that Hamlet's madness results from Polonius' mandate that Ophelia must not return Hamlet's affections. Claudius and Polonius watch as Ophelia speaks with Hamlet. Hamlet realizes that he is being watched and viciously rejects the girl. The King decides that Ophelia is not the cause of Hamlet's distemper, but remains suspicious of the Prince's behavior.

Players arrive at the castle, and Hamlet has them play a play similar in plot to the death of his father. The king has a reaction to the performance, disrupts the play, and storms off. Hamlet is called to his mother's chamber, and Polonius hides himself behind an arras in the room to listen to the conversation. As the argument grows, Gertrude cries out, Polonius calls for help, and Hamlet, hearing the counselor behind the arras and thinking it is the king, stabs and kills Polonius. Hamlet then confronts Gertrude and makes her peer into her own treacherous soul. The Ghost appears and interrupts the confrontation, reminding Hamlet to leave her judgment to heaven. Gertrude cannot see the apparition. Hamlet speaks more calmly with her about her infidelity. She repents, and he secures her loyalty. Hamlet grabs Polonius' body and "lug[s] the guts" away (III.iv.214).

The King learns that Hamlet "in madness hath Polonius slain" (IV.ii.34) and schemes to send the Prince to England, with his two old companions bearing a request for the King of England to execute Hamlet. On the voyage, Hamlet alters the papers so that they request the deaths of his companions. Pirates intercept the ship in transit. Hamlet escapes to the pirate ship, which returns him to Denmark. His traveling companions continue onward to England and to their deaths.

Hamlet returns to Denmark and learns that Ophelia is dead. Laertes, Ophelia's brother, conspires with the King to poison Hamlet during a duel. The King also puts poison in a cup, hoping Hamlet will drink it during the duel. Laertes, losing throughout the match, cuts Hamlet with the poisoned tip of his rapier. In the ensuing skirmish, they exchange rapiers, and Hamlet stabs Laertes. The Queen has drunk from the poisoned cup and dies. Laertes reveals the plot, and Hamlet kills the King. Hamlet soon after dies, but for a brief (though unstated) moment he is king by default. He predicts the crown will go to Fortinbras of Norway, and gives that succession his blessing. Fortinbras enters, claims Denmark for Norway, and orders that "four captains / Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage" (V.ii.400-01) for an honorable burial.

A Comparison of the Essential Hamlets

These summaries reveal some of the flexibility available within the story structure. The same general events occur in both, but just as with Ophelia's rue, these elements must be worn with a difference. Saxo and Shakespeare provide divergent tellings of the "same" story, and their differing uses of the common elements allow a transformation of Hamlet from epic-directed hero to tragic-brooding hero. Moreover, the works of both authors contain additional story-elements that are not shared. These varying elements are useful tools in further designating other texts in the tradition as being principally Saxo-derivative, Shakespeare-derivative, some combination of both, or significantly deviant from both.

Contrasting Elements

In Saxo, Fengi openly executes Orwendil, presumably for mistreatment of Gerutha. This act seems merely allowed by the general public rather than supported. In Shakespeare, the people believe that the late King was killed by a serpent in his garden, so Claudius' ascension is accepted, and he thanks the court "which hath freely gone / With this affair along" (I.ii.15-16). The murder is secret, and it is generally presumed that Claudius acted alone in the murder, though Gertrude may or may not have been having an affair with Claudius prior to the death of her first husband. It is worth noting that Fengi becomes King only of Jutland, whereas Claudius is King of all Denmark. This is more significant in the later adventures of Amleth, since he goes to war against Viglek for control of Denmark.

Since the murder is openly acknowledged in Saxo, Amleth is keenly aware of his perilous situation as the son of a murdered king. He feigns madness (dimwittedness) from the start. He is presumed to be an adolescent when this occurs, because the mental defect at least initially is not viewed as a result of his father's death nor is it seen as a "sudden transformation." This presumed youth of Amleth makes credible his delay in taking revenge because he is either not old enough or not strong enough to bring it about. Hamlet is depressed and hurt at first but not mad, and the source of his soon-to-develop madness will be debated in the subsequent acts of the play. Hamlet at first doubts "some foul play" (I.iii.256) but only learns of the treachery of his uncle through his meeting with the Ghost. Since the murder was secretive, the Ghost provides a device for exposition as well as additional plot complications.

Amleth seems dimwitted and therefore harmless, but some of his antics make Fengi suspicious that he may be up to something. Fengi decides to see how sharp Amleth is by observing how Amleth reacts to a willing girl. Claudius has his doubts as well, but hopes that Hamlet's distress is more due to the combination of his father's death and Ophelia's rejection of the Prince. In Saxo, the test of the maiden is more base: if Amleth has sex with the willing and able girl, then clearly he cannot be insane. In Shakespeare, Hamlet and Ophelia already have developed a strong relationship, and the test of the maiden is more relational: if Hamlet is rational with her, or he responds as an honorable lover, then he cannot be insane. Amleth's foster-sister, who has known him since childhood but has no long-standing close relationship with Amleth, happily conspires with Amleth, has sex with him in hiding, and swears that they have not. Hamlet, knowing he is being watched, and assuming that Ophelia is part of the espial, thoroughly upbraids the girl.

This shift from hidden to public in their meeting is significant. The willingness of the girl (as well as the warning of the plot received earlier from a foster-brother) shows that Amleth, fool or not, has some compatriots in his quest. Hamlet, save the affections of Horatio, who is absent from this test, is alone on his journey. His perception that Ophelia has betrayed him frustrates him even more, and he lets loose his anger upon her. Also, in Saxo's account, two henchmen escort Amleth to his rendezvous; they are more akin to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern than to the King and Polonius, who watch the test in Shakespeare's version. The scene in Saxo on the way to the test of the maiden is similar in effect to the Hamlet's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in II.ii.

Fengi makes a pretense to be away from the castle; Claudius is alone, attempting to pray for his sins. Fengi's confidant spies on Gerutha and Amleth to see if Amleth speaks rationally with her, and Polonius hides in the Queen's chamber to hear what Hamlet may say and to ensure the safety of the queen. Polonius therefore has a more "legitimate" reason for eavesdropping than does Fengi's confidant—the Queen's safety in the presence of Hamlet—and reduces the test of madness in the scene. Amleth suspects that the confidant is in the room and stabs his sword all around the room until he hits the man. Hamlet is unaware that he is being overheard until Polonius calls for help. Amleth shows no remorse for the actions, but Hamlet regrets that it had not been the King.

The chastising of the mother is similar in both renditions, and the Queen repents her sins and promises to assist Amleth/Hamlet from now on. Hamlet, during his browbeating of the Queen, is interrupted by the Ghost, who reminds him to leave her punishment to heaven. The Queen cannot see the Ghost, leaving her to speculate on Hamlet's sanity. Saxo's account contains no ghosts.

Amleth disposes of the body to make the death look accidental, and it is generally accepted as such. Hamlet hides the body haphazardly and is openly acknowledged as the murderer. In Saxo, Orvendil is openly murdered, and the confidant secretly killed. In Shakespeare, the situation is reversed. Since everyone knows of Orvendil's murder, Amleth is not unique in his knowledge of the murder (Hamlet is); since Amleth is not accused of the confidant's death, he faces no specific consequence (Hamlet does). This inversion places more agency on Hamlet and his actions because Hamlet's knowledge and actions are specific and pointed.

Fengi, still not trusting Amleth, sends him off to England; Claudius, in fear for his own safety, does the same with Hamlet. Both heroes seem to know something is awry and each has a conciliatory moment with his mother prior to leaving. Amleth instructs his mother to make a funerary tapestry for him to be hanged in the hall one year later; Hamlet tells the queen that there is treachery around him but that he will "delve one yard below their mines / And blow them at the moon" (III.iv.210-11). Here, the story elements most obviously diverge: Saxo takes us to England with Amleth, but Shakespeare keeps us in Denmark with Ophelia, and his Hamlet, we learn, never reaches England. Regardless, the death sentence letters are switched, resulting in the two traveling companions being executed in England.

Amleth returns one year later, with two gold sticks, to his own funeral feast. Hamlet returns to the funeral of Ophelia. Rather than the celebration of drunken merriment found in Saxo's telling, Shakespeare's play offers a duel of honor between Hamlet and Laertes, son of the slain Polonius and brother to the drowned Ophelia. Amleth's sword is bolted shut and later Amleth consciously exchanges it with Fengi's sword. Laertes' foil is "unbated and envenom'd" (V.ii.323) and in the sparring he exchanges it with Hamlet's foil. The exchange of rapiers is sometimes considered a confusing stage direction in Shakespeare's text and a challenge for the fight choreographer. When viewed in relationship to Saxo's account, however, the exchange of swords (and moreover, the switching of letters) clearly holds a place in the tradition.

Amleth kills Fengi's supporters with a fire; the members of the court remain living. Gerutha does not die but Gertrude does, inadvertently poisoned by Claudius.

Both Princes run the usurper through, but Amleth takes the throne, while Hamlet, poisoned by Laertes' blade, gives his dying voice to Fortinbras. Figure 5 offers another parallel view of the two stories.

Elements Unique to Saxo

Unique to Saxo is Amleth's adventures in England. Prior to the execution of Amleth's companions, the King of England holds a grand dinner for the travelers. Amleth refuses to eat, and when asked why, he states that the bread was polluted by blood, the drink by rust, and meat by the dead. Moreover, the King, says Amleth, has the eyes of a commoner, and his queen was also lowly born. The king investigates the matters and discovers that Amleth is correct on all accounts. Gollancz refers to these responses as "Clever Hans" anecdotes, part of a different oral tradition but incorporated into Amleth's story (Sources 8). Amleth's ability to divine these facts adds a magical quality to the hero, something to watch for in other versions of the story.

The conclusion of this journey—the return to Jutland with the gold-filled sticks, is similar to Livy's story of Brutus in ancient Rome, who carried two gold-filled sticks as a offering to the Delphic oracle. When Amleth is asked the whereabouts of his traveling companions, he responds, "Here is one and that's the other" (89). The story of the gold sticks not only provides a moment in which Amleth/Brutus can be truthful and clever but also contributes to the conceit of Amleth/Brutus as hiding their own value beneath a façade. Since Hamlet never reaches England, this story element is dropped from Shakespeare altogether.

FRAME	SAXO	SHAKESPEARE
USURPATION	Brother kills King openly Brother takes throne and Queen Son feigns madness to escape death Son carves hooks	Brother kills king secretly Brother takes throne and Queen Son feigns madness after seeing father's ghost Son soliloquizes
FIRST TEST	King and henchman plan a meeting of son and a maiden Foster-brother warns son of trap Son hides with maiden and has sex with her	King and henchman plan a meeting of son and henchman's daughter Son discovers trap on his own Son chastises henchman's daughter
SECOND TEST	Son continues to make hooks King and henchman plan to hide the henchman in the Queen's bedchamber Son finds henchman and kills him Son chastises mother Death "assumed" accidental	Son presents a "guilt-play" The henchman decides to hide himself in the Queen's bedchamber Son finds henchman and kills him Son chastises mother; sees Ghost Son acknowledged as murderer
THIRD TEST	Son sent off with companions to England Son switches letters and has companions killed Son marries English Princess whom he leaves behind	Son sent off with companions to England Son switches letters and has companions killed Henchman's daughter goes mad and dies
REVENGE	Son returns to his own "death banquet" Son gets everyone drunk til they pass out Son uses hooks to cover partiers with a tapestry then kills them all in a fire Son kills King Son takes throne	Son returns to henchman's daughter's funeral Son agrees to duel henchman's son for honor's sake Duel is rigged to poison son, all major players are killed through layers of treachery Son kills King Son dies

Fig. 4. A comparison of Saxo's narrative with Shakespeare's drama in their use of the basic story structure.

The story of Amleth the Avenger completes Saxo's Book 3 of his Gesta Danorum. Book 4 begins with Amleth making a speech to the people to justify his actions, and he becomes the King of Jutland. Since Hamlet dies in Shakespeare's drama, these events cannot take place. In most cases, if a Hamlet-text pursues Hamlet's life beyond the execution of the revenge-story, the plot derives from Saxo's account. I have not found in the tradition a post-revenge story of a successful, yet Shakespearean, Hamlet. There are numerous texts that elaborate the aftermath derived from the Shakespearean version of the story, but in these cases, Hamlet himself is dead. For example, in Blessing's Fortinbras, the Norwegian king is plagued with the ghosts of all those who died in Shakespeare's version.

As Saxo's story continues, the King of England, an old blood-brother of Fengi, is compelled to avenge Fengi's death. He is reluctant to do so because he has only recently wed Amleth to his daughter, but he must be loyal to his blood brother and commissions his newfound son-in-law to bear a sealed message to Queen Herminthruda of Scotland. The message indicates that Amleth is a suitor seeking her hand in marriage, but because Herminthruda has a tendency "to lop off the head" of anyone who attempts to wed her, England is hoping to find a inconspicuous way of killing his son-in-law. Herminthruda, however, takes one look at Amleth and falls in love with him, so she changes the message to read that he must marry her. Amleth follows along and becomes her king. Amleth eventually is killed by his other uncle, Viglek, brother to Gerutha, when Amleth tries to take over all of Denmark, and his death comes at the hands of Herminthruda, who sells him out to Viglek in exchange for her safety and her hand in marriage.

In Saxo's narrative, the plot and story go hand-in-hand on a linear path, which is "par for the course" with histories. Shakespeare's drama needs not always unfold the plot elements chronologically. (Examples of such out-of-sequence events include the revealing of the murder at the end of Act One rather than at its beginning, or the revealing of the switched letters after rather than before Hamlet's return.) Saxo develops only one storyline while Shakespeare devises several subplots that serve to expand upon the main line of the drama.

Saxo's narrative is based in an oral tradition. Hansen discusses how the text is written as a series of dyads, allowing a storyteller only to have to assume two characters at any given time. Names of many characters are not considered significant. In fact, the only characters mentioned by name are Amleth, Fengi, Gerutha, and Orvendil. The other characters are named only by role in their relationship to the main characters: Amleth's foster-brother, Amleth's foster-sister, Fengi's confidant, King of England, traveling companions, henchmen, revelers, etc. Moreover, these characters generally appear in one scene only. They serve their purposes and are heard from no more. As such, the supporting characters in each section of the story remain unnamed and unrelated. The only link between the scenes is Amleth. This device is often beneficial to an oral tradition because it limits the number of characters one has to keep in mind during the telling and it maintains the narrative-focus on those characters who are named, and so it was retained in the written history. This story is about Amleth. Shakespeare, however, will present many reasons not to leave these characters anonymous.

Elements Unique to Shakespeare

Shakespeare's play adds many unique elements to the tradition, including the Norway/Fortinbras subplot, the development of the counselor's (Polonius') family (particularly Laertes, who has no referent in Saxo), Hamlet's friendship with Horatio, the Gravediggers, the Players, and the Ghost.

In Saxo, Orvendil (Old Hamlet) defeats the King of Norway in one-on-one combat. Norway loses, and Jutland gains control of Norwegian soil. In Shakespeare, Old Hamlet's similar defeat of Norway is retold in the first scene by Horatio. In this version, however, we are informed that dissent has arisen between Young Fortinbras, son of the slain ruler, and his uncle, the reigning King of Norway. Young Fortinbras plans to make war against Denmark to avenge his father's death. As a result, Shakespeare's play opens with tension and foreboding. The military is on full alert, such that the shipwrights cannot "divide the Sunday from the week" (I. i.79) in preparations for a possible invasion. Young Fortinbras is presented as a counter-image of the avenging son, disagreeing with the tactics of his reigning uncle and seeking to avenge the death of his father by defeating his father's killer.

Just as the avenging son frames hero-as-fool components of the Hamlet story, so too does the story of Fortinbras frame Shakespeare's play. We hear much about Fortinbras in Act I as a threat to Denmark. He is referred to again in Act II has having given up the fight against Denmark in exchange for a fight against the Polack. (Compare "in fine / Makes vow before his uncle never more / to give th'assay of arms against your Majesty" [II.ii.69-71] and "I shall in all my best obey you, Madam [and not go to

Wittenberg]" [I.ii.121].) He is absent from Act III but appears physically for the first time in IV.iv, about to move his troops across Denmark and into Poland, and is seen again on his return from Poland in V.ii for the finale. The two avenging sons are set opposite each other throughout the play, and Hamlet marvels at Fortinbras' ability to act. Each has his revenge, but neither achieves it in quite the way he expected. Whereas Fortinbras inadvertently takes Denmark via the Poles, Hamlet may be said to take Denmark (briefly) "via Polonius."

While Fortinbras anchors the "avenging son" component of the Hamlet-story structure (Act I and V), the House of Polonius anchors the "hero-as-fool" component (Acts II-IV). As noted earlier, the characters in Saxo's history remain unnamed and unrelated; they are recognized by their role only. As a result, the only constants throughout the tests are Fengi and Amleth. In Shakespeare, however, the three tests are heavily integrated by the House of Polonius: the maiden in the first test is the daughter of the confidant killed in the second test; accordingly, Ophelia is not just a pretty wench whom the king chose to test the virility/sanity of his nephew—she is the king's counselor's daughter whom Hamlet has been courting. The events of the second test have repercussions on those of the first test: Ophelia is driven mad by Hamlet's rejection of her and her father's murder. Again, the playwright gives more consideration to the consequences of Hamlet's actions, and these reminders are interlaced throughout the play, culminating in Laertes' return to avenge to murder of his father and the death by drowning of his sister.

