

Hamlet and Macbeth:
To be or not to be a
Procrastinator

by

© Julie Sato

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The title of this dissertation is Hamlet and Macbeth: To Be Or Not To Be a Procrastinator. The characters of Hamlet and Macbeth, and the influences of their female counterparts are analyzed by looking at the plays themselves, with particular emphasis upon the soliloquies. Interpersonal interactions are also examined with emphasis placed on the dialogue scenes between Hamlet, Gertrude, and Ophelia, and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

The plays of Hamlet and Macbeth were chosen because of the excellent characterization and the contrast between the main characters. Shakespeare shows Hamlet to be a vacillating character who procrastinates and, as a result, loses the power of action. On the other hand, there is the character of Macbeth: after the murder of Duncan, he does not procrastinate; he acts.

The female characters are also discussed throughout the course of this dissertation. In Hamlet, there are Gertrude and Ophelia--they exemplify one of the major themes of the play--"Frailty, thy name is woman" (I,ii,146). These two women are very weak and very dependent upon a male figure. On the other hand, in Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is not at all like Gertrude or Ophelia. She is strong and independent until Macbeth is no longer controlled by her and then she becomes weaker.

The first chapter is a discussion of Hamlet's seven soliloquies and how each one reflects particular aspects of his personality. The second chapter is an analysis of Hamlet's character as he interacts with Gertrude. Similarly, the third

chapter is an analysis of his character as he interacts with Ophelia. The remaining chapters (4,5,and 6) deal with Macbeth. The fourth chapter is a discussion of Macbeth's soliloquies and asides which reflect his true nature. The fifth chapter is an analysis of Macbeth's character as he interacts with Lady Macbeth. Also included is a discussion of Lady Macbeth--her soliloquies and asides as well as her confrontations with Macbeth. The sixth and final chapter deals with Hamlet and Macbeth, and many aspects of their personalities are contrasted.

From this dissertation, it can be concluded that in analyzing the characters of Hamlet and Macbeth, one is dealing with two distinctly different character types--Hamlet, the contemplating procrastinator whose conscience has a tendency to make him seem cowardly through inaction, and Macbeth, the impulsive instigator whose misguided conscience causes him to take part in much action and without thought.

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CHAPTER 1: HAMLET'S SOLILOQUIES

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."
(III,i,83)

Hamlet and Macbeth, tragedies by William Shakespeare, are considered two of his most popular plays. Their popularity can be attributed to the fact that Shakespeare provides us with complete character portraits that are both believable and real. It is for this reason that two tragic, Shakespearean characters--Hamlet and Macbeth--and the influences of their female counterparts, will be analyzed. This will be achieved by looking at the plays themselves, with particular emphasis upon the soliloquies. Interpersonal interactions will also be examined, with emphasis placed on the dialogue scenes between Hamlet, Gertrude, and Ophelia, and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Clearly, an analysis of the soliloquies is crucial to an accurate understanding of these characters; also, there is no better way of analyzing interpersonal interactions than by looking at the scenes in which there are dialogues between Hamlet and Macbeth and their female counterparts.

A question might arise as to why the plays of Hamlet and Macbeth were chosen. As mentioned above, the excellent characterization was a primary consideration, but also important was the contrast between the main characters. Shakespeare

shows Hamlet to be a vacillating character who procrastinates and, as a result, loses the power of action. The play proceeds with the utmost slowness. On the other hand, there is the character of Macbeth: after the murder of Duncan, he does not procrastinate; he acts. This play then proceeds rapidly.

One should look also at the female characters of these plays. In Hamlet, there are Gertrude and Ophelia. They exemplify one of the major themes of the play: "Frailty, thy name is woman" (I,ii,146). Here are two women who are very weak and very dependent upon a male figure. Gertrude depends upon King Hamlet and, shortly after his death, upon his successor, King Claudius. Ophelia looks to Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet for support. On the other hand, in Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is not at all like Gertrude or Ophelia. She is strong and independent. It is she who spurs her husband into action; however, one must be aware that her character does not remain this way for long. After the murder of Duncan, and with Macbeth's new-found strength, she becomes weaker. As one can see, these two plays provide a sharp contrast and this is another reason for choosing them.

It would be appropriate to commence this discussion with a definition of the "soliloquy". It is defined as a thought projection, a speech made by a character when he/she is alone on stage. In drama, it denotes the convention by which a character reveals his innermost thoughts concerning his motives, intentions, and state of mind. Soliloquies are also useful for general exposition which allows the audience to

know what is going on elsewhere or what some other character intends to do. The soliloquy, therefore, has a three-fold purpose: it reveals character, it advances the plot, and it creates atmosphere.

Hamlet himself has seven soliloquies which comprise over two hundred lines. They show him struggling with roles he chooses or roles he feels are forced upon him. He reveals his deepest self by turning his inward self outward to our view. It is in Hamlet's conscious efforts at self-definition that one can begin to understand the problems he faces.

Undoubtedly, one of the strong points of the play is the soliloquies. Each one will be discussed separately as it occurs in the play. Note that all of the soliloquies occur in the first four acts. It is significant that there are no soliloquies in the last act of Hamlet: the time for philosophical thinking and meditation has passed--it is now time for action.

Hamlet's first soliloquy reveals certain matters that are pressing on his mind. It is quite evident that Hamlet is upset, because his mind entertains thoughts of suicide:

"Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!"

(I,ii,129-132)¹

He is definitely on the verge of depression:

¹G.B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare: The Complete Works, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), p. 888.

All quotations in this paper are taken from this edition

"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world."

(I,ii,133-134)

This state of mind can be attributed to the fact that Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, with indecent haste, has married the brother of her late husband and this breaks Hamlet's heart. He always loved his mother and this soliloquy shows that the faithlessness to the memory of his father, whom he worshipped, devastates him. He shows despair at having to remain alive while such a situation exists as shown in the above quoted lines (129-134). Clearly, Hamlet's reaction is extreme but this can be attributed to the fact that up until now, he has never had to cope with crisis. Hamlet is probably about thirty years old, but it is not until this point that crisis strikes him--his father dies and his mother remarries. How does he deal with these circumstances? He grows moody, he abuses the world, his opinion of women deteriorates, and he wishes that his body would "resolve itself into a dew"--and this is before Hamlet even knows that his father had been murdered.

Hamlet goes on to compare the state of Denmark to an unweeded garden. Evil has taken over the palace and has infected it, a situation Hamlet attributes to the reign of Claudius, Gertrude's second husband and Hamlet's uncle:

Fie on't, ah, fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature.
Possess it merely. That it should come to this."

(I,ii,135-137)

Claudius can be compared to a weed that has infected the garden of Gertrude, hence the kingdom. The weed, like Claudius, grows and becomes stronger while the other vegetation in the garden (Gertrude and the kingdom) becomes weaker and weaker. All of the beauty of the garden will be replaced with things "rank and gross in nature".

There is no comparison between Hamlet's father and Claudius. To Hamlet, his father was a glorious Hyperion, the sun god; his uncle is a satyr, half man and half goat. The obvious contrast is between the god-like and the bestial:

"So excellent a king, that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr."

(I,ii,139-140)

He further contrasts his father to Claudius:

"My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules."

(I,ii,152-153)

One can see that young Hamlet has placed his father high on a pedestal.

Hamlet reveals his sadness and sensitivity with the lines

"So loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? Why she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on."

(I,ii,140-144)

He feeds his melancholy with the thoughts of his mother's frailty. "Frailty thy name is woman" (I,ii,146) is one of

the major themes of the play. Hamlet sees his mother as weak, unfaithful, and sensuous:

"And yet within a month--
 Let me not think on't--Frailty thy name is woman!--
 A little month or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed my poor father's body,
 Like Niobe, all tears; why she, even she--
 Oh, God! A beast that wants discourse of reason
 Would have mourned longer--married with my uncle."

(I,ii,145-151)

The reference to Niobe in this soliloquy might seem at first glance to be a symbol of Gertrude's grief. Niobe, the queen of Thebes and mother of fourteen children, boasted that she was greater than Latona, mother of only two children. Latona's children, Apollo and Diana, killed all of Niobe's children. The queen wept bitterly and she became so sorrowful that she was changed into a weeping stone. Note, however, that what seems to be a comparison between Niobe and Gertrude--the fact that both women grieve--may, in actual fact, be a contrast because Niobe's grief is boundless, but Hamlet believes that Gertrude's grief is short-lived--she has replaced a mournful situation with a joyous one (her marriage). Gertrude's weakness, I believe, is the fact that she could not survive without a man to protect and watch over her. She could not even stand to be alone and mourn the death of her husband. From what Hamlet has already said regarding his mother, one is able to see that she was very dependent upon her husband. This need for support would not change simply because her husband had died; therefore, she quickly found a replacement, someone she

could depend upon--Claudius. Perhaps Hamlet is agitated because of his disappointment not in his mother's weakness, but in what she does in her weakness. Theodore Lidz states that

*Hamlet is disillusioned because he is expected to become his mother's major support but instead she has remarried.*²

This is a very relevant point and one which I support. Hamlet deeply loved his father and his mother, so after his father died, Hamlet would naturally want to be just like his father and assume his role, but instead, Claudius has taken the place of his father, and ultimately , of him. It was Hamlet who wanted to be his mother's strength and support, but just as his father was taken away from him, so was his chance to be his father's replacement.

The final lines of the soliloquy restate Hamlet's feelings towards the hasty marriage of his mother:

"Within a month
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married."

(I,ii,153-156)

The emphasis is on the speed with which she turned from funeral to wedding. Moreover, Hamlet calls his mother's marriage "incestuous":

"O, most wicked speed to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets."