Shakespeare all but abandons Hamlet's journey to England (the third test). Rather than follow Hamlet to England, however, the audience remains at Elsinore to view the results of his behavior. In Act Two, emphasis is placed upon the testing scenes, first with Polonius and then with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The principal issue in each case is Hamlet's feigned madness. However, in Act Four, the emphasis changes to Ophelia's true madness, a result of Hamlet's (in)actions. His absence incriminates him and it reinforces our view of Hamlet as agent—either as scourge or minister—whether he knows it or not. This emphasis on consequence differs greatly from that in Saxo's version, where revenge was the end-all, be-all of the plot. Saxo's hero has full clemency for his acts, but Shakespeare's Prince eventually must contend with the consequences of his own deeds.

The deaths of Polonius and Ophelia as a result of Hamlet's behavior set the stage for the conjoining of the three revenge plots. Hamlet, Fortinbras, and Laertes are all three sons of fathers slain and all three are bent on revenge. Hamlet's delayed, reluctant, brooding approach to problem-solving is set against Fortinbras' smooth, calculated, clear-sighted strategy on the one hand, and Laertes' rash, emotional, much less than "to thine own self be true" method on the other. Fortinbras hires an army to exact his revenge, Laertes rallies a group of Danes to support his revenge, but Hamlet, save his confidence in Horatio, maintains silence as he presses his vengeance alone. This is understandable, since both Fortinbras and Laertes know how their fathers were murdered, and the cause is publicly known. In contrast, the death of Old Hamlet is assumed publicly to have been accidental, but Hamlet knows otherwise. Without concrete evidence, however, he does

not believe he can rally troops to his cause. He believes that he alone was born to set this right.

In many respects, Fortinbras resembles Amleth. He takes a systematic approach to his revenge (an invasion via Poland) and while indirect, his course takes focused momentum. In contrast, Laertes rushes into his vengeance to have it deflected by Claudius into the treachery of a duel that "seems" honest and fair. These two sons, Fortinbras and Laertes, provide radical counterpoints to Hamlet's revenge. Fortinbras is calculated and indirect; Laertes is emotional and vicious. With such mighty opposites, one might think Hamlet is crafted to walk the line between. Instead, Shakespeare presents a Hamlet who vacillates between these polar tactics, being systematic and plotting in one scene then prone to rash and bloody deeds in the next.

Themes and Trends

In addition to examining how differently Hamlet-texts employ the story-structure, we can recognize several themes that recur throughout the tradition. The key elements of the story-structure, the avenging son and the hero-as-fool, bring to the front questions regarding the morality of personal vengeance and the nature of insanity or perceptions of "the real." Throughout the Hamlet-tradition, oppositions of truth/seeming, moderation/excess, and Christian/pagan resurface, and the characters actively test these oppositions. Life-cycle imagery also persists, especially the use of the sea as metaphor for Hamlet, flowers for Ophelia, and the growth-death-rebirth cycle for the story as a whole. Moreover, the diverse use of these themes and images throughout the tradition

greatly influence the characterizations found in each work. Along with the structure-model, these additional elements can add further insight to Hamlet-texts.

Truth, Tests, and Temperance

The older tradition has the hero "playing dumb"; that is, "foolish" rather than "insane." The newer tradition casts the hero as mad or "rash." Amleth appears in a harmless stupor, while Hamlet is prone to dangerous fits. Shakespeare also turns this ploy back on his Hamlet via the full insanity of Ophelia. Laertes and Fortinbras offer contrasting "avenging sons" as well. These characters do inform against him, showing in many ways what Hamlet is not, or possibly what he should(n't) be. These counter-(im)balances do much to problematize the atmosphere at Elsinore, with plays within plays within plays, and roles upon roles against roles, and "what is" and "what is not" is never fully clear. This added tension in Shakespeare's work establishes the threshold for tragedy, for his Hamlet does not have Amleth's clearer directives; his Hamlet must make choices.

While the avenging son supplies the direction and destination of the story, the hero-as-fool offers the pathway to that end. In terms of story and plot, the use of the fool in the telling is significant as well as varied. Saxo was adamant about the honesty of his Amleth and repeatedly calls attention to Amleth's veracity, for "nowhere in his words did he wish to appear a liar. Amleth wanted to be held a stranger to falsehood, yet he mingled artfulness with plain speaking, so that he adheres to the truth without letting it show through to betray his acute mind" (Davidson and Fisher 85). This attachment to

truth appears in most of the texts of the Hamlet-tradition, but while our prince may shun lying, he does take extensive liberty with truth, constructing his honesty to allow multiple levels of interpretation and deception. Puns are prevalent, resulting in comical answers that are ironically true. For example, in Saxo's telling, Amleth demands bloodmoney in England after the execution of the companions, and his request is granted. He asks that the gold be poured into hollowed rods. On his return to Denmark, he is asked the whereabouts of his two companions, so he raises his two gold-filled walking sticks and replies, "Here's one and that's the other" (89). As will be noted later, his honesty during the test of the maiden is similarly deferred.

This emphasis on truthfulness, or at least half-truthfulness, is continued in the madness of Shakespeare's Hamlet ("Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" [II.ii.205-06] and "How pregnant sometimes his replies are" [II.ii.208-09]). The Elizabethan hero's honesty is broad-based: he seeks truth not only in the death of his father, but in life, in death, in nature, in God, in revenge, and in everyone he meets. Amleth already knows his truths, and his honesty is left more to clever or prescient commentary than to examination of doubt. Shakespeare's turn on truth—his use of "doubt"—doubles the action of honesty in his play. Whereas the King Fengi in Saxo's version is in a process of testing Amleth's sanity and Amleth is actively avoiding detection, Shakespeare's Claudius is testing Hamlet while Hamlet tests the Ghost, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Ophelia, Claudius, and the Queen. Amleth is the tested trickster; Hamlet is both trickster and tester.

Hamlet's experience with the Ghost challenges his very foundation of thought. He wants to believe the Ghost, indeed, it tells him things that his prophetic soul had already entertained. Yet, the Ghost, coming back from that "undiscover'd country from whose bourne / no traveller returns" (III.i.79-80) could be a devil that "hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape" that "[. . .] abuses [him] to damn [him]" (II.ii.595-99). He cannot trust the Ghost fully and, coupled with his mother's "o'er-hasty marriage" (II.ii.57), the experience makes him question all of his relationships.

The sudden appearance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at Elsinore is immediately suspect, and he questions them concerning their purpose. They eventually concede that they are to report to the King on Hamlet's condition, but by then it is too late. Their hesitation to be even and direct with Hamlet seals Hamlet's distrust of them, and will eventually seal their doom in England. Indeed, Hamlet's window of trust appears to open only once for each character during the play, then closes quickly at the first sign of betrayal.

Ophelia is lost when, in response to Hamlet's query, "Where is your father?" she replies, "At home, my lord." Hamlet knows exactly where Polonius is, so that Ophelia's remark, whether stated innocently, awkwardly, or in complicity, condemns her to rejection. Hamlet confronts Gertrude more directly, to the extent of accusing her of the murder. He blasts her with her sins, and she buckles under the onslaught. Hamlet favorable receives her repentance, so their relationship stabilizes for the rest of the play.

Even Claudius has a window of opportunity with Hamlet while the Prince still has doubts about the Ghost's story and, therefore, hesitates to take revenge. Thus, Hamlet's

grandest test, which has no referent in Saxo, is the play-within-a-play, wherein he plans not only to catch the conscience of the king but also to ensure that it is an honest ghost that he has seen. After Claudius disrupts the performance, Hamlet would take "the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (III.ii.280-81) and the King's fate is sealed. With Shakespeare, however, it is not that simple. Hamlet, in narrating the events of the play, refers to the murderer-player as one "Lucianus, nephew to the King" (III.ii.239). He should have said "brother," but the slip allows those present to interpret the play not as an accusation of guilt but as a threat of high treason. Claudius has every right to be apprehensive of Hamlet now. Hamlet believes Claudius is the murderer (and he does happen to be so) but the play-scene as it unfolds provides no real confirmation of the crime.

Hamlet also tests Horatio, but mildly. At their first meeting in the play, Horatio states that he has come to Denmark for Hamlet's father's funeral, but Hamlet counters, "I think it was to see my mother's wedding." Horatio responds, "Indeed, my lord, it follow'd hard upon" (I.ii.178-79). Most discussions with Hamlet involving other characters are inquisitions, chastisements, pleas, arguments, or rubbish, but this conversation is one of the few statements made in the play that is both honest and sympathetic to Hamlet. Horatio is generally forthright with Hamlet, and he secures the Prince's loyalty from the start, particularly right after Hamlet meets the Ghost. Hamlet is distant and wild at first, but Horatio is persistent in his support, and Hamlet lets him in on the secret. Hamlet's judgments of the others are often made too quickly and are not evaluated again.

Just as this prince is positioned against two avenging sons (Laertes and Fortinbras), finding himself vacillating between their disparate actions, so too is this hero positioned against the two extremes of general behavior found in Claudius and Horatio. Claudius overflows with excess through murder, adultery, and drink: the King is often depicted as a heavy drinker; Hamlet decries the growing reputation of Denmark ("they clepe us drunkards" [I.iv.19]) and refuses to participate in such revelries; the inclusion of a (poisoned) cup of wine in the last act also adds to the incrimination of alcohol as agent of excess. Likewise, Saxo's Amleth exacts his revenge by getting a hall-full of celebratory supporters of the King drunk to the point of passing out. He covers them with a tapestry, pins the tapestry to the ground to hold them fast, then sets the hall on fire, killing them all.

The heroic Amleth negotiates this death-through-debauchery warning well, while the tragic Hamlet still lapses into extremes of behavior. He cannot stay the course of moderation, and he lapses between control and "rash and bloody deed" (III.iv.27). Shakespeare allows his hero to recognize this with his "one defect" speech (I.iv.23-38) and with his accolades for Horatio, the voice of control and moderation, whose "blood and judgment are so well commeddled / That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger / to sound what stop she please" (III.ii.69-71). In Saxo, this development of a Horatio-type character is unnecessary (in fact, the "foster-brother" occurs only briefly before the test of the maiden) for no positive contrast to the hero is needed—he is meant to be exemplary. Saxo's Amleth is always in control and knows exactly what he is doing. He is a

stereotypical hero. His madness is purely concocted foolishness, not psychosis imposed by a ghost or a college education.

A rationale for Amleth's behavior may be found in Kurt Johannesson's discussion of the Gesta Danorum, in which he classifies Books One through Four in Saxo's history as the "BC" books, each exemplifying one of the four cardinal virtues: Book I, fortitude; Book II, justice; Book III, prudence; and Book IV, temperance (qtd. in Davidson and Fisher 6). For Amleth in Book Three, prudence signals his caution in playing the fool and biding his time until he can enact his revenge, and the long-range planning found in his careful creation of hooks reinforces his patient approach to his revenge. In Book Four, he falls prey to the deceptions of a woman (Queen Herminthruda of Scotland) who betrays him and causes his defeat in battle. His indulgence (one could read misguided trust) in women that leads to his downfall. As with the Ambales Saga and "The Story of Brjám," revenge is realized through the use of the hooks that the hero fashions at the beginning of the tale. Amleth is not procrastinating—he has a carefully-considered, long-range plan that, through some mediation, will end with his hooks in the banquet hall. But Hamlet is not prudent; he is spurious and distracted by conflict. He doubts the ghost at first and later questions why he lives "to say this thing's to do" (IV.iv.44).

A great impasse for Hamlet is religion. The dynamic of pagan v. Christian appears often in Hamlet-texts, though it generally is absent from both Saxo and Shakespeare. Pagan belief and godhood do not factor into Saxo's account; Amleth's behavior is posited as sensible for any wronged son whose father was murdered. For Shakespeare, the Christian framework denies the right to personal vengeance. This

presents a grand problem for Hamlet: does the Prince, in exacting revenge, lose the support of the Church, damn his soul, and thereby challenge the sympathy of the audience; or, does Hamlet leave Claudius' punishment to God, and therefore leave a "trecherous, lecherous kindless villain" (II.ii.577) sit on his father's throne? Placed between these two mighty extremes, Shakespeare's Hamlet tries to bridge both worlds, attempting to enact personal justice while retaining Christian grace.

These forces climax in the Prayer Scene. Fresh from "proving" Claudius' guilt during the play-within-a-play, Hamlet comes upon the King in prayer. But he hesitates, because to kill Claudius in prayer, newly cleansed of sin, would send his soul to heaven. Hamlet cannot allow this; Hamlet must see Claudius suffer in hell as his father suffers. Ironically, Hamlet's urge for complete vengeance by killing Claudius is now the one thing that keeps him from carrying out the deed. Hamlet gets greedy, lusting for vengeance, not justice. Just as ironically in this scene, Claudius, whose prayers cannot pass the ceiling, is ripe for the picking. Had Hamlet stuck him then and there, his vengeance would have been complete and there would have been no need for any counselors to die, no maidens to go insane and drown, no bitter sons to return for their own vengeance, no poisoned mothers to pass away. It could all have ended right there, but it does not. This is the centerpiece in Shakespeare's play, and all that follows can be tied to Hamlet's (in)action at this moment.

Whereas Saxo's narrative avoids the topic of religion and Shakespeare's tragedy is partially framed by Christianity, numerous texts in the tradition grapple with differences in religious belief. Particularly in stories in which Saxonian elements prevail,

the tension between established Norse worship and the newly spreading Christian ethos of the Middle Ages is significant to the telling. This energy keeps Amleth/Hamlet at the center of the transformation from one mode of thinking to another. What Hamlet does and what changes he makes will have a significant effect on the world view of those who will come after him.

Mad as the Sea

The idea of Hamlet as catalyst takes an interesting spin when viewed through sea imagery. While the Danish clerk Saxo Grammaticus (c.1150-1220) has the distinction of writing the first full narrative of Hamlet/Amleth to be named as such, the "oldest" snippet of "Hamlet" may be found in a collection of Icelandic and Northern poetry known as the Prose Edda (c.1230) of Snorri Sturlason. Its second section, Skaldskapar-mál, contains poetic answers to the question, "Hvernig skal sæ kenna?" ("What are the names for the sea?"). A response attributed to the sailor-poet Snaebjörn mentions our hero:

> Kveða níu brúðir eylúðrs hræra hvatt hergrimmastan skerja grotta út fyrir jarðar skauti, þær es lungs fyrir löngu, mólu Amlóða lið-meldr.
>
> 'Tis said [. . .] that far out, off yonder ness, the Nine Maids of the Island Mill stir amain the host-cruel skerry-quern—they who in ages past ground Hamlet's meal. (Hamlet in Iceland xi)

While the Prose Edda was composed shortly after Saxo's Gesta Danorum, Gollancz believes the connection of the verse with Snæbjörn could place the poem's date of composition in the late tenth century, and the source story for the poem even earlier (Hamlet in Iceland xvii-xxi). Gollancz relates this reference to the myth of the World

Mill, which, specifically for this tale, he believed to refer to the great mælström that swirls off the coast of Norway. Von Dechend and de Santillana in Hamlet's Mill (1969) find in myth systems from around the world a reoccurrence of stories that include a mill, a hook, and a fool-like hero. The World Mill is comparable to the axis of the earth, a centralizing source/destination for all life on the planet or even the universe. Just as a flour mill creates flour (i.e., useful product, life) through the crushing and grinding of wheat (the dead or dying), the World Mill has the demiurgic associations of a creator/destroyer. The authors tie the stories to astronomical events, relating the World Mill to the progression of time, as calculated by the astrological signs in the grand time-cycle known as the precession of planets. In this sense, whoever "owns" the Mill has the capacity for controlling the direction of space and time. This would construct Amleth/Hamlet as a cosmic god or, if the Mill resides within the eye of a whirlpool as Gollancz suggests, a demiurgic sea god.

In addition to Snaebjörn's reference to sea maidens grinding Hamlet's meal, Saxo's Amleth refers to the ocean as grinding meal, meaning the sand, and tossing it ashore. Amleth also uses hooks to execute his revenge in the banquet hall. Shakespeare's Queen describes Hamlet as "Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend / Which is the mightier" (IV.i.6-7). While it would be difficult to affirm that the narrative choices of texts throughout the tradition are based upon this obscure, esoteric myth structure, the revenge story does concern a rectification of a world and a time that are out of joint, for which our hero alone was born to set it right. It is Amleth/Hamlet's destiny to reestablish the balance.

One story-element brings out the water/sea-god imagery most prominently. During the first test in Saxo, Amleth is left alone with a maiden. The theory goes that if he has sex with her then he is feigning insanity (for any "sane" man would "naturally" take advantage of such an opportunity). Amleth is warned of the trap by a foster-brother ("Horatio") and runs off to hide with the foster-sister ("Ophelia"), but Amleth and the maiden do indeed have sex. When the king's men catch up with them, Amleth boldly brags that they had sex upon an animal's hoof, a cock's comb, and some roof beams. When questioned, the maiden flatly denies this. Saxo supplies no viable explanation for the word-play, suggesting that Amleth collected these items along the way in order to substantiate his claim. Hansen offers that they probably refer to the names of local plantlife (the tryst occurred in the woods) and that Amleth supplied a literal name for the vegetation on which they did lie. For example, saying "on the shoes of ladies" might translate into "ladyslippers" flower, or "on roof beams" might refer to the reeds used to make thatch, or perhaps more simply, across a fallen limb.

If Hansen is correct, then this scene promotes a connection between the foster-sister and plantlife. In Shakespeare, Ophelia's connection to vegetation is displayed in Act Four when she hands out flowers to the King, Queen, and Laertes, and at her death while picking flowers by the brook. This would cast Ophelia as the earth goddess set against Hamlet as sea god. At harvest (death), she returns to him in the sea, hence her suicide by drowning. Hamlet "drowns" Claudius with the cup of poisoned wine in Denmark, this "unweeded garden / That grows to seed" (I.ii.135-36) where "something is

rotten" (I.v.90). Gertrude in a sense drowns as well. Hamlet is scourge and minister, executing others as well as sacrificing himself in order to renew life.

The tradition often perpetuates the association of Ophelia, water, and flowers. Tom Stoppard's film version of his play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead (1990) offers a beautiful pantomime performance of Ophelia dancing and swirling to a flowery death behind/inside several shimmering sea-toned semi-transparent sheets. In Henry Treece's novel The Green Man, Amleth is central in an annual fertility ritual in which he must have sex with the surrogate goddess (the Ophelia character) in order to ensure a fruitful harvest for the coming year. In his folktale, Brjám offers a magical prophecy regarding a coming sea storm. It is ignored by the ill-fated fishermen, who subsequently perish in the tempest. Jules Laforgue's short story "Hamlet, or the Consequences of Filial Piety" also contains much ocean imagery and metaphor. On the television series The Addam's Family, Cousin Ophelia has flowers growing right out of her head. T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" also combines the allusions to Hamlet (lines 111-118) and to "sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown" (line 130). The sea metaphor may not manifest often or consciously in Hamlet-texts, but when it is present, the image is likely to be significant.

Characterization

As the story-elements shift slightly with each telling of the story, and as the common themes are employed, how the principal players are cast comes into question. To end this chapter, I offer some typical questions to consider about characterization

when reading a Hamlet-text. To begin, was Old Hamlet a goodly king or a brutal husband? Both Saxo and Shakespeare suggest that Old Hamlet/Orvendil were noble and glorious kings, husbands, and fathers. Over the years, this assumption has left a stale taste in the mouths of many because it begs Hamlet's question: What kind of woman would go "from this to this?" Most Hamlet-texts in the Shakespearean direction do not broach this topic. However, texts in the Saxonian direction often do. Old Hamlet is frequently accounted as not much better than Fengi, and often worse. The Green Man casts old Vendil as brutal but not as loathsome as Feng. Mad Boy Chronicle suggests that Old Horvendal was far more brutal than Fengo. In John Updike's novel Gertrude and Claudius, Old Hamlet is not a bad man, but he is not as passionate and as interested in Getrude as is Claudius.

Post-mortem, the question to ask about Old Hamlet is whether the Ghost is a dear father murther'd or a demon come to tempt Hamlet into damnation? Shakespeare's play never answers that question, for the honesty of the Ghost in regard to Claudius does not speak to its honesty regarding its presence. In Thomas' opera Hamlet, the Ghost returns in Act V to hasten Hamlet to his revenge. Everyone sees the Ghost and it may be inferred that this Spectre is an honest one. Elsewhere in the tradition, the topic is not treated as often.

Visions of the Usurper are also diverse. Several novels have taken the viewpoint of Claudius and cast him sympathetically as a love-lorn brother-in-law who makes a better husband for Gertrude and kills when he fears Old Hamlet will harm Gertrude for infidelity, as in Updike's Gertrude and Claudius. Sometimes he is caught up in the fray

against the bombastic tyranny of his brother, as in John Turing's My Nephew Hamlet. Often he is shown to be just a poor guy who has fallen deeply in love with his sister-in-law who, more often than not, has fallen for him, too. However, just as often, the uncle is shown to be the lecherous, damnèd, smiling villain that Hamlet describes: a drunk, a beast, uncouth and barbarous.

For Gertrude, one must ask questions regarding her complacency and awareness. Was this truly adultery, or did she take up with Feng/Claudius only after the death of her husband? Does she marry her brother-in-law out of love, lust, desperation, or simply for political reasons? Did she contribute to the crime, know of it, or have no part in it whatsoever? Did she love her first husband, or the second, or both, or neither? In short, how honorable is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark? In Mad Boy Chronicle, she is greatly unloved and intermittently unloving. In The Green Man, she is independent and defiant of both of her husbands, particularly Feng. In Thomas' Hamlet, she is co-conspirator in the death of her husband. In Updike's Gertrude and Claudius and in Lillie Buffam Chace Wyman's Gertrude, Queen of Denmark (1924), she is innocent of the crime altogether (although in the former, she does have an affair with Claudius; in the latter, she marries him for the stability of Denmark).

As for the beautified Ophelia, is she innocent or lusty, simple-minded or sophisticated? Many of the more medieval tellings of the story show the Ophelia character as a wild child. In The Green Man, Sibbi is a slut, yet she holds a special relationship with Amleth, and in the end is cast in a sympathetic light. In Mad Boy Chronicle, Lilja is "off her rocker" from the start, desiring to be independent in a very

male-dominated world, and by the end not caring if she lives or dies. In many parodies, Ophelia's madness is not crazy talk but academic talk, be it philosophy or feminist rhetoric. Also significant for Ophelia's characterization is her implication in the first test. Does she know of the espial or is she ignorant of it?

For Polonius, how essential is he to the throne of Denmark? Is he a dithering old fool or a crafty politician? And how involved is he in the murders? As for the traveling companions, are they henchmen to the King or innocently caught "between the pass and fell incensed points / Of mighty opposites" (V.ii.61-62)? Were they ever Hamlet's friends? Shakespeare is ambivalent on their morality. Stoppard makes them goofy yet lovable innocents, swept along with the events at Elsinore. Gilbert makes them second only to Ophelia in sensibility and appeal. Often, the question that lies underneath the understanding of their characterization is, how does one view Hamlet's treatment of them given their character? Does he murder them, or is it self-defense?

Finally, we must always ask about Hamlet. Is he a hero, a madman, a scholar, or a fool? Is he noble or malicious? Scourge or minister? Agent or victim? All of the above? Throughout the tradition, the designation of Hamlet's lunacy varies considerably. Saxo's Amleth played dumb, Treece's Amleth is naïve, as is O'Brien's Horvendal, Olivier's Prince could not make up his mind, Arlett and Rubinstein's hero has "made a habit of his lunacy," and LaForgue's protagonist goes beyond antic disposition to sado-masochistic pathology. Parodies frequently use this extremism and turn it against the hero—his rantings and ravings are cause not for concern or pity, but rather, for contempt.

In studying these texts as a tradition, I have found Hamlet's character, purpose, and behavior to vary greatly. The five-part structure-model that I posit provides a convenient framework through which to compare the variant texts and to identify what liberties and engagements they take with the story. Over time, the themes that continue to permeate the texts—tester and tested, truth and seeming, indulgence and moderation, inaction and action, destruction and renewal, and possible others—offer increasing levels of discussion and comparison.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NARRATIVE HAMLET

Hamlet as Story

Changes in medium have had strong effects on the varying directions that the Hamlet-story has taken. Although Shakespearean structures understandably have dominated the performance genres, short stories and novels have utilized both the better-known dramatic version of Shakespeare and the lesser-known narrative roots of Saxo. The popular exceptions have been the "family Shakespeare" of Charles and Mary Lamb, meant to provide a "primer" in Shakespearean education to women and young boys, and various mock-summaries of the tale, for example, Richard Armour's Twisted Tales from Shakespeare (1957), in which we learn that "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is known as the Melancholy Dane, capable of depressing anyone within sight or sound of him" and that he continually wears "his 'inky cloak,' on which as a student at Wittenberg he apparently kept wiping his pen" (19) and so on. Older (pre-Shakespearean) narrative tellings of the story are often more similar to Saxo's account—heroic, clever, and relatively straight-forward. Both Gollancz and Hansen have supplied strong analyses of these tales.

The closest classical cognate for Hamlet is found in Lucius Junius Brutus who figures prominently in the story of Lucretia and Tarquin as told by Livy in his Early History of Rome (c. 30 BC). The first five books tell the story of Rome from its foundation to the Gallic occupation of 386 BC. Livy dates the story of Brutus around 500 BC. Several connections to our hero-as-fool are found in his account.

Tarquin, king of Rome, is frightened by a serpent sliding out of a crack in a wooden pillar (a bad omen). In his fear, he sends his two sons, Titus and Arruns, to consult the Delphic oracle in Greece. The two sons take with them their cousin, Lucius Junius Brutus, son of the king's sister, Tarquinia. Lucius Junius pretends to be a fool because Tarquin had assassinated several Roman aristocrats, including Lucius Junius' brother. By playing a fool, he causes the king to see him as no threat. He therefore receives the appellate brutus which means dullard or fool.

As an offering for Apollo at the Delphic oracle, Brutus brings two hollow sticks of cornel-wood filled with gold, "symbolic, it may be, of his own character" (97). After doing their service to the king, Tarquin's sons ask the oracle who would be the next king of Rome. The oracle replies, "He who shall be the first to kiss his mother shall hold in Rome supreme authority" (98). While Titus and Arruns scheme about who would kiss their mother first when they arrive again in Rome, Brutus pretends to trip accidentally and while on the ground he kisses the Earth, which is the mother of all things.

Shortly after this, back in Rome, Tarquin enters a contest with Collatinus to see who has the best wife as indicated by each wife's activities during a surprise visit home by the noblemen. Tarquin's wife is found frolicking with her lady friends; however, Collatinus' wife, Lucretia, is busy working at her loom. Collatinus wins the bet. Tarquin grows lustful for Lucretia and later returns to the house to rape her. Brutus happens to be with Collatinus when the latter comes home and learns of the event from Lucretia, who stoically commits suicide rather than live with the dishonor. Over her body, Brutus abandons his fool's façade and leads the revolt against Tarquin.

Elements of the hero-as-fool model for the story are noteworthy but not without strong dissimilarities. Tarquin, Brutus' uncle, does not usurp his brother/king; however, he kills his own nephew (Brutus' brother) for political reasons. Brutus feigns foolishness to escape punishment. No evidence is given of testing Brutus' sanity, and, since the queen/mother issue does not exist, the "closet-scene" is not necessary as such. The journey abroad does occur but without the purpose of disposing of Brutus; he is along for comic relief. Instead, the journey offers a contrast between the irreverent, narrow-thinking of Tarquin's sons (his traveling companions) and the pious, thoughtful behavior of Brutus. In her "confession" of her rape, Lucretia, as Hansen observes (31), fulfills the role of the repenting Queen of the closet-scene. Finally, her suicide triggers the delayed revenge. The result is a complete restructuring of Roman civilization. The hero-as-fool thus is the agent in radical, progressive change.

Livy presents Brutus' story as historically significant. In contrast, other storytellers construct their hero-as-fool narratives as folktale. "The Story of Brjám" is an Icelandic cognate of Hamlet, first made available in written form in 1705. Gollancz dismissed it as being "certainly nothing but a levelling down of the story of 'Hamlet,' cleverly blended with another folk-tale of the 'Clever Hans' type" (Sources 8) and asserts that the story derives from the Ambales Saga. Regardless of speculative possibilities, this brief tale provides a light contrast to the weight tale of Brutus.

In Part I, Brjám is described as the youngest son of a farmer who owns a wonderful cow that gives milk three times a day. The king, upon seeing this wondrous cow and learning that he does not own it, attempts to take it from the farmer. Being the

rightful owner who depends on the cow for food, the farmer refuses, and so the king's men kill him. The farmer's older sons grieve, and the king's men ask them where they feel the most pain. They beat their chests, and so the king's men kill them, too. However, when they question young Brjám, he laughs and slaps his buttocks. They decide the boy is a fool and will do no harm if he lives. (Brjáni in Icelandic means idiot. [Sources 9]). Brjám returns to his mother and tells her what happened, and she cries. Part I ends with, "He bade her not to weep, for they gained little thereby; he would do what he could" (Gollancz, Hamlet in Iceland lxxii).

In Part II of the story, Brjám causes a series of miraculous events to occur. Upon seeing a bower being gilded for the king's daughter, he remarks, "Lessen measure much, my men!" and the gold shrinks so much that not enough remains to cover the bower. The king, suspecting theft, has the craftsmen hanged.

> Brjám went home and told his mother. She answered: "You should not have said it, my son."
>
> He asked: "What should I have said, mother?"
>
> She replied: "You should have said, 'Grow three-thirds!'"
>
> "I shall say it to-morrow, mother," quoth Brjám. (Hamlet in Iceland lxxii-lxxiii)

The next day he sees some villagers carrying a casket and says to them, "Grow three-thirds, my men!" and the corpse grows so large that it falls out of the casket. Brjám continues with a series of malapropisms caused by speaking his mother's phrase in the wrong context. Later, he addresses the queen with, "Why! is it the king's thievish cur you are handling there, my men?" having seen a barber strangling a dog the day before (lxxiii). The queen graciously keeps the boy from being harmed, since he is a fool.

These misplaced comments finally cause his mother to beg, "Do not go thither any more; some day or other they will kill you." Brjám replies, "Nay, my mother, they will not kill me"(lxxiv).

Part III begins with Brjám offering a magical prophecy regarding a coming sea storm. It is ignored by the ill-fated fishermen, who subsequently perish in the tempest. Then the narrative jumps to a banquet held by the king. Brjám carves some hooks that he uses to fasten the banquet-goers coats to the floor. The members of the king's party blame each other for the mischief and all kill one another. The next morning Brjám offers himself to the queen as her servant. She agrees, "for she had but few servants left" (lxxv). Brjám then drops his façade, soon marries the princess, and later becomes king.

Part I includes a murdered father, who loses a coveted cow rather than wife, thereby muting the incest theme. Part II collapses the tests into the clever word-play of Brjám, yet does include the girl of the gilded bower whom Brjám later marries, the queen (the thievish cur) who makes him king, as well as the constant "What should I have said?" refrains with his mother, and an ocean voyage (the fishermen) although Brjám does not take a sea trip himself. Brjám's simpleton refrain, "I will say it to-morrow," and his subsequent ill-use of the memorized phrase convince both the King's men and Brjám's mother that he truly is a fool. Not until the end of Part II when he simply says, "Nay, mother, they will not kill me," is Brjám's foolishness understood to be a clever, careful strategy.

Part III concludes the tale with a mass-murder in the banquet hall (rather than a fire) caused in part by the hooks Brjám had forged at the smithy. This last detail is

significant in that the members of the court actively bring death upon themselves—they fight amongst themselves—whereas in Saxo's account the members of the banquet hall fall into drunken stupor and die in the fire set by Amleth. Therefore, Brjám is developed as a less violent character than Amleth but just as clever, if not more clever, since he allows others to bring ill consequence upon themselves through their own folly.

Hamlet as Novel

Narrative assumes the luxury of delving into the psychology of the characters, revealing much more detail than generally can be achieved in dramatic action or soliloquy. For novels in the tradition, this could have allowed opportunities for casting in greater detail all the major characters in the story through the use of a strong omniscient narrator, but the tradition has generally opted for first-person narratives, employing particularly the epistolary form, or a limited-omniscience narrator who favors one character. Only Jules Laforgue's short story is told in first person through the eyes of a maniacal Hamlet, but this Hamlet is shown to live and die in the course of a day, and he dies after having given up his desire for revenge (after the smashing début of the play that he had written to express his angst). At present, I have not located other narratives that present Hamlet through a first-person narration for the entire story.

When authors have chosen to use Shakespearean elements in prose, the common ploy is to shift attention away from Hamlet and toward other characters. John Turing's My Nephew Hamlet (1967) and Alethea Hayter's Horatio's Version (1972) both employ epistolary formats to relate the events framed in Shakespeare's play. In Turing's novel,

Claudius (whose journal is written in an intricate code that the author has "painstakingly deciphered") reveals himself to be a King caught between his love for his sister-in-law and the needs of the people, whom he feels are being unfairly treated by his blow-hard brother. This Claudius does not instigate treason, but rather he gets caught up in it. Hamlet is shown to be a word-twisting, rabble-rousing pain-in-the-neck and not the least bit heroic, as well as in league with Fortinbras for the takeover of Denmark. If anything, we are presented with a Claudius who becomes characterized as the Hamlet with whom we are more familiar. This innovation is the most entertaining development in the novel: Hamlet and Claudius, even in Shakespeare's play, have a great deal in common. Both are emotionally driven, both have a deep love for the Queen, both are crafty rhetoricians. They are by no means the "mighty opposites" that Shakespeare's Prince might have us believe.

The action in Hayter's Horatio's Version unfolds after the events of Shakespeare's play. Horatio is a key witness in an Enquiry—ordered by the newly-crowned King Fortinbras—into the deaths of Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet. The text comprises nine courtroom scenes spread over a five-day period. Between each scene there are excerpts from Horatio's personal diary that offer his thoughts and feelings regarding the past and the up-coming day's events. Voltimand, the former Ambassador to Norway, presides over the Enquiry. With a few noted exceptions, the novel does not attempt to step outside the parameters established by Shakespeare for the story, but rather it seeks to play out the explanation that Hamlet swore Horatio to pursue.

At the Enquiry, Horatio's narrative of the events is immediately contradicted by Osric and "The First Gentleman In Waiting"—a liegeman to the late King Claudius. Apparently, no one in the court quite remembers the events as Horatio describes them. The First Gentleman assures the court that Horatio is lying, that Hamlet drew a dagger to kill Claudius and Laertes in cold blood in one of his mad fits, and that Hamlet poisoned the cup himself, whereby the Queen was killed.

Horatio is despondent and contemplates suicide daily during the Enquiry. He finds himself to be a poor rhetorician compared to the First Gentlemen, and in the first two days of the Enquiry, Hamlet continue to look guilty of the murders. Horatio decides he must break his oath to Hamlet that he not reveal to anyone the appearance of the Ghost. Marcellus refuses to break his oath to Hamlet and will not testify. On the third day, the English Ambassador reveals that the letter received in England is in Hamlet's hand. Horatio produces the original letter in Claudius' handwriting, much to the chagrin of the First Gentleman:

> FIRST GENTLEMAN: [. . .] I am sure that King Claudius's reference to that in his letter has been misinterpreted—perhaps by a mere misreading of his handwriting. The word which has been read as "beheaded" is no doubt in fact "restrained."
> HORATIO: What the letter actually says is that his head is to be struck off with an axe. It's not very likely that that could be misread. (67)

Bernardo agrees to testify about the Ghost, and Horatio follows, explaining the feigned madness of Hamlet, which only hurts their case, because the First Gentleman points out that if Hamlet were sane, then his murdering of the King and Queen is an even more heinous crime. The evening of the fourth day, Reynaldo, Polonius' "spy" on

Laertes in France, wants to redeem the sullied name of Ophelia, but hesitates to explain why. Horatio requests the Coroner's report on Ophelia's death, which states that Ophelia jumped into the water and drowned before she could be reached by help. He recalls the Queen's Lady-in-Waiting, who testifies as an eyewitness that Ophelia climbed a tree and fell in. It is revealed that the First Gentleman was at the scene and did not save the girl, making his previous testimony perjurious. His defense is that the King thought this death would be a blessing from the girl's madness.