(I,ii,156-157)

²Theodore Lidz, Hamlet's Enemy, (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1975), p. 51.

It is evident that Hamlet disapproves of his mother's behavior. Gertrude's conduct fills him with loathing because she has degraded herself and has caused Hamlet to suffer the shame he feels for her. Lidz states that

His mother who had been his ideal of a good wife and mother is now a fallen idol³, she, even she is lust ridden and only seeming-virtuous.

Hamlet ends this soliloquy with his determination to live on and bear this heartbreak in silence:

"It is not, nor it cannot, come to good.
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue."

(I,ii,158-159)

Note that Hamlet meditates but does not voice his disapproval in public. He thinks about the events and becomes agitated but he locks these feelings inside rather than releasing them. These events transform into images in his mind:

The agonizing scene through which he has just passed transforms itself into vivid images and concrete symbols which flash before his mind to express his disgust at the world, his love for his father, and the hasty marriage. The soliloquy carries the tragedy to a different plane of reality and we can see things through the eyes of Hamlet.⁴

The thing that bothers Hamlet the most was not his father's death, vague suspicion, or loss of the crown. It is the disclosure of his mother's true nature.

This first soliloquy then, shows Hamlet to be a very unhappy man because of his mother's remarriage. Clearly, his

³Ibid, p. 52.

⁴Wolfgang Clemen, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972), p. 160.

feelings for Gertrude are very deep--if they were not, Hamlet would not be so depressed or disgusted. It is quite evident that the loss of his father is not the issue here; what really bothers Hamlet is his mother's behavior. Notice that there are more lines which focus on Gertrude (13 lines) than on King Hamlet (6 lines).

Hamlet's second soliloquy occurs in Act One, scene five, just after his confrontation with the ghost. King Hamlet's ghost leaves Hamlet with three commands: firstly, to separate Claudius and Gertrude; secondly, not to harm Gertrude; and thirdly, to revenge his death:

"If thou has nature in thee, bear it not.
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch of luxury and damned incest
But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to Heaven
...
Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me."

(I,v,81-91)

Now that the horror of his father's death has been revealed to him Hamlet asks for strength to keep him from losing his senses:

"And shall I couple Hell? Oh, fie! Hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old
But bear me stiffly up."

(I,v,93-95)

There is a revelation of his weakness and his hope to gain strength in line 93. If his heart is held, Hamlet will become robot-like and therefore, he will not be able to feel.

He will do the task that has been imposed upon him and being "heartless", he will feel no remorse. No human passion will come between himself and the deed.

Hamlet vows to blot everything else from his mind and dwell only upon revenge:

"Remember thee!
 Yea, from the table of my memory
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 Unmixed with baser matter."

(I,v,97-104)

Hamlet follows his pledge to the ghost with "O most pernicious woman!" (I,v,105). To him, his mother's behavior takes precedence over that of the "smiling, damned villain" (106) he has just sworn to kill:

He has difficulty in keeping his mind from being tainted and contriving against his mother⁵, killing his stepfather seems a secondary matter to him.

Line 105 further substantiates what has been hypothesized about Hamlet in his first soliloquy. His father's death, and now the revelation of his father's murder, is not of primary importance. He is plagued with thoughts of his mother's frailty, even though he has vowed to think only of revenge.

This soliloquy introduces three conflicts that will be developed: Hamlet versus murder, Hamlet versus Claudius, and

⁵Lidz, p. 64.

--

Hamlet versus himself (conscience). These conflicts are brought to the surface by the ghost and the three commands that he leaves Hamlet. The commands are very demanding for a person like Hamlet and the pressures imposed by these commands cause Hamlet's character to change rapidly--from being a sensitive, romantic, young man, he changes into an obsessed revenger. Notice the repetition which can be considered an indication that Hamlet is indeed becoming obsessed:

"O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!"

(I,v,106)

Notice also that his thoughts are fluctuating and ungoverned--he speaks about heaven, earth, hell, in a matter of one and a half lines, and he refers to his mother, Claudius, the ghost, and his vow to revenge his father's murder. Again, Hamlet is indeed obsessed, not with the revenge, however, but with his mother--a matter which is not of primary importance to the ghost.

Compare this soliloquy to the first one. The tone has completely changed. The sensitivity inherent in the first soliloquy is replaced with angry emotion in the second soliloquy. Notice all of the exclamation marks and the diction that Shakespeare uses to achieve effect. Words such as "pernicious woman" (105), "sinews", "stiffly", "pressures past"(100), and "damned villain" (106) are cacophonous words which give an overall effect of harshness.

In the third soliloquy, his longest one, Hamlet examines and criticizes himself and the situation that he is in. Just before this, Hamlet had been listening to the player's speech. In this speech, Aeneas tells Dido of Priam's slaughter: of how Pyrrhus had avenged his father, Achilles, and how a faithful queen, Hecuba had mourned her husband. While listening to the player agonize about Priam and Hecuba, Hamlet is stimulated to move out of the inertia of his melancholy, his indecision, and his feeling that nothing matters to him. Perhaps the reference to the mourning Hecuba reminds him of his ungrieving mother and this obsession stirs his emotions.

When Hamlet is alone, he asks himself several questions in order to explain his own passiveness. Perhaps he has delayed because he is insensitive or because he is a coward:

"And can say nothing--no, not for a King
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward?"

(II,ii,596-598)

and,

"But I am pigeoned-livered and lack gall
To make oppression bitter."

(II,ii,605-606)

Could it be that Hamlet simply is not bothered by the fact that Claudius has killed his father and has put himself in the King's shoes so that he is now the owner of all the King's possessions? Has he not been emotionally moved by the ghost's revelation? He tries to trade places with the player:

"What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have?"

(II,ii,586-588)

While Hamlet reflects upon these possibilities, we gain a deep insight into Hamlet's constitution and condition, his disposition to delay action, and his consciousness of his feebleness. This shows much of his character.

More of Hamlet's character is revealed to us when he makes reference to Claudius, the villain. One gets the impression that Hamlet feels that Claudius mocks him. He runs through the insults that provoke him:

"Who calls me villain? Breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? Gives me the lie i'th' throat
As deep as the lungs? Who does me this?"

(II,ii,599-602)

Claudius is this someone. Although he does not directly "tweak Hamlet by the nose", the mockery Claudius makes of Hamlet surely degrades him enough that he "feels" the blow. As Hamlet presents these questions it seems as though he is daring someone to fight against him. The series of questions asked by Hamlet and the quick pace at which they are executed by him exemplify this. The sentences are short and choppy which gives the effect of urgency. Hamlet continues with

"I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!"

O, vengeance!"

(II,ii,607-610)

Clearly, there is a mood of despair in this soliloquy, despair which probably made Hamlet exaggerate his own weaknesses. As Hamlet continues to call Claudius a "remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain", one can almost feel the anger and a sort of desperation building up in Hamlet. The line "Bloody, bawdy villain" may be a reference to Gertrude or to Claudius; however, I am inclined to believe that Hamlet is referring to Gertrude simply because he is characteristically obsessed with the nature of his mother--he is always thinking about her frailty and is convulsed by it. Then comes the emotional climax of this soliloquy with the screamed line "O, vengeance!"

At this point, Hamlet was probably emotionally drained and exhausted. The lines become longer which indicate that Hamlet is not so agitated. He begins to defame himself. Hamlet compares himself to a whore or dishwasher:

"Why what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by Heaven and Hell,
Must like a whore, unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion!"

(II,ii,611-616)

Almost immediately, the mood of depression and despair disappears as quickly as it appeared, as Hamlet is inspired with a plan. Hamlet recalls that the guilty have a tendency

to blush when they are exposed to a facsimile of their crime or malefaction. Although the tongue of a murderer will not speak, the face can be read like an open book. A play would also verify whether or not the ghost had spoken the truth. The command of the spirit might lead to damnation. The spirit could have been the Devil's and Hamlet will not act on a demonic lie. Hamlet realizes that Claudius could be innocent, and if he trusts the ghost, he may be abused and damned by it; therefore, Hamlet decides to use his own judgement before taking any unnecessary action against Claudius:

"The spirit that I have seen
May be the Devil, and the Devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have ground
More relative than this."

(II,ii,627-633)

Hamlet's pleasure increases in finding further excuses for delay:

"Fie upon't! About, my brain! Hum, I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been stuck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malfactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,
I'll tent him to the quick. If he but blench,
I know my course."

(II,ii,617-627)

The last lines of this soliloquy,

"The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

(II,ii,633-634)

forecast Hamlet's attempt to establish Claudius' guilt. The plot is also further developed because the reader becomes aware that the play-within-a-play will take place.

The tone of this soliloquy is one of hatred and despair--hatred, because of Hamlet's feelings toward Claudius and the behavior of his mother, and despair because of Hamlet's own refusal to act.

In the first two soliloquies, Hamlet voices his displeasure with Gertrude and Claudius; however, in this soliloquy, Hamlet himself is the target of disapproval. He is angry with himself because he does not have the passion to revenge his father's murder. In comparison, the actor, who does not have the motive or the cue for passion as Hamlet does, can play a role passionately through the use of his own imagination. He can become angered simply by wishing himself to be--and for the sake of a fictitious role. Hamlet, however, apparently has justification for being angry yet he is unable to become aroused into acting. The contrast between the actor and himself causes Hamlet to become agitated and he calls himself names, but not even the build up of this emotion is sufficient to make him act. He finds an excuse to justify a delay--he must be certain that the ghost is telling the truth. I believe this to be an excuse because Hamlet did not doubt the words of the ghost dur-

ing their encounter or right after the ghost had left him. The fact that this doubt appears later rather than at the time of their meeting, may indicate that it is a rationalization for a delay which Hamlet would have made in any case--it may be a sort of afterthought.