On the final day, Reynaldo, enraged about the truth of Ophelia's death, takes the stand to admit that Laertes had been in league with the King to murder Hamlet. Osric quickly jumps sides and implicates himself and the First Gentleman in the conspiracy to rig the duel. Osric then admits that Horatio's account of Laertes' dying confession was true. At this, the First Gentleman lunges at Osric. Voltimand has the men arrested and summarizes the findings as we know the events from Shakespeare.

The novel ends with a diary entry from Horatio. He is in a cloister to do atonement for breaking his sworn oath to Hamlet. He still contemplates ending his life, but also considers staying with the Brothers in the cloister. Thinking of Hamlet, Horatio writes:

> Perhaps it wasn't what he wanted, after all. I never knew if he really, in his heart, cared about vengeance. Some of the time he did, but if he had really wanted it, why did he leave it so long? I sometimes thought I could divine what was in his mind, but I was never sure. No one will ever be sure about that. (106)

The novel offers responses to several long-debated questions raised in Shakespeare's text. How old is Hamlet? Probably 30 (The Lady-in-Waiting had worked

for the Queen for 31 years, starting not long before Hamlet was born.) How long did Hamlet delay? Less than six months. Hayter states in her own notes to the text (108-109) that she believes that Old Hamlet was killed in late March, that the Ghost was seen in late May, that Ophelia and the rest die in August. The Enquiry takes place in late August, early September. This is considerably less time than that claimed by those who take the apparent age-difference in Hamlet in Acts I and V to mean the prince ages from 18 to 30 during the course of the play.

By placing her text closely to the world of Shakespeare's play, Hayter does not attempt to retell the story, but rather to elaborate upon it. To fill in the gaps left by the earlier text—to answer the question, "What else happened?" or "And then what?"—Hayter does not question many of the generally accepted constructs of the story, but plays out the "chatter" of the little people of the court, little people in terms of Shakespeare's play, but as it turns out, grand players in the scheme of the story. As in Macbeth, where the Woman and Doctor look on as Lady Macbeth washes and washes her hands—they are there to witness the madness—so too do these bit part players from Shakespeare's text, all but invisible to us there, come alive in Hayter's work, brought from the wings to center stage. With nine corpses silenced at Shakespeare's final curtain, they are the only ones left to do so. However, with the exception of the details surrounding Ophelia's death, what the little people have to say sheds little light on the goings-on at Elsinore. Claudius still acted treacherously, Hamlet too hesitantly, and everyone still died.

Gertrude, Queen of Denmark: An Interpretive Romance (1924) by Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman gives the author's account of the events at Elsinore as told to her by the

Ghost of Gertrude during a series of visits to the author's home. The Queen wishes the author to clear her name just as Horatio was to do for Hamlet. Gertrude, Queen of Denmark, is written from a woman's vantage point, and that is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. At those times when the text embodies the women characters, giving them more to say and do and think than Shakespeare's text allows, the novel succeeds; but when the women are not "onstage" we are left with a run-of-the-mill what-happens-in-Hamlet à la J. Dover Wilson. There are a few notable exceptions: some extra attention is given to the Ghost scene, to Hamlet's "heart's heart" speech to Horatio, and to other interactions between the two friends. Indeed, what this narrative does best is account for relationships at Elsinore, be they among family or friends. All else is glossed over, and unfortunately, the gloss is often neither enlightening nor necessary.

This is where the narrative fails, seemingly due to the notion that it cannot tell the women's story only, but that it must also tell Hamlet's (and by extension, must tell Shakespeare's—that is, it must justify Shakespeare as true author). But we already know what happens in Hamlet; we do not need a story about Gertrude and Ophelia heavily interladen with Cliff's Notes. Sadly, the novel fails most at the very moment in the play/story where it could have been most enlightening—at the duel. Gertrude drinks the poisoned cup; she swoons, she cries out, "The drink, the drink!"—and she dies. In the novel, the scene is bereft of any comment by Gertrude regarding her own death, regarding the deaths of the others, or regarding her discovery that indeed someone has poisoned her and that the someone was likely to be Claudius, whom until this point she had never suspected of villainy. All along we are treated with the Queen's thoughts and

understandings of the events as she learns them or experiences them, but at the very moment when she might realize that she has been sorely betrayed, the narrative abandons us, denying us the insight of this tragic Queen.

Since Saxo's narrative is more summary of the facts than a rich retelling, these novels have ample room in which to develop characters, scenes, motivation, and themes. Yet, the authors of these works often have opted to skirt the issue of the story-proper. Two works do attempt to retell the complete narrative: James Branch Cabell's Hamlet Had an Uncle (1940) and Henry Treece's The Green Man (1966), and both hearken back to elements in Saxo's narrative rather than to those in Shakespeare's drama. Cabell's Hamlet Had an Uncle: A Comedy of Honor is not centered on Hamlet but on Wiglerus (Viglek), Hamlet's uncle on his mother's side, who, in the old account, is the one who finally defeats Amleth and rules over most of Northern Europe. Cabell returns to the pre-Shakespearean form of the story—not for tragic or heroic reasons, but for comic effect. Much of the story is told tongue-in-cheek, and in some places it alludes to Shakespeare's treatment of the story. For example, Hermintrude of Scotland's executioner (both as a servant and later in service—he kills for her, and later kills her) has a penchant for taking the heads of Hermintrude's deposed suitors, holding them aloft, and musing over the meaning of life and, more importantly, the meaning of death. Amleth is cast as a hunky dumbbell, a characterization that persists in the novelization of the story by Henry Treece.

The Green Man

Henry Treece wrote over fifty works of fiction, poetry, history, and criticism between the 1930s and 1960s. He is associated with the "poets of the apocalypse," a neo-Romantic movement that developed in England after World War I and claimed a substantial influence from Dylan Thomas and from Freudian psychology. Part of the movement was a condemnation of the "modern" age, a belief that Man had become too mechanized, and that this machine age had executed too great an influence on art and individual development. As such, Myth was viewed as a means by which an individual/artist could attempt to reintegrate his psyche. The Green Man, published in 1966, reveals this urge to return to an older way of being, in which the socio-economic system itself remained tied to the earth and the cycles of nature. The novel itself cycles between good-hearted living and mean-spirited desecration. In the middle of it all is an unsuspecting hero, a would-be fertility god whose naivete makes him ripe for the harvest.

Treece's Amleth

It is seven days after Yuletide at Vendilsgarth (Elsinore), where we find old Vendil (Old Hamlet / Horwendil) arising in the dark to answer a scratching at the door. He drunkenly, sleepily staggers into the cold night and sees three men in the shadows. They quickly butcher the king. The murderers are soon revealed to be Vendil's brother, Feng (Claudius), and his henchmen, Hake and Godgest (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). The murder is never admitted publicly, though the Queen (who had no part in the murder) openly accuses Feng of the crime. Feng becomes the ruler, as brother of the dead king,

and Gerutha retains her title as Barley Queen, holder of the mysteries that ensure the fertility of the land in their kingdom. She refuses to allow Feng into her bed.

Meanwhile, Amleth, a strapping, hairy, blond youth of twenty, is unaware of the events back at Vendilsgarth and is looking to earn some experience on the high seas as a pirate before fulfilling his role as the Green Man, the fertility prince destined to become the King of the Wood and ruler of his people. He seeks his adventure with two trusted traveling companions: a dwarf named Torfi and a wayward marauder named Gautrek. For induction to the world of piracy, his seeks out the King of the Geats, Beowulf (Fortinbras). He meets with the pirate king, who, in his mid-thirties, is happy to offer the young prince advice but no employment. Amleth suggests that he might travel south the Christian regions and be a hired assassin for Belisar. Beowulf instead encourages the youth to go to Britain and work for the old Bear-King there known as Arthur, enjoy the Roman food and wine, gather up some trunksful of treasure from looting with Arthur, and return home to be King. Beowulf also offers Amleth a hand on the inner thigh, but Amleth spurns him.

Amleth returns to find that his father's body has been burned and sent out to sea. Sibbi (Ophelia), a waiting girl of the Queen, found a fingertip that washed back on the shore and gives it to Amleth. He goes into the woods with his companions to distance himself from the garth. In the woods, he sees a vision of his father that grows and looms over him, then falls upon him. After the vision, he is found pinned to the ground by a fallen oak tree. This is the sign that he is to be the new King of the Woods.

Amleth is taken to his mother's chamber to care for his wounds. When Feng hears that Amleth has received the markings of the King of the Woods, he decides to hide at sea for a while, a-pirating. He is a poor pirate, and his incompetence allows his ship to be boarded by Beowulf. His treasures and supplies are sacked by the Geat-king. But the two talk graciously whilst the pillaging continues (the alternative is to be butchered by the pirate). Feng seeks Beowulf's advice on what to do with Amleth. Beowulf, clearly sore about being rejected by the youth, tells Feng that he had suggested to Amleth that he go to serve Arthur the Bear in Britain. He continues that Feng should also suggest this, and send a sealed letter along with Amleth requesting that Arthur kill the prince immediately, in return for which Britain would be assured safe treatment from the Danes for the length of a lifetime. Feng thanks Beowulf for his idea.

Meanwhile, Unferth, once a reliable tool of Feng but now considered an old pest, decides to redeem himself before Feng, so creeps into the rafters and gets into Gerutha's room to hide behind a pile of straw and eavesdrop on the pair. Amleth, still recovering from his vision in the forest, discusses killing Feng with Gerutha. Unferth is enjoying his espial but breathes in some straw dust, forcing him to cough. Amleth hears the sound, and quickly stabs his sword into the pile, killing the Lawsayer. He cooks the body with the help of Sibbi, and tosses the meat down the Queen's privy and into the dried out moat, where the swine feast upon the remains of the old man.

Feng, back from sea, decides that his henchman should kill the Green Man as soon as possible, but Torfi and Gautrek make it difficult to get too close to the Prince. Since Amleth is a virgin, they decide to arrange a meeting of Amleth and Sibbi the whore

(who has a strong liking for the Prince) and kill him while he is in the throes of passion. Torfi and Gautrek, however, realize the plot and interrupt the festivities before Hake and Godgest can arrive on the scene.

The night of the Maze-Dance (a vernal equinox fertility rite), Feng and his henchmen force Guilliberht, a cleric who happened to wander into the garth that night, to write the suggested letter while Amleth fulfills his role as the Green Man by having sex repeatedly with Sibbi in the Maze. Amleth is sent off to Britain with much fanfare, and he promises his mother that he will take his revenge upon his return.

When Amleth arrives in Britain, Arthur the Bear reads the letter and quickly executes Hake and Godgest. Amleth, unaware of the contents of the letter, protests, knowing Feng would not appreciate his henchmen being killed. Arthur obligingly repays Amleth for the act with a princess (and through her, inheritance of the land of Powys) and a wergild of gold to be filled inside two hollow sticks.

Sections Two and Three of the novel ("Britain" and "Pictland") tell of Amleth's adventures in those regions, blending in several events that occur in the King Amleth section of Saxo's narrative (Book 4 of the Gesta Danorum). Amleth gets drunk at a banquet and complains of the food and insults the lineage of the queen. Before he can get more out of line, Gautrek cold-cocks him with the butt of his sword. This disrespect greatly offends the more "civilized Roman" Brits, but Arthur is lenient. He suggests that Amleth cool off by visiting Powys. Gautrek is left with Arthur's band as "collateral" while Amleth is away with the princess Elene, his new bride, and Arthur's nephew Medraut.

After being left for dead by Medraut (who plunders the gold stash of the elderly king of Powys), Amleth and Elene are sold as slaves to Elekt, queen of the Picts. As Amleth recovers from his wounds, Elekt falls in love with him and makes him her king. The Picts are in a territorial war with the Romans (that is, the Brits, who are guarded by Duke Arthur the Bear). Amleth, loathing Medraut and wanting revenge, is hesitant to attack while Gautrek is in Arthur's possession. Elekt informs him that Gautrek was murdered months before by Arthur. (Really, he was killed secretly by Medraut, unbeknownst to Arthur.) Amleth agrees to help Elekt and her brother Orest defeat the Brits, but decides to finish up business at home first.

Amleth returns to Jutland with Elene and Elekt and first comes to the cabin of an old woman, Ragna, who once cared for his mother. He finds what he thinks to be just another old woman living in the house, but she turns out to be the once young and beautiful Sibbi, who, after Amleth left for Britain, was brutalized by Feng and left tied over a log at the side of the road to be used by any men who wished to have her. The torture left her hair white and her face and body withered. Amleth, armed with Elekt's Scythian sword, returns to Vendilsgarth in the middle of the Maze-Dance festivities. He acts like a drunken fool. He is armed, but since the standard practice for these festivities is that every man be unarmed in the banquet hall, the other partiers tether Amleth's sword into its scabbard.

Amleth then takes a small gelding knife from Elekt and climbs to the top of the enormous tapestry that he had requested Gerutha make during his absence. It is thick and heavy. While the party continues, the revelers laugh, thinking Amleth is trying to climb

the giant oak tree sewn into the tapestry. Amleth cuts the ties that anchor the tapestry and it falls upon the crowd of drunken thralls, many of whom have already passed out, many others too drunk to get free, and the rest taking advantage of being trapped with women underneath its bulk. Amleth secures the tapestry to the ground with huge hooks that he had instructed Torfi to make in his absence (Torfi in the meantime had been executed by Feng as "a sacrifice to Odin.") With the tapestry securely anchored, Amleth sets fire to the hall and thereby kills the revelers.

Gerutha has been left by Feng to hang in an osier cage above the moat. Her cage has not been cleaned for a month and she has had no water or food for several days. As the flames consume the garth, the floor of her cage crumbles from the heat of the fire below, and Gerutha, partially aflame, drops into the dried-out moat, where she dies moments before the swine, as they had with old Unferth before, feast on her charred body.

Feng, who had gone to his chambers when Amleth arrived in the hall, thinks a bonfire has been started by the partiers. Amleth then arrives in the room and baits Feng with questions about the whereabouts of Sibbi, Torfi, and his mother. Feng is cornered and tries to talk his way out of being butchered. He asks where Hake and Godgest are, so Amleth throws the gold-filled sticks to him and says, "Here they are uncle. As you will see, they have not been drinking. They are as dry as a bone" (244). Feng begins to panic, realizing his henchman cannot protect him now. His only sword hangs on the wall, and Amleth stays between Feng and the weapon.

> Then Feng began to roar like a trapped lion. "I have no sword," he yelled. "If I had a sword, you would not torment me so."
>
> Amleth laughed by the wall and said, "That is soon arranged, take mine, my lord." He flung the dirk across to the man and even waited a while to watch him dragging at it blindly, unable to untie the thing that kept it in its sheath. (245)

Amleth chops off Feng's privates just as Feng had done to Amleth's friend, Torfi the Dwarf, then proceeds to torment the king, taking off Feng's left ear and right hand before finally running the usurper through.

> And that was how it was done, blow for blow and word for word. Whoever sets it down differently has no respect for the truth.
>
> And so it was that Amleth left the two sticks, and came away with two swords. This he considered was a fair bargain. (246)

Amleth returns to the old woman's cabin to rejoin Elekt, Sibbi, and Elene. Elekt points out that although it is regretful that Gerutha died in the fire, it is unlucky for a man to have three queens, so perhaps her death was for the best. However, Elene points out that she is the Queen of Powys, so there are three queens present (Sibbi being the reigning Barley Queen). This comment is ignored, but shortly thereafter a scratch is heard at the door, and Amleth goes outside to investigate. Three men lurch in the shadows. Amleth recognizes one as Beowulf, and gives a cautious greeting. Elene, wanting Amleth to come back inside, rushes out and wraps her arms around him, keeping him from drawing his weapon. When he turns to push her back inside the cabin, Guilliberht, with his small fishing knife, comes up behind Amleth and hamstrings him. Amleth drops to the ground.

> [Beowulf] stood over the Jutlander. He said, "Do you recall how you scorned me once on Crabland? I wished to be your friend then but you had other friends in mind. Now where are they all?"
>
> Then as Amleth opened his mouth to answer, the tall king put in his sword point and drove it through to the turf behind. And when all the writhing and

> twitching had stopped he said to the others, "It never fails to amaze me how easily this may be done." (249)

It is not clear at what location Beowulf drives in the point. Although the heart is likely, the reference to Amleth opening his mouth to speak suggests to me that Beowulf rams his sword right down Amleth's throat. Whichever the case, for this Prince, the rest is indeed silence.

The Dumb-Jock Hero

Treece's novel expands upon the skeleton of Saxo's narrative. It is greatly consistent with the events as they unfold in Saxo, giving lusty medieval flesh to the characters. It does not follow a more Shakespearean model of integrating the three tests with a House of Polonius. Unferth is the son of a man who used to work for Hygelac, Beowulf's lord and master, and who used to belittle Beowulf when he was a youth. Sibbi is no relation to Unferth. Gerutha has a special affection for the girl. As it is revealed, Sibbi is actually Gerutha's daughter from a secret meeting of the Queen and a thrall. (He was hooded so that he would not know who it was he was topping.) Feng knows this story and uses it against Gerutha, who wishes Amleth to marry Sibbi, his half-sister. The children are unaware of their relationship. (The incestuous relationship of Amleth and Sibbi has its closest parallel in the story of Kullervo in the Finnish Kalevala. For a discussion, see de Santiallana and von Dechend [26-35].) There is no Laertes cognate in this telling, consistent with Saxo's version.