The fourth soliloquy is perhaps the most famous one. It is a philosophical contemplation of or reflection on the merits and disadvantages of suicide. It can be considered to be universal and timeless--thoughts of suicide can be experienced by any person, in any walk of life, in any century. This soliloquy is a superb stretch of philosophical poetry which contrasts painful life with restless death, and patient endurance with positive action. Hamlet makes the point that the great preventative of committing suicide is the uncertainty as to what might come after. He does not say that he really contemplates it, though he seems to blame himself for not having accomplished anything.

Hamlet takes several positions within the soliloquy itself, looking at himself and his situation from different angles of vision. Although the soliloquy does not advance the plot of the play, it allows the audience and us as readers to share Hamlet's stream of consciousness and his philosophy of life. It is quiet and contemplative and can be compared to the "eye of a tornado" in that this soliloquy divides the other soliloquies, which tend to be more angry and agitated, in half; thus, agitation (storm) is followed by quietude (soliloquy 4 "the eye") which is followed by agitation again.

Hamlet considers the subject of self-destruction from every perspective--its facility, its promise of prompt relief from grief, and its consequences. Hamlet's analogy of death and sleep reveals his intellect, his powers of introspection, his imagination, and his deep awareness of the world around him. It reveals Hamlet's sane, cool, and logical reasoning in the consideration of an extremely difficult subject. In this evil world, the noble mind has duties and temptations. This causes Hamlet much doubt and perplexity:

"Whether 'tis nobler in mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
 And by opposing end them.

...

To sleep--perchance to dream. Aye, there's the rub,
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil
 Must give us pause. There's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life
 For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely
 The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 The patient merit of the unworthy takes

...

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns."

(III,i,57-80)

The prevailing mood is one of quiet frustration. Hamlet is frustrated by life's burdens and the burden that he now bears. Hamlet believes that it is his task to revenge his father's murder, yet he feels the deep strain that this task imposes on him. Perhaps suicide would be easier--but then, what would await him after death? The tone created here is one

of quiet meditation which, in effect, creates the stillness and intimacy necessary as a prelude to Hamlet's meeting with Ophelia, the girl he loves.

In this soliloquy Hamlet works through the advantages and disadvantages of suicide by talking this problem through in his imagination. The soliloquy has loose rhythm and varied caesuras which reflect Hamlet's halting, questioning process of thought:

"And by opposing end them? To die; to sleep--
 No more; and by a sleep to say we end
 The heartache...
 ...
 To sleep--perchance to dream. Aye, there's the rub."

(III,i,60-65)

The caesuras are a very effective way of illustrating how intensely Hamlet is thinking. Notice also that he remains on topic--his mind does not fluctuate to thoughts of his mother.

Hamlet answers the question "To be or not to be" after intense deliberation. He knows nothing about death. When one dies, dreams of woe and terror may come that surpass all life's waking afflictions and ills:

"To grunt and sweat under weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?"

(III,i,77-82)

It is for this reason that Hamlet decides that life is a better choice. He logically decides that because death may be but

another stage of consciousness, that which is known, is better.

Hamlet realizes that contemplation will lead him away from his task. He must be impetuous and be ready himself for action:

"And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn away,
And lose the name of action."

(III,i,85-87)

In this soliloquy, the contemplative, intellectual side of Hamlet's character is displayed. He poses the universal, philosophical question of existence--"to be or not to be", and he remains on this topic until he sees Ophelia and his soliloquy ends. There is no mention of Gertrude or Claudius; hence, Hamlet is not emotionally excited, but calm. The many caesuras which slow down the tempo of the lines effectively illustrate this point.

Hamlet is not considering suicide as a personal decision; he is studying the idea of existence in his mind--something that a true philosopher and scholar would do. He has an original way of exploring the sleep-death analogy--he talks about the torments or pleasures of the afterlife as dreams. He displays a rather free-thinking, almost atheistic viewpoint and he pays little attention to standard theological stances (i.e. the Christian notion that suicide is a serious sin which will lead to damnation). At any rate, all of these thoughts are preventing Hamlet from doing what he has sworn to do--to revenge his father's murder.

The fifth soliloquy is the shortest one in Hamlet, but these twelve lines keep the audience and readers in a moment of tension and wonder. What will happen next? We know that Hamlet is about to go and speak to his mother; however, his preoccupation with graves, his alliance with the witching time of night, his thirst for blood, and his determination may cause him to harm her. Will Hamlet kill her? The atmosphere is filled with fear, deceit, hatred, and wonder.

The time is midnight, a time when graves open up and disease and evil spread easily. Hamlet could very easily kill Gertrude, and this soliloquy shows his fear that he may lose control and kill her. The fact that he does worry about this shows that Hamlet has feelings for his mother, but the fact that he is a definite threat to his mother's safety, leaves one to wonder which will prevail--Hamlet's homicidal thought or his love for his mother.

As Hamlet's determination takes over his thoughts momentarily, he says that he "could drink hot blood". One can see that Hamlet starts off to see his mother in a state of agitation and high excitement:

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

(III,ii,408-410)

Suddenly Hamlet's mood changes, and he returns to the reality that he is supposed to speak to his mother and not harm her. He must control his emotions so that he does not go into a

destructive rage and impulsively kill her. Hamlet bids his heart and soul to remain true. If his soul should turn cruel, like Nero's soul, turmoil could result and Hamlet would become a social enemy. This allusion to Nero's soul refers to the fact that although Nero was once kind like Hamlet, he became a brutal enemy of the public by committing and engineering homicidal acts. Hamlet's soul could take a similar course. His main concern is to speak to his mother with sharp, mean words, without actually putting "a dagger" to her. He wants to make Gertrude realize her faults and feel ashamed for having married Claudius. Hamlet hopes that his tongue and soul will be hypocrites with respect to each other; that is, his tongue should be cruel but his soul not so:

"Soft! Now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak daggers to her, but use none.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites,
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!"

(III,ii,410-417)

It should be noted that the word "soul" is repeated three times. This suggests that Hamlet cannot fail to recall the words of the Ghost:

"But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught."

(I,v,84-86)

Tension is created quite effectively in this soliloquy. The idea of graves opening up produces an element of fear of

the supernatural. Also, at this time of night, Hell seems to spread evil very quickly to the outside world. This would seem to be the best time of night to commit murder.

The fifth soliloquy then, shows Hamlet to be quite restrained. He creates suspense by stating that he could "drink hot blood" (408), which leads one to believe that Hamlet is thinking about murdering his mother--this is something new. Although Hamlet is very upset with his mother's behavior, there has never been any indication that he would consider killing her.

The clear thinking Hamlet in the fourth soliloquy appears again in the fifth soliloquy. He realizes that he must remain calm when he speaks to Gertrude even though he is very angry. Hamlet also realizes his limitations. He knows that if he loses his self-control, he might very possibly kill her. His concern for his mother's safety is an indication that deep down, Hamlet really cares about her, and this is actually the first time that Hamlet shows any feeling other than disgust for his mother.

With the sixth soliloquy comes the chance for Hamlet to revenge his father's murder. When Hamlet comes upon Claudius, his first thought is of fulfillment of the task promised to the ghost. Hamlet never questions this task, yet he ponders whether or not Claudius should have the right to go to heaven. His own father had died with his sins unconfessed so he is not in heaven. Hamlet again procrastinates--he finds a reason

for not killing Claudius because he believes that Claudius has purged himself of all of his sins. He sees an opportunity to avenge his father's murder but tells himself

"And now I'll do't; and so he goes to heaven;
 And so am I revenged. That would be scanned:
 A villain kills my father; and for that,
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send
 To heaven.
 O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
 He took my father grossly, full of bread,
 With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May."

(III,iii,74-81)

Hamlet does not take advantage of this opportunity. He thinks of reasons for delaying action, just as he has done in the past. The most obvious reason for Hamlet's decision to delay is provided directly by Hamlet. He feels that justice can only be obtained for his father if he kills Claudius in an act of sin. Hamlet is not content to take blood for blood but instead his deep, intense hatred of Claudius is reflected in his wish that Claudius' "heels may kick at heaven" (93). All of Hamlet's inborn feelings of goodness and mercy have been replaced by his terrible resolve to see Claudius damned:

"When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
 Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,
 At gaming, swearing, or about some act
 That has no relish of salvation in't--
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
 And that his soul may be as damned and black
 As hell, whereto it goes."

(III,iii,89-95)

*The language of his imagination is richer than the logic with which he has tried to analyze the immediate situation. The poetic image of Claudius in heaven is more interesting to him than if he were to kill Claudius now. He takes delight in his invention of a private vision of Claudius in hell, thus relieving himself from the obligation to participate in the immediate reality. It is not a procrastination--he is quite capable of action, but Hamlet needs a poetic or dramatic setting: if there has to be action, it must be carried out under the illusion of significance or for that extreme reason, survival.*⁶

I support what Zulfikan Ghose has said pertaining to Hamlet and his imagination; however, there is one aspect of his argument with which I do not agree. Ghose feels that Hamlet's decision not to kill Claudius at this point in time is not a procrastination. He is not alone in this argument for Theodore Lidz states that

In Elizabethan times, personal revenge was considered a duty and hell and heaven were both real. The audience would feel that Hamlet's reasoning was correct and was not a trifling excuse. His considerations were very real and powerful.