Hake and Godgest, the henchmen, are clearly agents of Feng, not old schoolchums of Amleth. In contrast, Torfi and Gautrek are Amleth's devoted (and wiser) companions. The pair are outcasts of society, possibly marking Amleth's behavior as more "foolish" due to his relationship with them.

Although the House of Polonius is not constructed in this version, Amleth remains part of a triad, not with two avenging sons, but rather, with two kings. Treece, noting that one probable time frame for the life of the "real" Amleth is the sixth century, sets his story in 526 AD, allowing him to position Amleth in triune with two other historically significant kings, Arthur and Beowulf. Arthur the Bear (compare to Saxo's King of England) is the wizened general of the Brits, an old and battle-scarred leader, tired of the constant bickering and fighting, rough to behold but nonetheless civilized. Beowulf (compare to Shakespeare's Fortinbras or pirates) is a warrior in his prime, successful in pillaging the lands surrounding the northern seas. Arthur is the hero-sage, Beowulf the hero-king, and Amleth is the hero-youth. They are three facets of the same hero-archetype, but in this case, Amleth does not live long enough to reap the benefits of that legacy.

Amleth is constituted, in fact, counter to the heroic. As avenging son, in the first and last acts of the story-structure, Amleth succeeds with a vengeance. However, in the hero-as-fool center of the story, this Green Man holds little agency in his own tale. In fact, much of what happens to him does just that: it happens to him, happens around him, happens for him. Whereas Saxo's Amleth and Shakespeare's Hamlet actively thwart their testers, Amleth gets by in spite of himself.

In the test of the maiden, Amleth runs off with Sibbi into the woods to lose his virginity, which he does. Hake and Godgest are sent by Feng to butcher Amleth in the throes of passion. However, Torfi and Gautrek are nearby and, knowing the henchmen are closing in, stir up a host of gadflies from a nearby strawpile. (Treece provides here a fairly clever way of incorporating one of the more incredulous moments from Saxo's narrative. In Saxo, the foster-brother warns Amleth of the trap by attaching a piece of straw to a fly that buzzes by Amleth. Somehow, Amleth knew exactly what this meant. Treece's connection of the flies and straw is a bit more plausible.) The flies swarm in Amleth's direction, dropping straw on him and biting at him. He throws Sibbi aside and stands up to combat the flies. Hake and Godgest arrive to find Amleth swatting flies and Sibbi leisurely looking at flowers. The "moment" has passed, and so Amleth passes the test.

In the second test, Amleth is more active. As Gerutha gives him a spectacular family sword, Unferth, hidden in the straw, breathes in some of the dust and coughs. Amleth hears the cough, and so passes old Unferth out of the narrative. Saxo's Amleth enters his mother's chamber actively seeking the spy, while Shakespeare's Hamlet stabs Polonius in hopes that it is the king himself. Treece's Amleth does not have the luxury of Hamlet's sudden rage because he is not fighting with Gerutha at all. He simply hears someone eavesdropping and takes care of business. However, the greatest difference in this scene is that Amleth does not chastise his mother. She hates Feng as much as he does. Although he provides quick thinking for the removal of the body, Amleth spends most of the closet-scene recuperating from his King of the Woods experience.

Amleth does not dictate his own safety in the third test either. Feng, happy to have been instructed on this clever trap by Beowulf (this Feng is not as resourceful as either Saxo's or Shakespeare's usurper), realizes that he is missing one basic component of the death letter plot—neither he nor his men know how to write the Roman characters that are required to draft the letter. On the night of the Maze-Dance, who should come wandering into town but little old Guilliberht, a cleric from the south. He is coerced into writing the note for Feng, so he does. He even allows the illiterate Feng to proofread his handiwork. Feng, putting on a grand show of perusal, accepts the document as it is written. However, when Arthur the Bear reads the letter, he obligingly kills the Hake and Godgest, as the letter actually required. Amleth is clueless as to why the men are executed, and he cannot believe that Feng would have his most trusted men killed thus. And so, Arthur agrees to give Amleth a bride, an inheritance of land in Powys, and wergild for the executions.

By removing Amleth from agency in his tests, Treece promotes the vision of this Hamlet-hero as out of his depths. He is a "green man," unprepared to understand the system that works around him. Amleth has a certain magical existence marking him as the would-be, rightful King of the Woods, but he cannot control the tide of his greatness and is swept away by it.

The Pen versus the Sword

Letters from Guilliberht, a monk in the House of Arles, to his patron, Lord Manuel Chrysostom of Puteoli, open and close the novel The Green Man. After

barbarians ravage his monestary, Guilliberht travels northward to covert the pagans to Christianity, and in his letter, he asks his patron for two mules and some money for his journey. The novel ends with a letter from Gilliberht "Voyager, Lawspeaker, and Captain of Halberds," to Manuel Chrysostom at Puteoli, sending to him Elene, Sibbi, and Ragna with a bag with amber and jet to compensate for the "two sorry mules," cloth, and coin that he had supplied to Gilliberht previously. He closes the note (and the novel) with, "Take warning, the Summer of the North is now at hand. [signed] Gilliberht Viking" (255).

This cleric, who set out to the North to convert pagans, is himself coverted to paganism. Indeed, the little man towers over the great Geat-King Beowulf through repeated demonstrations that the pen is mightier than the sword. He offers to write down the Geat-King's triumphs so that the lords of the southern regions might know of his achievements. In this sense, he is Horatio to Beowulf's Hamlet, his voice of legacy. However, this relationship is more strategic than friendly, for whenever Beowulf threatens Guilliberht, the cleric threatens not to write the saga:

> "But, my hairy friend, where does that leave you? It leaves you exactly as I found you, a dim king in the cold North, unloved by most, unknown by any who matter, and immediately forgotten when he is dead."
>
> King Beowulf beat his great shaggy head on the cobbled floor, "For Thor's sake, do not say that," he bawled. "To live a hero's life and then be forgotten! No! No! Oh, God, no!" (231)

This Beowulf is often clever and powerful, but as narrative plays out, his fame and heroism stem more from propagandistic ploys, both from himself and from Guilliberht, than from any truly great acts. His reputation is sustained by nothing more

than his reputation, as his sacking of Feng's ship early in the story attests: "Godgest leaned over the gold prow and waved to the oncoming galley as though they were friends of his and he was glad to greet them once more. A hot trickle ran down his left leg" (63). Beowulf does not have to do anything to take over the ship; he simply steps aboard and takes away whatever he wishes. Guilliberht's ability to write allows him to convey Beowulf's legacy to subsequent generations, and his writing thereby assures himself a reasonably safe, long, and profitable life.

This writer's framework draws attention to the purpose, if not necessity, of the writer to perpetuate the story. We today would not know of the exploits of Beowulf or Arthur or Amleth had not someone bothered to write down their stories. The novel echoes this fact in Elekt's account of the Oresteia as we know it today: the Picts, who according to Elekt have no need for a written language, retells what is to us a garbled or at least antithetical version of the death of Agamemnon.

But as Guilliberht makes painfully aware during the "switching" of the letters, the writer has not only the power to report, but also the power to manipulate. He has the ability to script history however he wishes to define it. One hundred or one thousand years later, it does not matter whether Beowulf slayed a she-monster of the sea, or as Gautrek suggests got "old fishwives under waterfalls" and called them "mere-monsters" (36)—what was hammered down on paper by one in the past will forge the memory in writing of the masses in the future.

The time between Vendil's death (seven days past Yuletide) and Amleth's death (on the Maze-Dance) is roughly fifteen months. It is not clear why Amleth does not kill

Feng outright, when so many fairly overt plots had developed to kill him. Presumably, Amleth believes that he is still the Green Man, the prince, and until he has done his pirating abroad, he cannot rule as the King of the Woods. He seems to have every intention of killing Feng once he returns. His naivete betrays him, for if he had executed Feng quietly before going to Britain, the rest would not be silence. Amleth is strong and generally noble, in a northerner kind of way, but his foolishness lies is his inability to see the big picture. He is the quintessential "dumb jock," heroic and savvy on the field, but off the field, sorely lacking in measured thought. He is a life-time away from that melancholy Dane of Shakespeare, and a hard day's journey from Saxo's resourceful prince.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DRAMATIC HAMLET

Hamlet as Drama

While Saxo and Shakespeare hold the honors for having written the most prominent versions of the Hamlet-story, they are by no means the only versions, nor are their renderings "originals." Saxo's Amleth was constructed from an older tradition of tales found across Europe, including Livy's account of Brutus in his Early History of Rome. Shakespeare's plays were frequently adaptations of other plays, poems, histories, and narratives, and Hamlet is no exception to that pattern. Stories change over time, place, genre, and language—sometimes a little, sometimes a lot.

Not surprisingly, after Shakespeare, the Hamlet-story as matter for serious drama has come all but to a stand-still until the twentieth century. The bulk of Hamlets appearing in the interim were generally player's editions of the text, or scaled down and sometimes rearranged versions of Shakespeare, or translations of Shakespeare into other languages, with minor revisions for cultural continuity.

If the dramatic Hamlet has had any variety over the years, it is due to the stage tradition of Shakespeare's work, notably in various reductions made from the Bard's longest play. Some have removed, for better or worse, the "extraneous" matters of Hamlet in order to "pluck out the heart of its mystery." The materials most subject to extraction are the Dumbshow, the material with Fortinbras, the material with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and much of the material regarding the Players. Some revisions have

gone beyond the mere exchange of rapiers for knives (as in one Italian translation) or beyond (re)placing the nunnery scene prior to the "to be or not to be" soliloquy. Such changes to Shakespeare's play are particularly notable in France.

Initially, the French reception of Hamlet was less than enthusiastic, resulting in translated texts that attended more to cultural than linguistic changes. For nearly one hundred years Jean-François Ducis' loose adaptation of Shakespeare was the Hamlet of France, becoming a mainstay in French theatre and influencing several operas. Why was Ducis' adaptation to achieve greater success than a more literal translation of the text? As Helen Phelps Bailey explains, the French had a difficult time accepting Shakespeare in general, and Hamlet in particular:

> The plain fact of the matter is that the label "tragedy" identified Hamlet for the French with a genre for which the rules, adapted from antiquity and sanctioned by nearly two hundred years of precept and example, were fixed and unquestioned. Most French critics of the time were simply incapable of considering the play for what it was: an example of "a completely different kind of art." (23)

The French demand for the Unities, which derived from the Aristotelian diagnosis of tragedy, excludes by definition any claims to artistic greatness for Shakespeare's Hamlet. Corneille and Racine never would have devised a play that so abuses the French Unities of time, space, and action, nor would they have injected their dramas with the disease-like improprieties, such as the gravediggers, Hamlet's punning, his raucous behavior during the play-within-a-play scene, or, and Bailey notes, his audacity to refer to his mother's funeral shoes (10). The "Continental" Hamlet in France had a particular development. Ducis based his dramatic adaptation on La Place's quasi-translation of 1746, which purified much of the "baseness" commonly found in English drama by

exchanging "common words" for more "precious ones," and often only summarized sections of the text. Ducis, who knew no English and based his work on the remarks of La Place and Voltaire, furthered the purification process (making the story more unified) by emphasizing the relationships between Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, and Ophelia. Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Fortinbras, as usual, are eliminated, and Polonius is minimized, as is Horatio, now renamed Norceste.

Ducis' plot proceeds as follows: Claudius and Gertrude conspire to kill the king, but they do not yet marry. Gertrude reigns until Hamlet can overcome his melancholy (he never feigns madness; he is simply depressed) which has delayed his coronation. The Ghost appears to Hamlet only "in his mind's eye." The Prince is hesitant to kill Claudius because Ophelia is his daughter, and Hamlet finds it inappropriate to kill his sweetheart's father. "Weak and effeminate, given easily to tears, he is sensible in the fullest eighteenth-century sense" (Bailey 15). To make matters worse, Ophelia is subject to a decree by the late king that she should never marry. However, after Hamlet gently breaks up with her, she encourages him to complete his revenge, and she lives on unmolested. Gertrude is full of guilt for murdering her husband and chooses to devote her life to her son's welfare. Rather than using the play-within-the-play or the closet-scene to catch the conscience of the queen, Hamlet confronts Gertrude with her dead husband's funeral urn. Claudius, frustrated with these obstacles to the throne, conspires to kill both Hamlet and Gertrude. He no sooner completes the murder of the Queen than Hamlet finds and kills him. Hamlet then becomes king.

As Bailey notes, this Hamlet is crafted as sensible, sensitive, and noble, and the drama is civilized and thoughtful, not broad-reaching and visceral. Compartmentalized by the convention of the Unities, the action is confined to a smaller arena and the challenges that face the Prince are limited. In fact, he does not have much to do. Since the greatest conflict presented to Hamlet is killing his lover's father (an obstacle she removes because she gives him permission to do so), and since the test of foreign-land is eliminated, the test of the mother becomes the most pivotal action of the play. In this sense, the drama is really less about Hamlet and more about Gertrude, for she is the one who reaches the moment of recognition (when presented with the funeral urn she must face her guilt in the murder) and reversal (she dies at the hands of Claudius) thereby most closely fulfilling the demands of French tragedy.

Vera Arlett's and H. L. Rubinstein's one-act play "Hamlet at Aldwych" (1948) avoids retelling the story proper and instead offers a scene from Hamlet's stay in England. The play is set in a Danish village outside London, c. 890 AD during the reign of King Alfred the Great. Princess Ethelgif is torn between her calling to become a nun and her duty to marry Hamlet. (They have been betrothed per the "letter sealed" from Claudius.) If she does not marry him, the Danes may make war against England. If she goes with him, she will deny her calling from God. She attempts to discuss this dilemma with Hamlet. He is brooding and mocking at first, as he has been for his entire stay, but finally he lets down his guard to the princess.

He explains that he forged the marriage letter because the true letter he carried from the King of Denmark contained a death-sentence for himself. As he explains to her

the events unfolding in Denmark, she gains heartfelt sympathy for him. Alfred and his daughter try to persuade Hamlet to stay with them in England and not to return and seek revenge. Hamlet is inclined to stay but compelled to return to Denmark, knowing that he may face death. Other elements include a subplot concerning the pagan Danish ship captain and his Christian sister, who lives in the Danish village outside London with her husband and son. The son wants to be a Viking, but his mother wants him to serve the King in England. The play ends with the Boy standing on the shore, waving goodbye to his uncle and Hamlet.

The play contains a mixture of Saxonian and Shakespearean elements, making it one of the few texts that has attempted to combine elements from both works. It is almost an interpolation of a "missing scene" in Act Four of Shakespeare, except for a few details: no expendable courtiers arrive with Hamlet; Shakespeare's Hamlet says he was taken by pirates and therefore never arrived in England; England is Christianized whereas Denmark is still pagan; Hamlet mentions that he has been feigning madness since childhood. The play is also unlike Saxo in that there are several speculations that Hamlet saw a ghost; again, no courtiers; Hamlet does not marry the princess; King Alfred shares no obvious loyalty to the King of Denmark; there are some inside jokes regarding Shakespeare's version, such as Alfred's comment, when he learns Hamlet has not yet asked the princess to marry him: "You mean, our Prince delayed?" (19).

The desire to create this interpolation is understandable. The formidable presence of Shakespeare's work is no doubt intimidating, and few have taken up the challenge of retelling the tale itself on stage. It is artistically "safer" to answer questions that

Shakespeare did not fully address. Since the foreign-land episode is truncated in order to allow more playing time for Ophelia's madness and the revenge of Laertes, the trip to England, abandoned since Saxo, can be reemployed.

"Hamlet at Aldwych" does offer an interesting explanation for Hamlet's odd behavior. Hamlet mentions that he has been feigning madness since childhood to avoid a penalty of death from his uncle. He states: "Month after month I destroyed the life of my mind, to preserve the life in my miserable body . . . I have made a habit of lunacy" (31). This thoughtful remark offers a rational and sensible justification for Hamlet's behavior—he has brought his pathology upon himself through years of maniacal repetition. While this neither explains nor reconciles the disparities of Saxo's and Shakespeare's treatment of Hamlet's insanity (Saxo's hero feigns madness from childhood and is not affected by it; Shakespeare's, by most accounts, feigns madness for a much shorter period of time) it provides, in terms of the tradition, a new insight into the character—the very personal and human cost of his predicament.

Rather than work a missing scene, another tactic employed by some performers is the hyper-reduction of Shakespeare's text, as illustrated by Charles Marowitz (1978) in his Hamlet, which shatters the Bard's script and then crafts a collage of shards that gives a strange and interesting reflection of the tale, all in about an hour's time. Echo after echo of key lines is heard in a multi-focus, multi-temporal staging. The kaleidoscopic effect of Shakespeare's lines displaces Hamlet. A similar method is used for a German play Ophelia und die Wörter (1972) by Gerhard Rühm, in which three voices offer a choral interweaving of all of Ophelia's lines.

The serious plays about Hamlet that have cropped up tend to skirt the events of the story proper, in order not to invade the territory of the still actively performed tragedy by Shakespeare. For example, several plays focus upon the events leading up to those within Shakespeare's work, including James Rush's Hamlet Prelude (1832) and Gerhart Hauptmann's Hamlet at Wittenberg (1935), which follow Hamlet during his school years. Percy MacKaye's Tetralogy (1950) gives four-play cycle that chronicles the events in the lives of King Hamlet, Gertrude, and Claudius prior to and including the murder. More recently, Michael O'Brien's Mad Boy Chronicle (1996) does offer a Hamlet-centered retelling of the story that begins to mix the traditional heroic and tragic elements. However, this rendering also shifts attention away from Hamlet toward the King, who succeeds in the end in defeating Hamlet and maintaining the faith of the people through the fine art of spin-doctoring, a talent for which young Hamlet does not possess.