I believe that Hamlet was again procrastinating. As it can be noted from previous soliloquies, Hamlet always finds reasons for inaction. In this soliloquy, I contend that Hamlet remains consistent in the fact that he thinks too intensely. His reason for not killing Claudius is a theological one and this is completely uncharacteristic of Hamlet. As illustrated in the fourth soliloquy, Hamlet seems almost atheistic, so his

⁶Zulfikan Ghose, Hamlet, Prufrock and Language, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. 75.

⁷Lidz, p. 74.

sudden change to a religious belief and reason is only an excuse; hence, he is procrastinating.

The sixth soliloquy then, confirms the premise that Hamlet is a procrastinator. His reason for delay--killing Claudius at prayer will send him to heaven--reveals Hamlet's hatred for Claudius. Murdering Claudius is not enough. Hamlet wants Claudius' soul to be damned as well. Clearly, he is assuming God's role--something he has no right to do. Notice also that Hamlet makes no reference to Gertrude and as a result, this soliloquy does not have the intensity of the first soliloquy, for example.

In the seventh and final soliloquy, Hamlet compares himself to Fortinbras. Because Hamlet did not kill Claudius when he had the opportunity to do so, he is disgusted with himself. Hamlet now realizes that he has no more reasons for hesitation--Claudius' reaction to the play has proven to Hamlet that he is guilty. The soliloquy allows Hamlet to reprimand himself and to put himself together emotionally.

This soliloquy begins with Hamlet's feelings of worthlessness. He feels this way because he has not revenged his father's murder yet. He thinks of himself as a beast:

"What is a man
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more."

(IV, iv, 33-35)

Hamlet might be too rational a being:

"Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,
 Looking before and after, gave us not
 That capability and god-like reason
 To fust in us unused."

(IV,iv,36-41)

He attributes his inaction to the fact that he has qualities which are characteristic of a beast or a chronic thinker. Hamlet realizes that he thinks too much and thus appears cowardly but he does not know why:

"Now whether it be
 Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple
 Of thinking too precisely on the event--
 A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
 And ever three parts coward--I do not know
 Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"
 Sith I have cause, and will and strength, and means
 To do't."

(IV,iv,39-46)

Then Hamlet draws a comparison between Fortinbras and himself. Fortinbras would fight over and die for an eggshell, but Hamlet would sit back and hesitate, even before revenging his father's death. He dwells on this idea for a long while:

"Led by a delicate and tender Prince
 Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
 Makes mouths at the invisible event,
 Exposing what is mortal and unsure
 To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
 Even for an eggshell...
 How stand I then,
 That have a father killed, a mother stained,
 Excitements of my reason and my blood."

(IV,iv,48-58)

It is obvious that Hamlet admires Fortinbras because he takes action even for the cause that is of very little importance:

"The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That for fantasy and trick of fame
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain?"

(IV, iv, 60-65)

Fortinbras is acting for the sake of honour and nothing more; Hamlet has cause for acting but he does not. Although Hamlet does not agree in acting for an "eggshell" cause, he still thinks highly of young Fortinbras:

Hamlet expresses his contempt for wars pursued for no purpose other than honour and self-advancement, yet he admires a young man who does not let reason or conscience stand in the way of action.

Even though Fortinbras' venture has something ridiculous about it, it is for an honourable cause which makes him an honourable man:

"Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake."

(IV, iv, 53-56)

Ghose supports the notion that Hamlet admires Fortinbras:

Fortinbras is not only a reminder to Hamlet of what kind of prince he himself ought to be but also an example of a leader who invents cause, one who uses

⁸Lidz, p. 87.

*language not to ask questions but to give orders,
who substitutes metaphysical quest with physical
conquest.*

At the end of the soliloquy, Hamlet comes to his senses and makes a final statement of intent. It is Fortinbras' example that incites Hamlet into action:

"O, from this time forth,
My thought be bloody or be nothing worth!"

(IV, iv, 65-66)

He is conscious of what has to be done and he is going to do it.

This soliloquy is less violent than the fourth--the latter precedes the violence against Ophelia and the greater violence against Polonius and Gertrude whereas this one precedes immediately, the quieter, sadder, mad scenes of Ophelia. It shows Hamlet chastizing himself for having delayed the revenge but he does this in a philosophical tone; hence, it is not a violent soliloquy. For the first time he states his lack of understanding as to why he has delayed for all of this time, and he ends with a stern statement of intention--he does not think about reasons for delaying any longer. A.C. Bradley's comments about this soliloquy are similar to the comments that I have made. He states that

⁹Ghose p. 86.

*This soliloquy has a great value for the interpretation of Hamlet's character. It shows that Hamlet, though he is leaving Denmark, has not relinquished the idea of obeying the Ghost. It exhibits very strikingly his inability to understand why he has delayed so long. He has learnt little or nothing from his delay, or from his failure to seize the opportunity presented to him after the play scene.*¹⁰

The seven soliloquies of Hamlet's are his deliberations. The value of the soliloquy is made very apparent--without them, one would have a very difficult time trying to understand the character of Hamlet and the different phases that he goes through. Harry Levin summarizes, quite nicely, the content and function of the soliloquies:

The first, relating to his parents, strikes the note of dejection. The second reacting to the ghost, seals a vow; the third, inspired by the Player, plans a test. The fourth is the central soliloquy and has the universality of its appeal. Unlike the other six soliloquies, it does not mention particular events or individuals; nor does it advance the action of the play. Unlike the first three, it does not begin with "O". Its tone is quietly meditative and detached. The fifth, coming after the play, is a resolve to chide the Queen; the sixth, spoken behind the kneeling King, is a postponement of the revenge, and the seventh spurred¹¹ by the army of Fortinbras, is a final call to action.

The first, fourth, sixth, and seventh soliloquies are alike in that that they express a mood that is violently dark. The fourth and seventh are alike because they are severe self-recriminations.

By looking at the soliloquies, one is able to form an opinion about the character of Hamlet. There is no doubt

¹⁰A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1964), p. 141.

¹¹Harry Levin, The Question of Hamlet, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 67.

that he is a true scholar and a very capable thinker; however, this ability is responsible for his inactivity. The fact that Hamlet is able to come up with reasons to postpone action proves that he is a procrastinator. He does not doubt the ghost's words at the time of their meeting but he uses this as an excuse to delay action later on. This indicates that Hamlet probably would have delayed anyway, and doubting the ghost's words was, therefore, an afterthought. He later uses a religious excuse even though he is not a religious thinker. The excuse of not killing Claudius at prayer is totally out of character when compared to soliloquy 4. The best proof that Hamlet is a procrastinator comes from what Hamlet says about himself--he admits that he has delayed action. He seems to lack the nerve necessary to do the act, so he could find solace only in thinking of reasons to postpone action--to procrastinate.

CHAPTER 2: HAMLET CONFRONTS GERTRUDE

"Frailty, thy name is woman."
(I,ii,146)

By looking at the dialogue scenes between Hamlet and his mother, it will be possible to analyze the interpersonal interaction that transpires between them. One sees Gertrude's concern for Hamlet from the moment that they meet, following his return from the university in Wittenburg. She is concerned because Hamlet is still mourning over the death of his father, and she wants him to end this and go on with his life. Everyone must accept death:

"Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy veiled lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know'st 'tis common--all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity."

(I,ii,68-73)

Notice also, her affection for Hamlet. It is clearly demonstrated by the first line that she speaks--"Good Hamlet".

Hamlet agrees that death is common and the Queen then asks:

"If it be so
Why seems it so particular with thee?"

(I,ii,74-75)

This question posed by Gertrude indicates a lack of sensi-

tivity. Everyone knows and accepts the fact that death will occur, but when it happens to someone who is loved and who holds an important place in one's life, quite obviously, it will affect the person more deeply--especially if the person who has died is a member of the family. Gertrude's lack of understanding and compassion in this matter bothers Hamlet. Should not his mother, who had professed complete love and devotion to his father, feel the same way that he himself feels? The fact that Gertrude implies that Hamlet might be "putting on an act"--"Why seems it so particular with thee?" (75), causes Hamlet to retaliate with

"Seems, madam! Nay, it is. I know not
'seems'."

(I,ii,76)

One can feel the emotion with which Hamlet delivers this line. He continues by saying that appearances cannot express the feeling of loss and sadness that he feels:

"'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good Mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath--
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief--
That can denote me truly."

(I,ii,77-83)

Hamlet says that his behavior might be the way an actor might execute lines of a play but his woe disseminates from within--it is not "skin-deep" as it would be for an actor:

"These indeed seem,
 For they are actions that a man might play.
 But I have that within which passeth show,
 These but the trappings and the suits of woe."

(I,ii,83-86)

Even after Hamlet's outburst, the audience sees again Gertrude's love for her son:

"Let not thy mother lose her prayers,
 Hamlet.
 I pray thee, stay with us, go not to Wittenburg "

to which Hamlet replies,

"I shall in all my best obey you, madam."

(I,ii,118-120)

Notice here that Hamlet does not refer to Gertrude as "Mother". He calls her "madam", a cold term which lacks affection. This might be an indication of Hamlet's disgust over her hasty marriage to Claudius.

The next dialogue between Hamlet and Gertrude occurs in the Play Scene. Hamlet has the players perform a play called "The Mousetrap" in order that he might be able to determine whether or not Claudius is guilty of murdering King Hamlet or if the appearance of the ghost was the Devil himself. At this point in the play, the Player Queen says lines that indicate her conspiracy in the death of her husband,

"Sleep rock thy brain,
 And never come mischance between us twain!"

(III,ii,238-239)

Hamlet then asks his mother:

"Madam, how like you this play?"

(III,ii,240)

to which Gertrude replies,

"The lady doth protest too much, me thinks."

(III,ii,241)

It is evident here that Hamlet is testing his mother. Obviously, Hamlet does not trust Gertrude; his trust of her has been shattered by the revelation of her very nature. Their relationship is very insecure--it is possible that Hamlet feels that he no longer knows his mother. She is not the same woman who was married to King Hamlet--at least not in Hamlet's mind. At any rate, Hamlet wants to know if his mother had knowingly allowed Claudius to kill his father. Her response to Hamlet's question, and the fact that she does not understand why Claudius rises--

"How fares my lord?"

(III,ii,278)

is a clear indication that Gertrude was not involved in her first husband's murder.

The scene that is devoted solely to conversation between Gertrude and Hamlet occurs in the Queen's closet. It is Gertrude who has called for her son. She probably thought that she would be able to help Hamlet overcome his strange mood. The fact that she is worried about his condition and wants to help him shows, once again, her love for Hamlet. Gertrude,

really look at herself and repent:

"Come, come, and sit you down. You shall
 not budge,
 You go not till I set you up a glass
 Where you may see the inmost part of you."

(III,iv,18-20)

It is at this point that Gertrude begins to fear Hamlet. His intensity of action causes Gertrude to fear for her life:

"What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not
 murder me?
 Help, help, ho!"

(III,iv,21-22)

Polonius then shouts out and Hamlet draws his sword and stabs him through the arras. It is important to note that Hamlet draws his sword on an unseen eavesdropper. It is quite evident that he had thought that the eavesdropper was Claudius:

Queen "Oh me, what has thou done?
 Hamlet Nay, I know not. Is it the King?
 Queen Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this!
 Hamlet A bloody deed! Almost as bad, good Mother,
 As kill a King and marry with his brother."

(III,iv,25-28)

The last two lines spoken by Hamlet indicate that he is giving justification for the act that he has just committed. He feels that the "bloody deed" is almost as bad as killing a king and marrying his brother.

Gertrude, once again, is proven to be innocent in connection with her first husband's death for she says:

"As kill a King!"

(III,iv,30)

She is obviously very surprised at hearing these words and for this reason, she is deemed innocent of the knowledge that her husband was murdered or that Claudius was responsible for the deed.

When Hamlet sees that he has killed Polonius and not Claudius he says:

"Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.
Thou find'st to be too busy in some danger."

(III,iv,31-33)

Hamlet is stripped of feeling. He is not even remorseful for murdering Polonius. He even feels that it is Polonius' just reward:

"Take thy fortune." (32)

Hamlet immediately turns to his mother. He wants to search Gertrude's heart. The killing that he is responsible for seems unimportant:

"Leave wringing of your hands. Peace! Sit you down,
And let me wring your heart. For so I shall
If it be made of penetrable stuff,
If damned custom have not brass'd it so
That it be proof and bulwark against sense."

(III,iv,34-38)

It is obvious that Gertrude is in a state of panic and fear-- she is wringing her hands. Hamlet is accusing his mother of being hard-hearted--it is evident to Hamlet that she has no feelings or why would she have married Claudius? Gertrude does not understand why Hamlet is speaking this way to her for she

asks:

"What have I done that thou dares wag
thy tongue
In noise so rude against me?"

(III,iv,38-39)

Hamlet speaks of her marriage vows and how, in her case, they were a string of meaningless words, making her out to be a harlot. This implies that she has entered a marriage for a second time because of her sensuality:

"Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there--makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' oaths. Oh, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words. Heaven's face doth glow,
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act."

(III,iv,40-51)

Gertrude's sensuality may have been a reason for remarrying; however, her frailty and fear of being alone were probably more significant considerations in her decision to remarry. Hamlet is so preoccupied with the sensual aspects of woman's nature that he can only accept her marriage on sensual terms.

Hamlet then compares her two husbands. He refers to his father in god-like terms:

"See what grace was seated on this brow--
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,
A combination and a form indeed

Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man."

(III,iv,55-62)

In contrast there is Claudius, "the moor":

"Look you now what follows
Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear,
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
And batter on this moor? Ha! Have you eyes?"

(III,iv,63-67)

Hamlet cannot understand his mother's sensuality--it is shameful:

"You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgement. And what judgement
Would stop from this to this? Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion. But sure that sense
Is apoplexed; for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd.

...

Oh, shame! Where is thy blush? Rebellious Hell,
If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will."

(III,iv,68-88)

Hamlet feels that if the passion of his mother, a woman who is much older than him, is uncontrollable, then it follows that there should be no shame in a young man's lust. If the "elderly" are eager and their reason encourages them even though it should control desire, then youth should have no restraints.

The Queen now sees a part of herself as she really is and it disturbs her. Her frailty has been brought to the surface

and she is now forced, through Hamlet's words, to look at herself. She is ashamed and unable to cope with this side of her character--a side that has been exaggerated by her son. Gertrude, because of her very nature, is unable to defend herself. She accepts all of Hamlet's strong accusations, accusations which are blown out of proportion. Gertrude may have been sensual, but not to the degree that Hamlet perceives her to be. His words hurt Gertrude enough that she does not want to hear any more:

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

(III, iv, 88-91)

Hamlet, however, continues:

"Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty--
...

A murderer and a villain;
A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole
And put it in his pocket!"

(III, iv, 92-101)

All during this emotional outburst Gertrude pleads with Hamlet to say no more but he continues until finally the ghost reappears. Immediately, Hamlet changes. The subject he is speaking of suddenly switches:

"A King of shreds and patches--"

(enter ghost) Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings,
 You heavenly guards! What would your gracious
 figure?"

(III, iv, 103-104)

Gertrude naturally assumes that her son has gone mad because she cannot see the ghost--only Hamlet can. Indeed, his behavior confirms Gertrude's original fears that her son is truly unstable:

"Alas, how is't with you
 That you do bend your eye on vacancy
 And with the incorporal air do hold discourse?
 Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,
 And as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,
 Your bedded hairs, like life in excrements,
 Start up and stand an end. O gently son,
 Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
 Sprinkle cool patience."

(III, iv, 116-124)

A logical question to ask is why did Gertrude not see the ghost? One is already aware of the fact that Gertrude is indeed a frail, weak woman. King Hamlet, as a living being and then as a ghost, realizes this. Gertrude would have to have the courage to speak to the ghost first. Harold Jenkins expresses this very point:

*A ghost has not the power to speak till it has been first spoken to; so that, notwithstanding the urgency of the business on which it may come, everything must stand still till the person visited can find sufficient courage to speak to it.*¹

Undoubtedly, the ghost's appearance would frighten Gertrude and because of King Hamlet's deep love for her, he does not

¹Harold Jenkins, ed., Hamlet, (London: Methuen Co. Ltd., 1982), p. 424.

appear to her. Gertrude, because she cannot see the ghost, thinks that her son is seeing things:

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

(III,iv,137-139)

Hamlet tries to disprove Gertrude's statement by offering to take a test. With this test, only a madman would be unable to reword any matter spoken by himself:

"Ecstasy!
My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered. Bring me to the test
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from."

(III,iv,139-144)

Hamlet then pleads with his mother to confess and repent for what she has done and abstain from being with Claudius:

"Mother, for the love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseem. Confess yourself to Heaven,
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker

...

But go not to my uncle's bed.
Assume a virtue if you have it not

...

Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence, the next more easy."

(III,iv,144-167)

and:

"Not this, by no means, that I bid you do,
 Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,
 Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
 And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses
 Or paddling in your neck with his damned finger,
 Make you ravel."

(III,iv,181-186)

When Gertrude does this, then Hamlet will forgive her and she will forgive him for speaking cruelly to her:

"And when you are desirous to be blest,
 I'll blessing beg of you."

(III,iv,171-172)

Hamlet has convinced Gertrude that he is indeed mad. He has slain Polonius and does not seem disturbed by this, he has hallucinations i.e. the ghost, and he has condemned his mother for her hasty remarriage and her sexual misconduct. Hamlet, however, impresses upon Gertrude the fact that he is not mad:

"That I essentially am not in madness,
 But mad in craft."

(III,iv,187-188)

Hamlet then comes to the realization that he should have let his mother believe that he was mad without trying to defend himself. He did not want Claudius to believe that he was not mad so as to allay any suspicions. In the excitement of their heated conversation, Hamlet must have forgotten about his "antic disposition". Perhaps Gertrude will tell Claudius that Hamlet himself had said that he was not mad:

Hamlet "'Twere good you let him know,

For who that's but a Queen, fair, sober, wise,
 Would from a paddock, from a bat, a gib,
 Such dear concernings hide? Who would do so?
 No, in despite of sense and secrecy,
 Unpeg the basket on the housetrap,
 Let the birds fly, and like the famous ape,
 To try conclusions, in the basket creep
 And break your own neck down.

Queen Be thou assured if words be made of breath,
 And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
 What thou hast said to me."

(III,iv,188-198)

Gertrude's answer to Hamlet clearly demonstrates her devotion to him. She will not tell Claudius or anyone else about what has transpired between Hamlet and herself.

In this scene, it is quite apparent that Hamlet is jealous of Claudius and he is disappointed because he thought that he would be the centre of his mother's attention and affection. One also realizes that even though Hamlet has treated his mother terribly, Gertrude's love for him does not die. When Gertrude is near death, having sipped from the poisoned cup, her dying words are

"No, no, the drink, the drink!--O my
 dear Hamlet--
 The drink, the drink! I am poisoned."

(V,ii,320-321)

One concludes from the dialogue scenes between Gertrude and Hamlet that Gertrude's love for Hamlet remains constant. Even though she feels that her son has gone mad, she cares for him nevertheless. Her fondness for Hamlet can be proven by the fact that she listens to his comments about her personal life. Obviously, Hamlet's opinions are important to her.