Hamlet as Comedy

While the Ghost of Shakespeare may have scared would-be playwrights away from drama, the Bard's work remains "fair game" for the sharp pens of the satirists. Parodies of Hamlet were the rage in the nineteenth century, and today plays such as Janusz Glowacki's Fortinbras Gets Drunk (1990), Lee Blessing's Fortinbras (1991), or Paul Rudnick's I Hate Hamlet (1992) continue to jab at the play.

Before considering the wave of travesties that assaulted Hamlet in the nineteenth century, we must consider the earliest largely comedic performance text. The German Der Bestrafte Brudermord (or, Fratricide Punished) comes to us in written form in a text

dated 1710; however, the play is believed to have been available almost one hundred years earlier as a continental traveling rendition of Shakespeare's play (Bullough 20). It is difficult to discern how serious the play was initially and how much comedy filtered in later. It may be the product of a poor German translator or of a poorly memorized rendition of the Elizabethan drama.

Der Bestrafte Brudemord is a strange amalgamation of dramatic styles. It begins with a highly stylized prologue spoken by Nyx who sends the Furies into Denmark to spread strife. The strong difference in style suggest it is a late addition (Bullough 22). Several parallels have been made between the general text and the First Quarto of 1603, since both use the name Corambis for Polonius. The general assumption is that either DBB derived from a travelling copy of Shakespeare's First Quarto, or that both DBB and the First Quarto are derivatives of the infamous Ur-Hamlet text. Regardless, the comic elements so permeate the text as we have received it that it is difficult to look at the play under any other rubric than comedy.

Hamlet is more than a tragic figure—he is funny as well. For the French neo-Classicists of the eighteenth century, this was one of the many problems with Shakespeare's monstrous play. In the works of Corneille and Racine, one neither expected nor cared to see ribaldry and low humor—in their works no proper Prince would roll around on the floor at the feet of a maiden and discuss country matters (Bailey 10). If Hamlet was to be considered tragedy in the neo-Aristotelian sense, bawdy humor was to be excluded. This matter of taste, which condemned the Shakespearean Hamlet in France until Romanticism gave him some reprieve, failed to allow for the necessity of humor in

the Hamlet-tradition because the French Hamlet did not play the fool; he was sublimely depressed. But the Prince's insults and puns are essential to his masquerade as fool, and his moments of ribaldry and jocularity provide the reader/audience a multi-dimensional view of his character. Hamlet becomes personable—human.

In Shakespeare's tragedy, the mad scenes, particularly those with Polonius or with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, convey the hero's quick (and often biting) wit. In comedy, however, Hamlet is more often the brunt of the joke than its instigator. While his cleverness resides in the heroic/tragic works, his true foolishness is conveyed in the most critical inversion of those modes—parody. Humor and Hamlet met with the greatest force in the 1800s, when the Bard's other characters also took numerous beatings. John Poole's lampoon from 1810 may be the first widely accounted parody of Hamlet (Wells 1: xvi). Poole presents his jabs less as criticism than as good fun. He writes in his preface to the text from 1836:

> From the force of its sentiments, the beauty of its imagery, and, above all, the solemnity of its conduct, there is, perhaps, no tragedy in the English language better adapted to receive a burlesque than "HAMLET"; and from its being so frequently before the public, so very generally read, and so continually quoted, it is, more than any other, calculated to give to burlesque its full effect, and which can only be produced by a facility of contrast with its subject work. (Poole 4)

Poole's version thrives on the intertext of the oft-quoted work, its currency in the culture of the day, so he keeps close to the intent of Shakespeare's plot and language, but, as is stated later in his preface, Poole attempts to give the characters the same things to say, but in a way in which their proper Shakespearean counterparts would not say them. He also exchanges the climactic duel for a more contemporaneous boxing match in which

Hamlet and Laertes punch each other to death, a device that has recurred in other comedies, parodies, and satires developed later in the nineteenth century, after Poole's work.

Throughout the nineteenth century, universities and theaters presented dozens of parodic performances each season. As a text against a text, the burlesques serve to defamiliarize an all-too-familiar play. In Poole's parody, as with several others, Hamlet and Ophelia "break up" but then rush back in and "make up"—all done, of course, with pithy songs and festive dances. These travesties argue against one of the greater complaints heard about Hamlet: "Oh, why can't they just fall in love and be happy?" Ophelia still drowns later, but they do but die in jest. The emphasis on parody, aside from the reasons presented above by Poole, has other socio-economic rationales. Stanley Wells, editor of Nineteenth Century Shakespeare Burlesques (1978) explains:

> Because of the Theatre Monopolies Act, "legitimate" drama—regular tragedies, comedies, and farces—could be played only in the patent theatres, Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and (for part of the year) the Haymarket. During the late eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth, there grew up a number of minor theatres where "illegitimate" dramatic entertainments could legally be performed. A high musical content contributed towards qualification as illegitimate, and the term "burletta" was used to mean "nothing but a play which could with safety be given at a minor, or unpatented theatre." The Lord Chamberlain wrote in 1824: "Surely a Burletta must be interspersed throughout with songs at least." So Poole's use of songs is no doubt related to his desire to have his piece performed. (Wells 1: xix)

Viable, "illegitimate" drama needed to be light and playful, and what better moneymaker than a tune-filled travesty of the serious plays being performed across the street or down the block? A handful of Shakespearean parodies had been staged prior to Poole's Hamlet Travestie, but only after its appearance did the "industry" bloom. In its

wake, other public forums, such as the satirical digests Fun and Punch, offered additional parodies of the Bard's works.

In the United States of the same period, touring productions of Shakespeare brought about a wealth of roving local companies that bastardized the text and resorted to cheap, minimized treatments of the plays. Samuel Clemens' parody of these performances in Huckleberry Finn shows the corruption not only of the South, but the corruption of "good literature" in the hands of opportunistic amateurs. Another form of treatment in the U.S. comes from the minstrel shows. Ray B. Browne classifies five types of minstrel-treatments of Shakespeare's works:

1. Songs taken from the works and sung straight;
2. Brief references to the poet and to his plays [. . .] sometimes [. . .] being irrelevant introductions to nonsense anecdotes, speeches and skits;
3. Songs and prose sketches about him and take-offs on his works;
4. Brief skits which revolved about the plays;
5. Short but full-scale travesties of the works. (375)

In addition to minor songs and end-man jokes based on Hamlet, Browne identifies ten copyrighted Hamlet burlesques between 1870 and 1916 alone, making it at the time the most popular of Shakespeare's plays to parody (385). One earlier treatment by the Griffin and Christy Minstrels (1840) entitled "Hamlet the Dainty: An Ethiopian Burlesque" boasts two scenes: the revelation of the Ghost, and the Laertes-Hamlet duel (again, a boxing match). This six-page text is obviously a bastardization of Poole's Travestie. Most lines are direct borrowings, and alterations are made principally for inserting "local color" into the skit. To its credit, the profanities in Poole's Travestie (damns, hells, etc.) have been replaced by less offensive phrases; however, the burlesque by today's standards is laden with racist jargon. As Laertes and Hamlet box, Gertrude

drinks from the cup which Claudius has poisoned. The boxing stops as she swoons, giving the closing line (complete with superfluous Alexandrine):

> No, no! I'm poisoned! Your old uncle, here,
> Has mixed a deadly poison with the beer.
> It's now too late—I took too many swigs—
> He put the poison in, to kill off all you nigs. (8)

The crowd promptly attacks Claudius, pummeling him until the ghost reappears to scare them away. The Ghost is dressed in a "shabby, ragged uniform [. . .] smoking a long segar." (3) At his first appearance, Horatio and Marcellus fall over each other in fear, and Hamlet utters, "He's from the South! Oh, grace defend us!"

Two major texts in the comic tradition put Hamlet on the back-burner and turn up the heat on two of the story's most unlikely and inconspicuous characters, the two courtiers caught between the fell incensed points of mighty opposites: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In W. S. Gilbert's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the satirical commentary on Hamlet cuts a little deeper than any travesty before its time. First written for the periodical Fun in three installments in 1874, R&G was conceived primarily as a jab at Henry Irving's production of Hamlet at the Lyceum in 1874-75 (Salomon xx [sic]). The farce was not performed until 1891, set against Tree's production of Shakespeare's play. In the opening scene, Claudius secretly reveals to Gertrude that he once wrote a play which failed miserably at its premiere. As a result, he decreed that whoever should mention or resurrect the work would be executed. The name of the play: The Mousetrap.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive at the request of the Queen to care for Hamlet. The two courtiers meet up with Ophelia and are distraught to learn that she is

betrothed to the Prince. (Ophelia is not happy about the arrangement either.) Hamlet is a "vainglorious, self-centered bore" (Salomon xxi [sic])—a fool in the cruel sense of the word—and in an effort to rid themselves of his constant lamentations, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Ophelia scheme to convince Hamlet to perform the lead in a truly terrible play—its title: The Mousetrap. Unaware that Claudius had written the piece or that the king has a death sentence for its reviver, Hamlet performs it for the court. Claudius is outraged while the court rolls in laughter. The King rises to slay Hamlet, but the prince begs, "Hold thine hand! / I can't bear death—I'm a philosopher!" (Wells 2: 261), so he is sent in exile to England where "they're welcome to his philosophic brain" (262). And, Ophelia runs off with Rosencrantz.

The story-elements are considerably lacking in this farce to the point where it is not even clear or necessary if the King has killed anyone or if Hamlet has even seen a Ghost, but this play has a few other tricks up its sleeve regarding the tradition. Gilbert's production utilizes only a few scenes from Shakespeare: a modified play-within-a-play, the advice to the players, and the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, although Rosencrantz and Guildenstern assist the Prince in his contemplation:

HAMLET: To die—to sleep—
ROS: It's nothing more—Death is but sleep spun out—
Why hesitate? (offers him a dagger)
GUILD: The only question is
Between the choice of deaths, which death to choose.
(offers a revolver)
HAMLET: (in great terror) Do take those dreadful things away.
They make my blood run cold.

and later:

HAMLET: But that the dread of something after death—
ROS: That's true—post mortem and the coroner—
Felo-de-se—cross roads at twelve p.m.—
And then the forfeited life policy—
Exceedingly unpleasant.
HAMLET: (really angry) Gentlemen,
It must be patent to the merest dunce
Three persons can't soliloquize at once! (252-53)

These scenes are self-conscious of the tradition of Shakespeare's play, and they draw attention to its performance history. The "to be or not to be" soliloquy is probably the most familiar line in the play, and difficult to recreate without slipping into cliché, which makes it readily available for parody. The inserted commentary of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, directly meant to frustrate Hamlet, succeeds in counteracting the excess of his soul-searching monologue, as well in offering some pragmatic reasons to not kill oneself, including forfeited life insurance policies (a significant issue in Victorian society). The play-within-a-play affords an opportunity to "out-Hamlet Hamlet" and to ridicule the acting styles of many contemporary actors, in particular, the style of Irving (Salomon xxi). This Hamlet is not an auteur, and during his advice to the players, the Prince is rather curtly informed that they do not intend to teach him princely propriety, so he should please refrain from instructing them on their arts.

The entire stage and critical tradition of Hamlet is subject to Gilbert's jabs. When Guildenstern asks Ophelia what Hamlet is like, she provides such a wide-sweeping and heavily contradictory list of characteristics (which cleverly sums up the features and mannerisms of many of the major actors who have played Hamlet) that Guildenstern, in

response to this impossible description, exclaims, "Oh, he is surely mad!" Ophelia replies:

> Well, there again
> Opinion is divided. Some men hold
> That he's the sanest, of all sane men—
> Some that he's really sane, but shamming mad—
> Some that he's really mad, but shamming sane—
> Some that he will be mad, some that he was—
> Some that he couldn't be. But on the whole
> (As far as I can make out what they mean)
> The favorite theory's somewhat like this:
> Hamlet is idiotically sane
> With lucid intervals of lunacy. (249)

Just under one hundred years later, Tom Stoppard in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (1967) follows a similar line of logic to establish Hamlet's mental state:

> GUIL. I think I have it. A man talking sense to himself is no madder than a man talking nonsense not to himself.
> ROS. Or just as mad.
> GUIL. Or just as mad.
> ROS. And he does both.
> GUIL. So there you are.
> ROS. Stark raving sane. (1061)

Stoppard's work explores the Shakespearean drama from the (lack of) perspective of the two "expendable" courtiers. We get a "backstage" look at this bumbling pair who must wait "to swell a progress start a scene or two" only to reach execution. And when Guildenstern asks, "Who are we that so much should converge on our little deaths? Who are we?" the Player simply states, "You are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. That's enough" (1090). Stoppard's adaptation of his own play to film (1990) provides a firmer characterization for the two courtiers than does the play and provides multiple, wonderfully visual retellings within retellings of the events at Elsinore.

Gilbert's de-centering of the Hamlet character was somewhat unique for its time. It was not until Stoppard's production that serious dramatic attention was given to other characters. More recently, Janusz Glowacki's Fortinbras Gets Drunk (1990) looks at the story from the perspective of a Hamlet-like young Fortinbras who drunkenly bumbles his way into control of Norway and Denmark. The Prince avoids being executed by Sternborg and Eight Eyes, Norway's political advisors, who have run the country for the past two years since they murdered the King, whom they display as a costumed corpse to keep up appearances, even after a bombing dismantles half the body. These two have orchestrated the events in Denmark, including the murder of Old Hamlet, the casting of a spy to play the Ghost to Prince Hamlet, and the enlisting of Polonius as an informant, instigating Laertes' rebellion against the Crown, among other heinous acts.

Sternborg and Eight Eyes have already eliminated Mortinbras, Fortinbras' older brother, and are planning to remove Fortinbras from the picture as well, now that he has sobered up. But Fortinbras jumps off the wagon quickly for his own protection, and it is his drunkenness, not madness, that keeps him alive. The two advisors test him with a play-within-a-play to see if the Prince knows of his father's murder, but Fortinbras can only focus on Dagny Borg (Ophelia) who plays the Queen in the scene. They discover that his is trying to contact Hamlet in Denmark, and that he has grown happily sexual with Dagny, so they decide they will have to kill him anyway.

Not long after this, Eight Eyes decides that he has had enough of Sternborg and flays him and kills Dagny, too. The political back-stabbing, head-chopping, and skin-flaying leave Fortinbras few options. He talks with Hamlet (whose foreign-land episode

is not in England but in a Norwegian prison) and tries to convince the very suspicious Prince to return to Denmark and take over with the help of the Danish guerillas whom Norway cannot control. Hamlet does not trust Fortinbras and believes that Denmark can attain independence from Norway. Fortinbras laughs at his stupidity, but then offers to switch places with Hamlet so that Hamlet can rule the independent Norway and Fortinbras can run the show in Denmark. Hamlet again refuses to "collaborate" with Fortinbras and is allowed to return to Denmark. Eight Eyes and Fortinbras watch the events unfold in V.ii of Shakespeare's play. Fortinbras holds a dagger to Eight Eyes' throat, letting him know that if Hamlet dies, he dies. They watch Hamlet die, the two grapple briefly, and Fortinbras kills Eight Eyes. The play closes with Fortinbras giving his reform-party speech to the populace. In the final image, his two guards take of their face-masks and look exactly like Sternborg and Eight Eyes, indicating that the same cycle of totalitarian corruption and political puppeteering will continue.

Glowacki includes many story-elements from the tradition, but with Fortinbras as the Hamlet-character. Fortinbras is visited by the Ghost of his father, is tested with a maiden, survives exchanges of both letters and daggers (the name on his death warrant is somehow changed to "Eight Eyes"), and kills his father's murderer. But Fortinbras' kingship is highly problematized by the last image in the play. He is not as crafty as the those who surround him.

Mad Boy Chronicle

Michael O'Brien's tragicomedy Mad Boy Chronicle premiered at the Alberta Theatre Projects playRITES [sic] Festival in Calgary in February, 1995. Martin Marrow of the Calgary Herald, calls the play a "Viking-free-for-all" that "at times resembles nothing so much as a Monty Python parody of a Norse legend, with ragged old crones who tell the dead king's ghost to 'piss off' and a dumb-blond Viking warrior who talks to his sword" (O'Brien 152). Yet, between Mad Boy's bawdy humor and visceral violence, there lies a pointed criticism of early Christianity, and painted in blood is the portrait of a young boy who is lost in a world with too many gods and not enough saints.

O'Brien's Horvendal

Fengo has bashed in his brother's head in secret with the help of Matthius, his counselor. He lets it be known that his brother was killed by a meteor sent by Thor, who disapproved of the former king's lack of courage. At the start of the play, it is 999 AD, and Fengo has ruled for seven years and Gerutha is his Queen. She detests him in general but also for the murder she assumes he committed. However, she also thinks he is (barely) less cruel than her former husband, so she puts up with him. Horvendal, now 14, has become a devout Christian and bitterly forgives his uncle for his evil doings. Fengo, a pagan, is sick of this Christian tripe and declares that Horvendal must leave Denmark by sundown or he will be killed. Horvendal also fights with his mother. Although she hates Fengo, she is sworn to him, and Horvendal detests her for this. She begs Horvendal not to make her choose between the two and asks him to seek Fengo's forgiveness.

Horvendal replies, "Hie off you Fengo-fucker. Go with your Mann" (26). (Throughout the play, "Spelling, punctuation and syntax are erratic to suggest emphasis, dialect, and state of mind" [11].) Gerutha abandons him angrily and runs off in tears.