She is basically a good and loving person. Her weakness is that she is frail. She is afraid to be alone--she needs the support and love of a man and when Claudius wants to fill the void in her life, she accepts him. She may have been sensual but certainly not to the degree that Hamlet believes her to be; yet, because of her very nature she is unable to defend herself, so she takes all of Hamlet's accusations to heart. The unfortunate thing is that Gertrude did not have the wits or the insight to look ahead before she married the brother of her late husband. This lack revealed itself as insensitivity to her son's feelings. Had she stopped to think about what she was doing, she might have realized that her son would never accept her marriage, and a hasty one at that. She was truly naive in thinking that her son would be able to forget his father and think of Claudius as a replacement or that he would even want to for that matter. Her frailty made Hamlet believe that his mother was a harlot, a woman who could not control her sensuality, and more importantly, a false woman who had lied about her feelings of love and devotion for Hamlet's father:

"Why she would hang on him

...

and yet within a month--

Let me not think on't--Frailty thy name is woman--

...

She married--O most wicked speed! To post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!"

(I,ii,143-157)

Gertrude's behavior was responsible for Hamlet's changing,

negative opinion about women in general, and Ophelia specifically. Because he viewed Gertrude as being a sensual, false woman, he became very suspicious about all women, especially his love, Ophelia:

*Hamlet views Ophelia as he considers his mother--a passionate voluptuary whose flagrant sexuality is a poisonous and destroying force.*²

Clearly, Hamlet loses faith in his mother and questions her loyalty and love for his father. His mother's behavior has scarred Hamlet's view of women as shall be seen later in his dialogues with Ophelia.

Whether or not Hamlet actually loses his love for Gertrude is subject to discussion. It is quite possible that Hamlet, although disillusioned by his mother's behavior, still loved her. This is illustrated in the closet scene where Hamlet wanted Gertrude to repent, with the intention that after she had left Claudius, they would resume their close relationship. Also, at the end of the play, Hamlet finally killed Claudius, but one should notice that he did not accomplish this deed until he realized that his mother had died because of Claudius' treachery. It was the deeply hidden love for his mother that gave him the strength and courage to kill Claudius. It is, however, quite possible that Hamlet was not even aware, or was not willing to admit to himself, that he loved his mother, for as he approached death, he

²Nigel Alexander, Poison, Play, and Duel, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), p. 136.

referred to her as

"Wretched Queen, adieu!"

(V,ii,343)

CHAPTER 3: HAMLET CONFRONTS OPHELIA

"Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum."

(V,i,271-273)

The relationship that existed between Hamlet and Ophelia is one that is very puzzling. Did Hamlet really love her? Some critics, such as Helena Martin, believe that Hamlet was incapable of loving her,¹ but it is my contention that Hamlet was deeply in love with Ophelia. His mother's behavior had a tremendous effect on the way that Hamlet looked upon women, and indeed, the circumstances surrounding her hasty remarriage caused Hamlet to form a negative opinion about women. Perhaps this negative opinion would not have been so pronounced if Ophelia had chosen not to obey her father's wishes:

Polonius	"Affection pooh! You speak like a green girl, Unsifted in such perilous circumstance. Do you believe his tenders, as you call them? ... I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth Have you so slander any moment leisure As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet. Look to't, I charge you. Come your ways.
Ophelia	I shall obey, my lord."

(I,iii,101-136)

Her behavior only caused Hamlet's premise to be proven further. She now denied him access to herself and she returned his gifts to him. Undoubtedly, this change in her behavior was

¹Helena Martin, On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters, (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p.18-19.

responsible for the change in Hamlet's treatment of her. Gertrude's disloyalty to her husband was equated with Ophelia's disloyalty to Hamlet.

If Hamlet had not possessed deep affection for Ophelia, then he would not have reacted the way that he did in the Nunnery Scene. K.R. Eissler also believes this for he states that

...his break with Ophelia and his subsequent ranting against her serve as his defense against a still strong affection. In the absence of such attraction, indeed, of passionate longings for her (at least in his unconscious), he would not have given vent to such a passionate outburst. Had he succeeded in truly breaking the tie between them, cold scorn or indifference would have been the consequence instead.²

In the Nunnery Scene, Hamlet clearly repudiates his love for Ophelia. She has followed the instructions of her father, Polonius, without question and now she is giving back the gifts that Hamlet had given to her. Hamlet, however, denies having given these remembrances to Ophelia. It is quite possible that because Hamlet's view of women has been changed and hence he regards Ophelia in a different light, Hamlet no longer knows Ophelia--the girl to whom he had sent these remembrances no longer exists in his mind:

Ophelia	"My lord, I have remembrances of yours That I have longed long to redeliver. I pray you now receive them.
Hamlet	No, not I. I never gave you aught."

(III,i,93-96)

Ophelia tells Hamlet to accept the tokens that he had given to her.

²K.R. Eissler, Discourse on Hamlet and "Hamlet", (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1971), p. 424.

She now believes Hamlet to be insincere:

"Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."

(III,i,100-101)

Hamlet responds to this by asking Ophelia if she is being truthful and chaste. In this regard, Hamlet implies that in the association of chastity and beauty, chastity will suffer. Ophelia is pleasing to the eye, and hence vulnerable through her beauty:

Hamlet	"Ha, ha! Are you honest?"
Ophelia	My lord?
Hamlet	Are you fair?
Ophelia	What means your lordship?
Hamlet	That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should Admit no discourse to your beauty."

(III,i,103-108)

The line "Are you honest?" (103) may very well be an indication that Hamlet sees Polonius eavesdropping on them. If this is the case, then he is questioning Ophelia's involvement in this "set up". Her participation in this act only strengthens Hamlet's belief that all women are deceitful and cannot be trusted. From this point on, Hamlet treats Ophelia with disrespect, as illustrated in the Play Scene, and speaks to her as if she were a harlot. This will be discussed further below.

In this scene, Hamlet asks Ophelia ambiguous questions about her chastity but she does not fully comprehend his meaning. She does not, however, accept Hamlet's implication

for she says,

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

(III,i,109-110)

Hamlet continues to taunt her. His distorted view of women is illustrated in his response to Ophelia. He believes that beauty transforms chastity into bawdry more quickly than chastity can transform itself into beauty. Gertrude is proof of this:

"...for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometimes a paradox, but now the time gives it proof."

(III,i,111-115)

Hamlet then says that he loved Ophelia once but when Ophelia agrees with this statement, Hamlet quickly denies it:

Hamlet	"I did love you once.
Ophelia	Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
Hamlet	You should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.
Ophelia	I was the more deceived."

(III,i,115-120)

Hamlet, at this point, becomes very agitated. He orders Ophelia to a nunnery so that she will not become a breeder of sinners. He speaks of himself as being moderately virtuous, but he also refers to himself as being proud, revengeful, ambitious, and an arrant knave who should not be trusted:

"Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners. I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery."

(III,i,121-130)

In the next breath he asks Ophelia where her father is. This is another indication that Hamlet may be aware that Polonius is eavesdropping, and this he considers foolery:

Hamlet "Where's your father?
 Ophelia At home, my lord.
 Hamlet Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play
 the fool nowhere but in his own house."

(III,i,131-134)

Ophelia, undoubtedly, believes that Hamlet has gone mad for she exclaims,

"O help him, you sweet heavens!"

(III,i,135)

and

"Heavenly powers, restore him!"

(III,i,143)

Hamlet is very much disillusioned by the behavior of his mother so he wishes Ophelia to be the opposite of what his mother is:

"If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery. Go, farewell."

(III,i,136-139)

Hamlet then refers to his mother's marriage to his father. He believes that she has made a cuckold (referring to "monsters" in line 141) of King Hamlet in the sense that she is unfaithful to his memory:

"Or if thou wilt needs marry,
marry a fool, for wise men know well enough
what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go,
and quickly too. Farewell."

(III,i,142-145)

Hamlet continues with a generalization about how deceitful women are for they conceal their real faces beneath a mask of cosmetics:

"I have heard of your paintings, too, well enough.
God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves
another."

(III,i,148-150)

Women pretend to be ignorant so that it may be used as an excuse for using wanton speech:

"You jig and amble, and you lisp;
and nickname God's creatures, and make your
wantonness your ignorance."

(III,i,150-152)

Clearly, Hamlet is referring to Gertrude who had pledged devotion to King Hamlet only to remarry hastily after his death. In Hamlet's mind, her relationship to his father was a pretense, a lie, just as his relationship with Ophelia is. She once received his tokens but now she refuses to see Hamlet and has returned his remembrances. Hamlet, therefore, equates Ophelia's behavior with his mother's behavior. These thoughts

of the deceitfulness of the women in his life bother him tremendously and distort his vision of marriage. He states that all the marriages shall survive except one--the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius:

"Go to, I'll no more on't
--it hath made me mad. I say we will have no
more marriages. Those that are married already, all
but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they
are."

(III,i,152-156)

Hamlet ends his conversation with Ophelia by reiterating the command,

To a nunnery, go."

(III,i,156)

This command could have a dual meaning, for a nunnery can be the standard term for a place where girls who are nuns live, or in another sense, a brothel. Because Hamlet is not sure exactly which place applies to Ophelia, she can choose the applicable meaning herself. In the Play Scene, however, Hamlet treats her like a harlot so he has obviously made up his mind about Ophelia's nature. Edward Hubler supports the idea of the duality of the word 'nunnery', for he states that

*the famous cry--"Get thee to a nunnery"--shows the anguish of his uncertainty. If Ophelia is what she seems, this dirty-minded world of murder, incest, lust, adultery, is no place for her. Were she "as chaste as ice, as pure as snow", she could not escape its calumny. And if she is not what she seems, then a nunnery in its other sense of brothel is relevant to her. In the scene that follows he treats her as if she were indeed an inmate of a brothel.*³

³Edward Hubler, ed., The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1963), p. 240.

When Hamlet leaves, Ophelia speaks alone, in her only soliloquy. She believes that Hamlet's denunciation of women and love are the products of mental illness. In this speech, Ophelia remembers what Hamlet was like before the death of his father and the marriage of his mother:

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

(III,i ,158-162)

It is quite clear that Hamlet was a very poised young man who was admired by many for his physical and mental attributes. Undoubtedly, Ophelia was quite taken with Hamlet but now she feels dejected and upset over what she presently sees in him:

"And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
 That sucked the honey of his music vows,
 Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
 Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,
 That unmatched form and feature of blown youth
 Blasted with ecstasy. Oh, woe is me,
 To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!"

(III,i ,163-169)

It is fitting that Ophelia speak these words, for as Angela Pitt says,

She has known him both in friendship and gallant devotion and so is especially fitted to utter the famous speech beginning: "O what a noble mind is here o'er thrown!"⁴

⁴Angela Pitt, Shakespeare's Women, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981), p. 56.

In the Play Scene, Hamlet treats Ophelia as if she were a harlot. He chooses to sit with Ophelia rather than his mother because she is more attractive:

Queen "Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.
Hamlet No, good Mother, here's metal more attractive."

(III,ii,113-114)

Hamlet takes this opportunity to crack jokes that are bawdy in nature so that he can humiliate Ophelia. She, however, replies to his jests innocently:

Hamlet "Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Ophelia No, my lord.
Hamlet I mean, my head upon your lap?
Ophelia Aye, my lord.
Hamlet Do you think I meant country matters?
Ophelia I think nothing, my lord.
Hamlet That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.
Ophelia What is, my lord?"

(III,ii,119-126)

The rude jokes continue but Ophelia is not completely innocent and naive because she is able to answer back to Hamlet quite successfully:

Ophelia "Will he tell us what this show meant?
Hamlet Aye, or any show that you'll show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means.
Ophelia You are naught, you are naught. I'll mark the play."

(III,ii,153-158)

and,

Ophelia "You are as good as a chorus, my lord.
Hamlet I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

Ophelia 'Tis brief, my lord.
 Hamlet As woman's love."

(III,ii,162-164)

This scene marks the last time that Hamlet and Ophelia ever converse. After this scene, Hamlet kills Polonius and Ophelia becomes mad and drowns. It is at the graveyard that Hamlet confesses his love for her:

"Forty thousand brothers
 Could not with all their quantity of love
 Make up my sum."

(V,i,271-273)

Much of Ophelia's personal tragedy, like Gertrude's, is that she simply does not possess the strength to function on her own. She needs the guidance and direction provided by her father, her brother, and her love, and when she no longer has these persons to rely on, she declines.

By looking at Hamlet's soliloquies and his conversations with Gertrude and Ophelia, one is able to form an accurate description of Hamlet's character. Hamlet was not a madman--he was a philosophical thinker who feigned madness in order to catch the guilty off guard. He had enough insight to realize that Claudius was sending papers to England to have him executed, and he had the intelligence necessary to get himself out of that situation. Hamlet did, however, have moments when he was unstable--this can be attributed to his preoccupation with the nature of woman: her sensuality and her insincerity in love. His greatest flaw was that he procrastinated--he spent all of

his time thinking (much of which is quite irrelevant to the revenge) rather than acting which rendered him useless in fulfilling his pledge to revenge his father's murder.

CHAPTER 4: MACBETH'S SOLILOQUIES & ASIDES

"My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use:
We are yet but young in deed."

(III, iv, 142-144)

The play Macbeth, as previously mentioned, is a contrast to Hamlet. This play proceeds very quickly and this can be attributed to the fact that the main character, Macbeth, is quite opposite to the character of Hamlet. Initially, Macbeth needs the prodding of his wife to entice him into action but after he murders Duncan, he does not procrastinate-- he acts and he acts quickly--hence, the movement of the play is in complete agreement with his character.

By looking at the soliloquies and the asides, one will be able to examine and analyze Macbeth--his vaulting ambition and his course of evil which he willingly takes so that he might prosper. One can watch Macbeth early in the play and see that he is a man of great courage. He is of a moral calibre such that he would not kill Duncan to advance himself, even though subconsciously he might want to do it. As the play progresses, however, one sees a change in Macbeth which can certainly be attributed to the prophecies of the witches, but more importantly, to the enactment of his own unconscious wishes because the prophecies were only suggestions:

Macbeth was completely dazed, almost hypnotized by the words of the witches. Since Macbeth was in a semi-hypnotic condition, the prophecies worked like powerful suggestions, which later on are acted upon because they are in complete harmony with his unconscious wishes.

While it could be true that Macbeth was hypnotized by the witches and their prophecies, he acted in complete understanding of what he was doing. He chose the course of evil, although he did need the prodding of his wife to make the decision. Macbeth could have gone either way; indeed, he had the tendencies and the potentialities to be both "fair and foul" in personality. If he had listened to Banquo, perhaps he would have paid no attention to the prophecies, but instead he listened to Lady Macbeth and the witches. Clearly, Banquo and Lady Macbeth function as characters in opposition. They establish the boundaries of values within which Macbeth must make his decisions. Macbeth's conscience could have kept him on the path of right conduct had it not been for his wife's comments and interference. There is no doubt that she was the catalyst responsible for triggering Macbeth's actions. Her comments, added to his natural ambition, were strong enough to direct him to the path of evil, a path which he willingly takes. Edmund Creeth supports this notion for he states that

Macbeth is unlike the normal morality for the reason that its hero begins his evil doing with complete un-

¹William Herman Toppen, Conscience in Shakespeare's Macbeth, (Amsterdam: J.B. Wolters, 1962), p. 286.

*derstanding of the course he is laying out for himself and with complete willingness to sacrifice his soul in the next world in exchange for the gifts of this world. He is deceived by supernatural agents of evil; but he is not blinded by them morally through the specious argument that vice is not truly vicious or that it is not repulsive, as the hero of the morality is usually blinded.*²

In Macbeth's first aside, one can clearly see that he is having difficulty in deciding whether or not the prophecies of the witches are evil or good. He tries to come to an understanding as to the validity of the content in the witches' tidings by stating that one of the prophecies is true--he is Thane of Cawdor:

"This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor."

(I,iii,130-133)

On the other hand, if this supernatural soliciting is good, Macbeth wonders why he is afraid. The thought of murdering Duncan (the horrid image) makes his heart pound and his hair stand on end:

"If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?"

(I,iii,134-137)

Macbeth states that the dangers that can actually be seen are less than his horrible imaginings. If this soliciting is good,

²Edmund Creeth, Mankynde in Shakespeare, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 41.

then why does the evil thought of murder enter his mind and make his body quiver?

"Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not."

(I,iii,137-142)

There are many pauses or caesuras in this aside which help to draw out the lines. Punctuation such as commas and periods are used to slow down the line. In this way, one can focus on the fact that Macbeth is uncertain and is thinking things over carefully in his mind. Slowing down the tempo of the lines effectively illustrates his uncertainty.

In Macbeth's next aside, the reader is made aware of the fact that Macbeth desires the crown and that he is seriously thinking about murder as a means by which to achieve this end. Macbeth sees that Malcolm is the obstacle or step that he must overcome:

"The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies."

(I,iv,48-50)

Macbeth knows that his thoughts are evil so he must conceal them:

"Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires."

(I,iv,50-51)

The command for the stars to cease emitting light is an example of Macbeth's wish that nature work in accordance with man. The murder which he is thinking about is evil and dark so Macbeth wants nature to work in accordance with this--the skies will be starless and therefore dark and evil. His planned deed is unnatural so he wants the stars to likewise cease their natural activity--he wants nature to mirror his own unnaturalness.

In the last lines of Macbeth's aside, he wants to prevent his eye from seeing what his hand is doing. By blinding himself to his hand's intention, Macbeth will be able to forget the evil deed, once he has committed it, and not feel remorse or guilt:

"The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see."

(I, iv, 52-53)

Macbeth believes that with the above condition, he will be able to commit murder. Clearly,

Macbeth is asking for what the demons are only too willing to give him, temporarily: a moral anesthesia for the murder, so that the eye does not know what the hand or body is doing.

The lines of this aside move at a slow tempo through the use of caesuras. Macbeth is thinking clearly and he is sane--this is illustrated through the tempo of the lines. A quick tempo can indicate a state of excitement, agitation, and even madness; a slow tempo, a clear thinking, calmer state of mind.

This aside then, is an indication of Macbeth's ambition,

³Paul A. Jorgensen, Our Naked Frailties, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 65.

an ambition which is so strong that he will knowingly resort to evil.

Macbeth's first soliloquy reveals his thought about committing the murder of Duncan:

"If it were done when 'tis done, than 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success."

(I,vii,1-4)

Macbeth feels that this act should be performed at once in order that he might be successful in his task; however, he worries about the ramifications of being involved in such a deed:

"But in these cases
We still have judgement here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips."

(I,vii,7-12)

Clearly, Macbeth believes that in committing such a deed, he is only hurting himself because in the final analysis, it will be known that he has killed Duncan and he will have to face the consequences.

Macbeth, for the first and only time, meditates with a theological perspective for he refers to the consequences of evilness in this life and after death. All other times, Macbeth is concerned only with the earthly consequences of this life:

"that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,

But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come."

(I,vii,4-7)

By murdering Duncan, Macbeth would be defying moral principles--the duties of kinship, loyalty, and hostship. The very fact that he is involved in plans for Duncan's murder, makes Macbeth a poor host and a disloyal companion and comrade:

"He's here in double trust.
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed. Then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself."