A fishwife enters and tells Horvendal that she and another have seen the Ghost of the dead king and that it demanded the women bring Horvendal to him. Horvendal rejects her pagan superstitions, and decides that he will leave the cold pagan north for the warm Christian Jerusalem to be with Jesus, whom he assumes lives there. Meanwhile, Ragnar (Laertes), Matthius' son, leaves to go a-whaling, and argues in a sibling way with his 13 year old sister Lilja (Ophelia), before he leaves. Matthius (Polonius) makes them swear to defend and protect each other.

On the long road to Jerusalem, Horvendal meets the Ghost, who reminds the boy that he had witnessed the entire murder but has repressed the memory. The Ghost chastises the boy for rejecting his Viking blood and demands that the murder be avenged. Horvendal is confused and cannot be sure if this indeed was the Ghost of his father or not. He regretfully heads back to Helsingnor to discover the truth.

Horvendal is discovered in the cold, naked and delirious. His mother is recalcitrant upon finding him, and swears to protect him. Fengo thinks he is faking his madness to get out of banishment, but Gerutha shames him into letting the boy stay. Matthius thinks Fengo is getting too soft, but Fengo ignores him. Horvendal takes to sleeping in the king's bed so that Fengo cannot fool around with Gerutha, acts like animals, and constantly asks about his father's death. Fengo decides that Horvendal is up to something and decides to take action.

While Lilja helps Matthius drag some wood, they see the ghostly image of a cross in the sky. Lilja exhibits the stigmata. Matthius has a revelation:

> Ohhh Lord Thunderhelm, now everythin makes sense—
> the signs are there for everyone to see!
> The Mad Boy feignin madness. Fengo, he's
> afloundering.
> Wimmen and children mouthin off to the menfolk—
> JESUS is coming! (54)

He runs in fear back to the village. Lilja stays and licks her hands. A Voice beckons her closer to hear wonderful news. Meanwhile, Matthius tries to kill the Madd Boy (sic) to prevent the coming of the Meek and Jesus. He gets some support but Gerutha berates him and the others, reminding them that to harm a fool or a cripple dooms a man to a coward's death. Fengo pretends to appreciate her honor and ties Horvendal to a post for the night (for his safety). Lilja comes to visit Horvendal and tells him that Jesus came to her and told her to rescue Horvendal and bring him to Jerusalem. She brings him a crown of thorns as a sign. But Horvendal can only think of Fengo and revenge.

Matthius thinks Lilja is in league with Horvendal and, with Fengo, decides to tie her to a rail to see if Horvendal will free her. The Madd Boy is brought in and is instructed by Fengo not to let Lilja go. The two then hide to watch what transpires. Lilja warns him of the trap and urges him to go off to Jerusalem and leave her. Horvendal is shocked that she is willing to stay and bleed or worse, all for her Jesus. He swears off Christianity and wants her to promise that they will both kill their fathers. Lilja prays for Jesus to guide the Madd Boy, then beckons the fathers to come and slay both children.

Horvendal, not wanting to die before his revenge is satisfied, bites off her ear and runs off. Fengo is unimpressed by the event and fires Matthius.

Lilja comes to Horvendal later, hiding in a barn. They reconcile and plan to run off but the Ghost of his father blocks the doorway. Meanwhile, Gerutha sees a vision of Mary and turns Christian, and Fengo, shocked by her behavior, prays to Odinn to guide him.

The next day, Fengo tries to bribe Horvendal. When the boy rejects his offer, Fengo offers that they settle this like men, mano a mano. Horvendal agrees, but he is much smaller than Fengo, and the king beats him thoroughly for a while, but then lets up on the fight for his own amusement. But then Horvendal flips Fengo solidly, throwing out Fengo's back. Horvendal tells him that he remembers now seeing the murder and that he will "mapp out the bounds" of his revenge (83). He hamstrings the prostrate king. Fengo begs for mercy from Jesus. Just then a band of friars approach, with orders from Rollo, king of Neustria, to convert the Danes, otherwise Rollo overrun them. Fengo quickly converts.

Fengo takes regency for the Christian faith and goes about excommunicating everyone he dislikes, including Gerutha, Horvendal, and Matthius. He also plans to marry young Lilja. The fishwives tell Horvendal that Fengo is going to be baptized on Sunday. Horvendal, angry that Jesus has switched sides, plans to listen to the king's confession at the baptism and kill him there. "The Baptism's the place / Where I'll rubb Viking justice in his Face!" (93). At the conversion, Fengo confesses some of his basic transgressions. The priest asks if there is anything else:

Well …
I must admit I've slew a lot of folk.
Often for a reason, but just as often not;
Laugh'd at cripples, stole from peasants,
Fornicated like you wouldn't believe;
Disembow'l'd Christians, tortur'd helpless animals;
Burn'd down yonder forest to starve the poor;
Betray'd everyone I've met; beat my wife,
Cockwhallop'd every child i' the village,
And said things that int completely true.
Heh heh …
These are my sinns. I am so ashamed.
Oh yeh—plus I smashed me brother's brains. (105)

When Horvendal hears the last line, he attacks Fengo. He is pulled back by the Viking guards, and he runs off. Fengo offers a reward for capturing Horvendal.

Horvendal seeks his mother, but Gerutha comes at him with a knife to kill him. He calms her long enough for her to admit that she loves him. He then encourages her to help him kill Fengo. She rejects the idea, then tells him that "Fengo's a bunnyrabbit next to yer Paa!" (111). He grabs hold of her wrists and she screams for Matthius to come help her; instead, Lilja proudly enters holding Matthius' head. She thinks that Horvendal has already slain Fengo so she is upholding her part of their agreement. Gerutha calls them monsters and tries to stab them. In the shuffle, Horvendal stabs her. The boy tries to reconcile after the accident but Gerutha rejects him. Horvendal, distraught at how things are ending up, takes Lilja and runs off with her. Fengo enters and sees the head of Matthius and assumes Horvendal did it.

Ragnar comes home and is irate that his father has been killed. Fengo convinces him that Horvendal and Lilja conspired together in the murder and danced on Matthius' corpse. Ragnar is ready to butcher him, but Fengo calms him:

Easy ladd easy, this here's a Christian land.
We gots to take the Boy, legally.
Administer the punishment, slowly and deliberately.
This here's the Christian way. (116)

Ragnar agrees to lead the search party to find Horvendal. Horvendal and Lilja head out of town, destination: Jerusalem. At first, Lilja is rapturous, calling her companion Saint Horvendal, with whom she will rid the world of "Evill." Horvendal pities her that her soul has been turned to madness. He decides too much blood has been spilled, and he "quits" (120). This enrages Lilja, who then discovers that Horvendal has not killed Fengo. She refuses to let him travel any further from Helsignor until he has come through on his part of the bargain.

Horvendal refuses to go back. Lilja parts ways with Horvendal, but not before taking his clothes and his sword and leaving her clothes with him. She heads back to Helsignor but meets the search party led by her brother. Ragnar thinks she is Horvendal because of her clothes, and she does not dissuade the thought. After exchanging harsh words with her, Ragnar orders his men to kill "him." The men chop her to bits.

Ragnar returns to Fengo, distraught after discovering that he has killed his own sister, but saying that he "barely murder'd her at all!" and that the deed was all Madd Boy's fault (128). Fengo gives Ragnar permission to kill Horvendal, but that he should make it look like an accident. Gerutha, slowly dying from her injuries in the fight with Horvendal, cradles the chopped up remains of Lilja and sings a lullaby. Later, Gerutha hopes to be baptized and forgiven by Christ, but Fengo will not allow it. She fights with him, curses him, and dies.

Horvendal tries to drown himself, using the skull of a wolf to break through the ice, but he resurfaces downstream, still alive, and now closer to Helsingor. He sees a vision of Christ, who tells Horvendal that he has failed Him because now a madman is corrupting his Gospel. He tells Horvendal to forget all the Christian love, take back his Viking heritage, and complete his revenge. Horvendal returns to the castle, slightly delirious. He is fed by the fishwives, who inform him that Lilja is dead, "strook by a meteor" (139). He runs off.

Feng holds a cremation service for Gerutha. Lilja's is scheduled for the next day. Ragnar returns, exhausted. Fengo rejects him and tells him not to come back until he has found Horvendal. Ragnar is disgusted with thie king but obeys. The next day, at Lilja's cremation, Ragnar leans over the body on the pyre to leave his sword with Lilja to show that he has sworn off fighting. Horvendal, who is wrapped in the death shroud, grabs hold of the sword and impales Ragnar. He jumps off the pyre and crouches toward Fengo with vengeful words. Fengo asks for Christian mercy from the boy, but the request is flatly rejected. The king drops to his knees and says, "Nay, it seems that Martyrdom's my Fate, / Love as ever always, must be devour'd by Hate" (148). Brother Petri, horrified, will not allow this, nor will Fengo's horde. A Viking stabs Horvendal in the back, other Vikings follow suit, and Brother Petri seizes a wooden cross and impales the Madd Boy from behind. Fengo is hailed as the "Saviour of the Danes" and the play closes with Fengo leading a prayer (149-150).

Mad Boy Chronicle deviates significantly from both Saxo and Shakespeare, though it is more akin to Saxo in its medievalism. The names of the principals, Fengo,

Gerutha, and Horvendal, derive from Saxo's account. In an odd mix of traditions, Amleth is given the name of his dead father, Horvendal (Orwendil) just as Shakespeare's Hamlet is named after his father. O'Brien resists using the more "courtly" names employed by Shakespeare in order to keep a Nordic tone. One remnant of the Shakespearean model is found in the development of the "House of Polonius": Matthius, Lilja, and Ragnar. Scene 3 and 23 in Mad Boy are reminiscent of I.iii and IV.vii in Shakespeare's play: Laertes' farewell family conversation and Laertes' conspiring with Claudius. Lilja (Lily) echoes the flowery tradition of Ophelia, but this is no garden-variety lady-in-waiting. This 13 year-old Madd Girl is fanatical in her love of both Horvendal and Jesus. Yet she is a sympathetic character at first, feisty and smart:

> MATTHIUS: I know it's hard to be the girl, my dear. I know it's hard, me lovin [Ragnar] more than you. But ye gots to accept yer lott in life. It's the godd's will.
> LILJA: Aye, I do accept it. At least I am not a horse.
> MATTHIUS: That's the spirit. That's the familie spirit.
> Oh Lilja, Lilja, me sweet pride and joy.
> A fine woman yer turnin out to be.
> LILJA: You, too, father. (33)

After her "stigmatizing" interview with Jesus in Scene 10, she is ecstatic to share her revelation with Horvendal and run off with him to Jerusalem. Even his rejection of her in the first test, complete with biting off her ear, does not dissuade her from helping him. She sees the slaughter of Fengo and Matthius as part of a holy war in which she and "Saint Horvendal" have been instructed by Jesus to rid the world of "Evill." In a world where she has no place, no rights, no respect, she finds salvation in the hope of butchering the pagan masses.

But it is she who is butchered, and by her own brother. In changing clothes with Horvendal (shades of Antony and Cleopatra) she tries to position herself in the world of men. As Ragnar and his men fall upon her as "Horvendal," her dying cry is "Lilja." In her death she plays out her own fantasy that, had this been her Madd Boy dying, he too would have shouted her name with his last breath. And, in fact, as Horvendal dies in the final scene, his last word is "Lilja."

The murder of the late king is secretive but Fengo is not necessarily clear of suspicion in the death. But, he has reigned for seven years. Horvendal is not a Saxonian dullard—in fact, he barely remembers his father. Rather than being dumb or depressed, Horvendal's madness is more profound—he is a Christian. In a pagan society, that may very well constitute insanity, and Fengo does banish the boy for it. No friends come to tell the prince of the Ghost; rather, it is a pair of frightened fishwives. Horvendal does not believe their pagan superstitions, whereas Shakespeare's Hamlet was filled with wonder at the story he received. The boy meets the Ghost in spite of himself, but doesn't bow fully to the specter's demands for vengeance. Horvendal instead plans to get to the truth of the matter, and believes playing mad will buy him some time to gather evidence against his uncle. The mad scenes are played to the hilt, with Horvendal running about barking, chirping, smelling crotches, pulling noses, and speaking nonsense.

Fengo is crafty enough to see that the boy is up to something. However, only the first "test" has to do with testing the Madd Boy's intentions. The first test is concocted by Matthius, but only after he thinks that Lilja is somehow conspiring with Horvendal. The boy passes the test, more or less. In Saxo's story, Amleth swears the girl to secrecy

and she eagerly obeys. In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet thinks Ophelia has betrayed him, and he chastises her. In O'Brien's play, Lilja herself warns Horvendal that he faces a trap. She wants him to run off with her, but he rejects her and her Christianity, swearing to avenge his father. She cries out to the watchers to come kill them, martyr them to the cause so that Horvendal will not do the murder. "Betrayed" by her, Horvendal literally bites her ear off and runs away. Fengo still doesn't trust the boy, but has a greater appreciation for him, as seen in their next conversation in which Fengo tries to bribe him. There are no subsequent tests of his sanity or craftily-designed attempts to take his life.

In Saxo's and Shakespeare's divergent uses of the story, the second test bears the greatest similarities in execution. O'Brien radically departs from this standard. Gerutha, finding that Horvendal is only making things worse for her by aggravating Fengo, decides to kill him herself, or "abort him" as she says. Horvendal does not lull her into complacency by appealing to her guilt—he cannot, for she hates Fengo almost as much as he does, and as she confesses, she hated Old Horvendal even more. He does succeed in placating her by singing a lullaby that she used to sing to him, but they reconcile only for a moment. As soon as Horvendal spouts again about revenge, they fight. Gerutha sees Horvendal repeating the same mindless, sexist violence that both of her husbands have supported. She is tired of it all and is intent only on looking out for her best interests now, which means getting rid of Horvendal so that Fengo will be less intolerable to be around. When Horvendal gets the upper hand in the fight, she cries out for help from Matthius (Polonius) but Horvendal does not have to kill the counselor—Lilja has done it for him. Horvendal receives the blame, however.

The third test is largely absent from the play. Horvendal runs off with Lilja, heading southward, but she abandons him to complete the journey, rather than Hamlet abandoning his two companions. With the exchange of clothes, Horvendal for a moment is Lilja (Ophelia) and he attempts to drown himself. But later, after her death, he surfaces from the water as Horvendal, still alive and still called to revenge. Although no letters-sealed are converted during this test, quite a number of Danes are, with drownings replaced by baptisms.

O'Brien does merge the Saxo-Shakespeare elements interestingly in the finale. The blazing fire of the banquet hall is replaced by the cremations of Gerutha and Lilja. Horvendal and Ragnar (Hamlet and Laertes) both "jump into the grave": Horvendal disguises himself as the corpse of Lilja, and Ragnar approaches the body to lay his sword down as an offering. An "exchange" of swords takes place. (Ragnar unknowingly hands over his Skull-Byter to Horvendal on Lilja's funeral pyre and is subsequently run through.)

The death count in the final scene resembles Shakespeare more than Saxo. Dead at curtain-fall are Matthius (disposed of earlier), Lilja, Gerutha, Ragnar, and Horvendal. However, the toll is one corpse short, for the would-be martyr Fengo, who has confessed his sins (penitent or no, he has been absolved, negating the irony of Hamlet's predicament in the Prayer Scene in Shakespeare's play), now reigns to spread Christianity with the swing of a blood-smeared battle-axe.

As do the novels of Treece and Updike, this play exploits the tensions between a traditionally pagan Denmark and a burgeoning Christian population. Fengo is a staunch

pagan until the brothers come to him with an ultimatum: convert or Rollo will destroy you. After that, Fengo finds that conversion to Christianity not only keeps him secure from outside hostility, but as Fengo the Confessor, he can use Christianity to his advantage, enjoying both the excommunication of anyone who gets in his way and the license to kill anyone who does not convert.

As found in other Hamlet-texts that emphasize the medieval qualities of the story, the portrayal of the established pagan world in conflict with the spreading Christian world is significant. Horvendal vacillates between praying to the Christian god and praying to the Norse gods. At one time or another, he feels betrayed by both theological systems. In the end, perhaps he dies a martyr, for Jesus did send him back to Helsignor to complete the revenge, but with Fengo representing the Church, the Madd Boy can only be a memory best forgotten, under penalty of excommunication. Once again, the rest is silenced.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LYRIC HAMLET

Hamlet as Opera

Ducis' French version inspired operas by Gaetano Andreozzi (1792), Luigi Caruso (1790), and G. S. R. Mercadante (1822), and possibly influenced several others. However, the Ambleto of Apostolo Zeno predated Ducis and was one of the first Italian operas to be performed on the English stage, opening on February 27, 1712 at the Haymarket in London. The original production, a collaboration by Zeno, Francesco Gasparini, and Pietro Pariati, premiered in Venice during Carnival of 1705. Numerous subsequent productions have appeared in the catalogues listing Zeno in collaboration with other composers such as G. D. Scarlatti (1715), Carlo Baglioni (1719), Giacomo Cozzi (1719), and Guiseppe Carcano (1742). Songs from the opera were printed in London in 1712, and several survive today. I have managed to find only a brief plot summary in The New Grove Dictionary of Opera (1992) and can at best reprint the concise entry of the story-synopsis, which utilizes Shakespearean cognates in brackets for the character explanations:

> Fengone [Claudius] and Valdemaro [Fortinbras] are both in love with Veremonda [Ophelia], a princess in her own right, who is true to Hamlet. Another Danish princess, Ildegarde [. . .], who was Fengone's mistress before he usurped the throne, is also in love with Hamlet. Twice Hamlet foils Fengone's attempts to unmask his madness as pretence. The usurper's resolve to repudiate Gerilda [Gertrude] and marry Veremonda precipitates the crisis. Fengone forces Gerilda and Veremonda to bow to his wishes by threatening to kill Hamlet; but during a bacchanalian revel, Hamlet arranges to administer a sleeping draught to him and he awakens in chains. As the newly acknowledged king, Hamlet sentences

> Fengone to a slow death, but the officer in charge takes it upon himself to dispatch him swiftly. Hamlet will marry Veremonda and reign along with his mother; Valdemaro will marry Ildegarde. (108)

What can be lifted from the summary is the distinct distance of the opera from the familiar story-elements, even though the New Grove entry editorially attaches Shakespearean names to the characters. It may be safe to assume that the text derives from Saxo (possibly through Belleforest) due to the name Fengone (Saxo's Fengi). Since the names of the foster-sister and -brother are given neither in Saxo nor in Belleforest, they are necessary additions to the libretto (Veremonda and Voltemaro). Ildegarde is without antecedent, unless we connect her with the British princess of Saxo. Since I have been unable to access a copy of the text, it is impossible to delve further into the characterization of Hamlet, in particular, the method through which he presents his madness, which would provide a stronger indication of how many story elements involving the tests were kept.

"Almost nothing in opera and in Shakespeare is as simple or forthright as [it] first appears," Gary Schmidgall writes in his Shakespeare and Opera (1990). "To enjoy them, it helps to bring a taste for ambiguity, for complexity, for intricate thought and structure" (xv). While Schmidgall finds this true for opera and Shakespeare in general, he finds the results of operatic Hamlets to be "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable adaptations" (313). To take the complexity and intricacy of Shakespeare's four-hour drama and set it to music could conceivably result in an eight-hour production. To make the play more manageable for the operatic stage, several elements of the Shakespearean version had to be condensed or eliminated. "Also spelling doom," continues Schmidgall, "is the fact that Hamlet is

Shakespeare's most word-bound and thought-bound—in short, his densest—play" (315). In an effort to free the story from the heavy burden of "words, words, words," heavy editing is required. The resulting "lyric" Hamlet is principally romantic rather than tragic or heroic. Reduction to tragic romance, as with other dramatic editions of the story, begins with eliminating Fortinbras, then Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in order to focus on the romantic relationship between "star-crossed lovers" Hamlet and Ophelia, which, as Schmidgall notes, removes the opportunity to explore "Hamlet-as-ironist-and-satirist" (318).

Hamlet

The most successful Hamlet opera is Ambroise Thomas' 1868 French Grand Opera Hamlet, with libretto by Jules Barrier and Michel Carré. The text pulls elements from Shakespeare's play, Ducis' "correction" of Shakespeare (see Chapter Four), and the Alexandre Dumas-Paul Meurice adaptation of 1846. Of note in the Dumas version, Hamlet does not leave Denmark for the third test—he goes into hiding after the death of Polonius—and the finale occurs at the gravesite of Ophelia. The Ghost appears to everyone and dole out their punishments: Laertes will die, but his heart is good; the Queen will die, but she has hope for redemption; the King will die, and there will be no pardon for him; and Hamlet, who has spent the length of the play bungling his divine assignment, is condemned to live. The Thomas opera references several of these adaptations, particularly the finale, and extended the one aspect that had always enticed the French audiences of Hamlet: not revenge, not madness, but a tragic love story.

Thomas' Hamlet

The scene opens at the coronation of Claude after the sudden death of King Hamlet. (As unfolds later, Claude, Gertrude, and Polonius conspired in the crime.) Hamlet grumbles on the inconstancy of woman. Ophélie speaks with him and they profess their love for each other, which lifts his spirits slightly. Then, the brooding Prince Hamlet meets Marcellus and Horatio on the ramparts. They tell him they have seen the ghost of his father, and soon enough the Spectre arrives. The Spectre tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Claude and he swears Hamlet to take revenge.

Act Two begins with Hamlet's antic disposition. He comes across Ophélie reading a book. He does not speak to her but abruptly leaves. She thinks he has fallen out of love with her. Gertrude enters, and Ophélie begs to leave the castle. Gertrude is afraid of Hamlet's condition and thinks only Ophelia can help him. She agrees to stay. Claude enters and states that Hamlet is deranged. Gertrude suspects that Hamlet knows of the murder, but Claude does not. Hamlet enters and, after some "witless" dialogue, informs the King and Queen of a troupe of players who will perform for them. Marcellus and Horatio bring in the players and Hamlet drinks with them.

Later, at the play, Hamlet narrates the dumbshow. The King reacts to the murder. Hamlet is convinced that Claude is guilty.

HAMLET: Treason! Treachery!
Let us avenge the murder of the king by the death of his murderer!
(approaching the king, pushing aside the courtiers who surround him)
There he is! Look! Do you not see him?
He derides the laws of heaven! Defies God Himself!
The royal crown sits yet upon his brow!

(he snatches the crown from Claudius' head)
Down with you, lying mask! Illicit crown, away with you! (31)

The court is horrified at such accusation and behavior, and Hamlet soon breaks into the drinking song again, continuing his mad act. The King rushes off.

Act Three begins with Hamlet debating why he did not kill the King at the play, then sings "to be or not to be." The King enters and performs the prayer scene. Hamlet wants to kill him but refuses to do it while the King is praying. Polonius enters to rouse the King from his fear. Hamlet hears Polonius reveal that he also was involved in the murder of Hamlet's father. Hamlet then meets the Queen, who brings Ophélie to him to marry. Hamlet is tortured that her father is involved in the crime, so he rejects her and tells her to go to a nunnery. Ophélie leaves in tears.

The Queen speaks with Hamlet alone in her chamber, and Hamlet informs her that he knows all about the murder. He forces her to look at "two counterfeit presentments" of the king and his brother. The Queen is moved by his words and she repents to him. Hamlet's anger keeps increasing, but the Spectre reenters, and Hamlet is reminded to leave Gertrude's punishment to God. There is no counselor hiding in the room, therefore no counselors die at this time; therefore, there appears to be no reason for the King to send Hamlet to England.

Act Four begins with a country dance among peasants. Ophélie arrives, handing out flowers. She has gone mad and tells the peasants that Hamlet is her husband but that he has forgotten her. She goes to the water and fancies that the Willis in the water will

help her to snatch Hamlet back. She thinks she hears him coming, so she enters the water and drowns.

Act Five begins with gravediggers. Hamlet, wandering the countryside, unaware of his love's death, is discovered by Laërte who has returned to Denmark to slay Hamlet for Ophélie's death. They fight at the side of Ophélie's grave as the funeral procession arrives. Hamlet now discovers that Ophélie is dead. He kneels beside her bier. The crowd is shocked to see him, but even more shocked to see the Spectre of the dead king appear. The Spectre urges Hamlet to his revenge. Hamlet runs the King through and becomes king. The Spectre tells the Queen to go to the cloister and sanctions Hamlet's kingship.

Three endings for the opera have been devised. The finale listed above is the original "French" ending, with Hamlet surviving to become king. Since English opera crowds might disdain such a departure from Shakespeare's text, the so-called "Covent Garden" finale was created. In it, Hamlet is about to kill himself and join Ophélie, but then decides abruptly to kill the King before committing suicide. Richard Bonynge's 1982 production offers a third ending in which Laërte mortally wounds Hamlet in their fight, and as soon as the Spectre appears, Hamlet kills the King then dies to join Ophélie.

Other elements significantly differ. Rather than Claude acting alone in murdering Old Hamlet (the general treatment) the opera incriminates both Gertrude and Polonius in the crime. Laërte is depicted at the beginning of the production as completely trusting and approving of Hamlet's conduct with Ophélie, only to feel bitterly betrayed by the Prince after her death, compared to Shakespeare's early scene which shows Laertes

cautioning his sister on the intents of Hamlet. Horatio is unsalutorily demoted to a mere courtier, and does not maintain the affections of Hamlet even long enough to be selected to watch the king during the play-within-the-play (Marcellus receives that honor). In addition, Marcellus and Horatio talk openly about seeing the Spectre, compared to the secrecy in Shakespeare. In the opera, fortunately, everyone they tell is drunk, so their disclosure remains a secret.

Attitudes toward drinking are also different. The Hamlet of Shakespeare denounces the drunken revelries of the King, noting how other nations ridicule Denmark ("they clepe us drunkards"). In Thomas, however, Hamlet does indeed drown his sorrows in ale with a drinking song he sings with the players before the play-within-a-play:

> O wine, dispel the sorrow
> that weighs heavy on my heart!
> Give me the dreams of ecstasy
> and the scoffing laugh!
> O elixir of potent charm,
> bring vinous balm
> and oblivion to my heart! (29)

It is atypical in the tradition for Hamlet to drink (even Marcellus and Horatio note during the song "He seeks oblivion in drunkenness!") but drinking songs were popular for operas at the time, so this is formulaic in the genre.

The greatest change in structure is the absence of the foreign-land episode. Perhaps most striking is that, in the time lapses from the closet-scene to Ophélie's death to the funeral, Laërte (who was out of the country) found out about his sister's death before Hamlet. The departure and return of Hamlet may be implied by this structure but is never addressed, but recall that in Dumas' adaptation, Hamlet goes into hiding after the

death of Polonius. In addition, the two companions who would have escorted Hamlet in the foreign-land episode do not exist, nor does the rival prince of Norway. By removing any opportunity for Hamlet to leave the country and end his relationship with his courtiers, by reducing Hamlet's friendship with Horatio, and by deleting the impending political conflict represented by Fortinbras, Thomas changes the focus of the story from a global tragic drama into a local romantic opera. Instead of Hamlet as avenger, the audience is directed to see Hamlet as lover. Just as Ducis' French drama about Hamlet is more about Gertrude, this French opera about Hamlet is more about Ophélie.

Whereas Shakespeare delays voicing Hamlet's own testimonial of love for Ophelia until Act V, the Thomas cuts to the quick by presenting Hamlet's amorous desires in the opening scene. Ophélie comes to him, sad to hear that he wants to leave Elsinore.

OPHELIA: Am I to think that your heart has grown cold towards me?
HAMLET: No! Heaven as my witness!
I am not the sort of man
who can make sweet promises of love one day
only to forget them the next.
My heart is not that of a woman!
OPHELIA: Ah, that was cruel! Has Ophelia deserved
that you should insult her thus?
HAMLET: Forgive me, dearest,
I was not accusing you!
The purity of your chaste soul
shines in the beauty of your face! Ah! (19)

They continue with a musical rendering of Hamlet's love poem "Doubt the stars are fire" (II.ii.115-23).

The bulk of the opera concerns the lovers, not only in preserving most of Shakespeare's scenes between the two but adding others. Maintained from Shakespeare are the nunnery scene (divided into two parts in the opera), the interaction at the play within a play, and the funeral scene. To these, Thomas adds the opening testimonial of love between the two (1.1), Gertrude consoling Ophélie after the nunnery scene, part 1 (2.1), the enactment of Ophélie's drowning (Act IV), and Hamlet's lamenting his treatment of her prior to his discovery of her death (Act V). It is important to note that no one observes the "nunnery scene" nor the "closet-scene" nor is Hamlet sent on a journey. Claude, while guilty of the crime, is hardly suspicious of Hamlet at all. As a result, Hamlet's struggle is more internal, more "lyric" because the greatest external obstacle to completing his revenge is his love of Ophelia, whose father is implicated in the crime.

While the emphasis on the two lovers shifts the focus of the narrative, some of the changes to the story, as with the drinking songs, stem from the French Grand Opera packaging, which, while allowing for a romantic male hero, must also give a great deal of stage time to the leading lady. Ophélie's role is necessarily significant in the production, and her mad scene, which consumes all of Act IV, continues to be recorded by opera divas today, and whenever the acclaimed Nellie Melba sang the role, the opera always ended with her mad scene of Act IV. Clearly to her, this was her (Ophelia's) show.

Focus on the two lovers also leads to a reduced body-count. Aside from Old Hamlet, the deaths of the courtiers are lost with their parts, and Thomas also succeeds in saving the lives of Polonius, Gertrude, and Laërte (usually) by leaving Polonius out of the bedroom episode and collapsing the events of Shakespeare's Act V into one scene,

placing the duel before Ophelia's funeral, and making Hamlet less-than-spectacular in his sword play (he is a lover, not a fighter). The Spectre must reappear in the finale in order for Hamlet to exact revenge and, depending on the version, the opera closes with two to four dead bodies (at least Ophélie and Claude) conveniently reposed in the graveyard. Thomas' Hamlet is remembered more for its musicality than its libretto, and it is good that Hamlet has plenty to sing, because the plot gives him little else to do.

CONCLUSION

THE GHOSTS OF HAMLET

The goal of this thesis was not to dilute the story of Hamlet to dry formula; rather, the intent was to provide the story-structure that allows a form as a passageway into the story. In addition, the structure offers future writers a framework to manipulate, allowing for an expansion of the Hamlet-tradition rather than contraction. The dual nature of Hamlet revealed in the essential Hamlet-texts—the clever epic hero of Saxo Grammaticus and the intellectual tragic hero of William Shakespeare—greatly increase the possibilities for characterization and plot with the tradition. This variety provides more ideas to entertain, more variations to concoct.

Yet with this diversity lies consistency. Throughout the tradition, Hamlet is isolated from his society, unique in his manner and pivoting between old habits and new ideas. This individuality is endemic to the hero, the rebel, and the pariah, and often Hamlet is all three, consecutively or concurrently. Recurring themes of truth, faith, and moderation call into question not only the characters and their actions, but the nature of the universe in which the actions occur. The emphasis within the story-structure of repeatedly testing the central character is significant in that plot complications (variations) derive from Hamlet's ability either to pass or fail each one. Stories are always full of plot twists, complications, and character choices. To me, the story of Hamlet opens more possibilities than most other stories because the testing concept is so

ingrained in the story-structure. Combined with the oppositional themes, it affords countless significant variations.

One goal of this thesis was to demonstrate how a reader may use a structure-model for the Hamlet-tradition to identify, interpret, and critique individual Hamlet-texts. Many of the works noted in the preceding chapters I have mentioned only in brief. Ideally, an annotated bibliography that offers a detailed structural reading of each text would provide a much greater contribution to the study of the Hamlet-story, but the scope of that project would far exceed the limits of this study. More Hamlet-texts exist than I was able to include in this thesis, and more continue to be produced. As I write this, a local theatre company is presenting an original play entitled Hamlet 2: The Investigation. Hamlet persists. My hope is that the structure-model presented here will provide a means by which researchers can approach these new works.

Because this thesis focused primarily on Hamlet-centered texts that retell the full story in narrative and dramatic forms, further research could expand the use of the structure-model into poetry, art, music, and film. In addition, texts that include Hamlet allusions or that contain only fragments of the story provide researchers with a different array of questions. For example, what kind of Hamlet-story is implied by the use of Hamlet-elements in quotation or image? To what effect do other non-Hamlet elements in the text interact with the Hamlet-elements?

For another direction of inquiry, Hamlet-texts may be compared more directly to each other. This thesis focused primarily on comparing individual texts to the general story-structure and to Saxo's and Shakespeare's versions of the story. However, some

texts build upon each other. This has been most notable in parodies, for example, "Hamlet the Dainty" taking lines directly from John Poole's Hamlet Travestie. Other groupings could include texts that focus more on medieval rather than renaissance elements of the story, texts that emphasize characters other than Hamlet, or texts that vilify Hamlet.

Although I did not address the stage tradition of Shakespeare's play in this research, further research could investigate the variations in staging the play through the story-structure and major themes. Since this thesis has emphasized the textual changes made by different authors, the editing and visualization by different directors of Shakespeare's play on the stage provide a wealth of information on differing interpretations of the tragedy. Moreover, variations of the Hamlet-story, as suggested in W. S. Gilbert's farce, may be readily connected to or inspired by contemporary stagings of Shakespeare's work. In turn, variant tellings of Hamlet's story also might serve to inspire alternate stagings of Shakespeare's play.

Given that many of Shakespeare's play are adaptations of other tales or plays, a structure-model approach provides researchers with another method in which to study other Shakespearean works. The stories of Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and King Lear have had diverse literary histories that began prior to Shakespeare's renderings. Resources such as Stanley Wells' Nineteenth Century Shakespeare Burlesques or Kenneth S. Rothwell and Annabelle Henkin Melzer's Shakespeare on Screen: An International Filmography and Videography provide excellent starting places for examining non-Shakespearean, Shakespearean texts. A structure-model method also

might be used to study other traditions of adaptation, for example, the modification of Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness found in Francis Ford Coppola's film Apocalypse Now.

In the classroom, a structure-model provides a framework for discussing the story. In addition, the structure-model can be helpful to students in comparing how an author/playwright tells a story; that is, how someone can tell "the same story" yet make significant changes to language or plot that may result in the text being regarded as "literary" or "popular literature" or simply make it an example of poor writing or plot-design. In this manner, a structure-model or traditions approach may assist instructors in explaining literature or writing to their students. Students may also develop their own versions of the stories, scenes, or passages to answer questions about, to expand upon, or to make criticisms of the texts as presented, shifting the critical and creative act back upon the reader.

I have always learned most when provided varied examples. The Hamlet-tradition contains a wide variety of literary quality, but in every version I find at least one interesting point of departure that reframes my understanding of the Hamlet-story. The internal dialogue that results within me from these explorations reinforces my appreciation of the story. My hope is that the structure-model and themes suggested here will assist other readers in expanding their understanding of Hamlet.

The diversity among the texts in this work as well as others in the Hamlet-Tradition reveal an on-going grappling with the story and its characters. While Shakespeare's tragedy maintains a strong centrality in the tradition, works like The Green

Man or Mad Boy Chronicle reinforce the heroic and medieval elements of the story more akin to Saxo's narrative and serve to decentralize the story as offered by Shakespeare. Other renderings, notably the parodies and minstrels of the nineteenth century, have "contextualized" Hamlet—that is, have presented him as a contemporary hero, scholar, madman, or fool, useful in his visibility to critique the society that surrounds the work. The structure-model and recurring themes provide a framework that serves not only in the study of existing Hamlet-texts, but in the creation of new ones. Hamlet may die a thousand deaths, yet he still breathes with new life in each re-vision of the story.

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