(I,vii,12-16)

Macbeth worries about murdering the king because as a king and person, Duncan is well liked and stands high in men's esteem; therefore, the public would not look kindly upon Macbeth. He would be the object of public antagonism and this terrifies him:

"Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels trumpet-tongued against
The deep damnation of his taking off.
And pity, like a naked newborn babe,
Striding the blast, or Heaven's cherubin horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind."

(I,vii,16-25)

The hideousness of the deed and the horror that others will feel as a result weigh heavily on Macbeth's conscience--an earthly consequence. As the last four lines of the above

quotation suggest, the consequences might outweigh the benefits.

His conscience finally causes him to confess:

"I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other."

(I,vii,25-28)

The lines of this soliloquy proceed rather slowly because of the many caesuras. This is effective in emphasizing the fact that Macbeth is pondering over his situation very carefully. As a result, the lines move more slowly to illustrate that these thoughts are a heavy burden on his mind.

In this first soliloquy then, Macbeth admits to himself that he has a flaw--vaulting ambition. This ambition is so great that he contemplates murdering Duncan, an act in which Macbeth is fully aware that he is deliberately committing himself to evil. The thing that terrifies Macbeth is the fact that he might get caught and then have to face the consequences. Note that the consequences that he worries about are largely of the earthly nature; in fact, this is the only soliloquy in which Macbeth even mentions a theological consequence--what will be in store for him after death.

In Macbeth's next soliloquy, the murder becomes an obsession with him--he can think of nothing else and his conscience is heavily hit upon. Because of this, he becomes a victim to the delusions of his fevered brain:

"Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
 Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
 To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
 A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
 Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
 I see thee yet, in form as palpable
 As this which now I draw."

(II,i,33-41)

Macbeth is still not completely committed to the task. In his mind he sees the dagger with the handle toward his hand. This indicates that a part of Macbeth is willing to accept the role of murderer; yet he cannot clutch the dagger, which seems to indicate that the other part of him does not want to commit the crime. The image of the dagger is very real to Macbeth. He feels that either his eyes are playing tricks on him, in which case the dagger is imaginary, or that the dagger is real and his eyes, above all his other senses, are telling him what needs to be done:

"Mine eyes are made the fools o'the other senses,
 Or else worth all the rest."

(II,i,44-45)

Macbeth is now becoming more determined in his decision to kill Duncan. In his mind, he now sees blood on the dagger. It is almost as if his imagination is telling him, as Lady Macbeth did, to go through with the deed:

"I see thee still,
 And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
 Which was not so before. There's no such thing.
 It is the bloody business which informs
 Thus to mine eyes."

(II,i,45-49)

As this soliloquy continues, one sees that Macbeth is going to choose the course of evil:

"Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings."

(II,i,49-52)

Macbeth chooses Hecate's offerings--the prophecies, and witchcraft, the evil. Macbeth refers to himself as a wolf-- he must have the qualities of one:

"and withered murder,
Alarumed by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost."

(II,i,52-56)

Macbeth must be quiet, quick, and unseen by others:

"Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it."

(II,i,56-60)

Clearly, the possibility that he might be caught frightens him.

At the end of this soliloquy, Macbeth has definitely decided to murder Duncan. He will no longer hesitate:

"Whiles I threat, he lives.
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.
I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell."

(II,i,60-64)

Shortly after the murder scene, Macbeth starts to change. He no longer has any compunctions about murdering--notice how he is able to kill the two groomsmen without thought. He now begins to fear Banquo so he plans to murder both Banquo and his son Fleance:

"To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
And to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear."

(III,i,48-55)

It is very significant to notice that in the development of his character, Macbeth no longer needs to be urged to murder. He undertakes the second crime--the murdering of the groomsmen, without consulting Lady Macbeth. His plans to murder Banquo and Fleance are also not made in consultation with his wife.

Macbeth's motives for these crimes include suspicion that Banquo knows that he has killed Duncan,

"And, to the dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety."

(III,i,52-54)

and jealousy because of the witches' prophecy that kings shall run in Banquo's family:

"He chid the sisters
When first they put the name of King upon me,
And bade them speak to him. Then prophetlike

They hailed him father to a line of kings.
 Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
 And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
 Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
 No son of mine succeeding."

(III,i,57-64)

Macbeth rationalizes his decision to murder Banquo. Why should he have to do all of the dirty work--the murdering of Duncan, and have no peace of mind because of committing the deed, so that Banquo and his line can rule?

"For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind,
 For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
 Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
 Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common enemy of man
 To make Kings--the seed of Banquo kings!
 Rather than so, come, Fate, into the list,
 And champion me to the utterance!"

(III,i,65-72)

Clearly, Macbeth seeks peace of mind and he believes that this will be attained only when Banquo and his son Fleance are no longer around to torment him.

It can be said that Macbeth no longer feels himself the weaker party. In the first act, he was unable to do the murderous deed but now, he is able to plan and commit more murders without the aid of his wife or of the witches.

By Act IV, Macbeth has become desperate and is nearly insane. He has placed himself in the control of the powers of evil, which have fully engulfed him. His moral deterioration is further revealed in his resolve to transform his whims into immediate action without thought--his scheme to massacre Macduff's wife and children:

"The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
 Seize upon Fife, give to the edge o'the sword
 His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
 That trace him in his line."

(IV,i,150-153)

His plan of murdering innocents clearly illustrates Macbeth's deterioration and his lack of hesitation in performing this heinous act.

In Act V, one is given a good indication of Macbeth's state of mind. At first he seems very confident:

"Bring me no more reports, let them fly all
 Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane
 I cannot taint with fear...
 ...
 The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
 Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear."

(V,iii,1-10)

Some twelve lines later, Macbeth loses heart:

"I have lived long enough. My way of life
 Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf,
 And that which should accompany old age,
 As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
 I must not look to have, but in their stead
 Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
 Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."

(V,iii,22-28)

Macbeth realizes that because of the choices that he has made, he will not be well liked in his old age, but will be cursed. He has lost love and honour and so is ready to die. Notice how he speaks only of the earthly consequences of his life; these are what he deems important.

A mere four lines later, Macbeth's mood changes. He ap-

pears to have determination:

"I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked."

(V,iii,32)

This is followed by a change of subject--he talks about Lady Macbeth:

"Cure her of that,
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow."

(V,iii,39-41)

Macbeth's fluctuation in mental state shows clearly his mental distraction, a distraction caused by a conflict between what he feels in his heart (anguish and defeat) and what he believes will come true (the prophecies of the apparitions).

The remaining scenes of the play have no more soliloquies or asides. These scenes involve the final battle, culminating in the death of Macbeth.

By looking at the play Macbeth, one can see that Macbeth had all of the qualities inherent in being great--he was a courageous, strong soldier and leader. Lady Macbeth realized this but she saw that his character flaw was that he was "too full o'the milk of human kindness" (I,v,16). It was this weakness that would prevent Macbeth from fulfilling the prophecies; therefore, Lady Macbeth knew that she would have to question his manhood as a means by which to prepare Macbeth for murder. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Macbeth was a moral coward. He feared Banquo because he

recognized in him a moral courage which Macbeth lacked. He hated and feared Macduff too because he refused to associate with Macbeth after the murder of Duncan and this caused Macbeth to become very suspicious of him.

He was also ambitious. There is no doubt that Macbeth had thoughts of being king someday and he murdered in order to satisfy his hunger for power. One reason why he hesitated before killing Duncan was because of his own fear of being caught.

His character deteriorated once Lady Macbeth launched him on his career of crime and then she lost control of him. After he murdered Duncan, he no longer needed to be urged to kill. He became cruel and treacherous, and his determination was so great that he stopped at nothing to relieve his troubled mind and to secure his hold on the crown. Once he had murdered Duncan, he felt very insecure and threatened. These feelings, in effect, were responsible for Macbeth's chain of crimes and the display of heroic desperation which one sees in the last act of the play.

As one follows the character of Macbeth throughout the play, it is apparent that his character undergoes change. In the beginning he was weak and under the domination of his wife. As the play progresses, however, Macbeth becomes stronger and stronger and without his wife's help. Lady Macbeth loses her complete control of him. Indeed, Macbeth's character becomes the exact opposite of what it was in the beginning of the play.

CHAPTER 5: MACBETH CONFRONTS LADY MACBETH

"Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters."

(I,v,63-64)

More of Macbeth's character can be revealed by looking at the scenes in which there is dialogue between Lady Macbeth and himself or when Lady Macbeth talks about him. By the same token, much of Lady Macbeth's character is revealed in the same way. Because of the very nature of her character--she is of major importance in the play--a discussion of her character will be provided in this chapter.

Upon being introduced to Lady Macbeth, one is given the impression that she has a strong will and character. She believes her husband to be a great man, but that he lacks initiative:

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promised. Yet I do fear thy nature,
It is too full o'the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it."

(I,v,16-21)

The first two lines of the above quotation show beyond a doubt that Lady Macbeth has determination. The prophecy to her is wholly believable and she accepts it as actual fact without reservation or question. She realizes that in order

for the prophecy to come true, she must counteract her husband's weakness. She feels that Macbeth is afraid to make his move:

"thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it,
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.'"

(I,v,23-26)

If Macbeth does not murder Duncan, he will never become king and therefore, he will never attain the greatness that he deserves. Because of Macbeth's hesitation, Lady Macbeth decides to take matters into her own hands. She demonstrates her dominance over him by planning the murder of Duncan herself:

"Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal."

(I,v, 26-31)

One can see Lady Macbeth to be a very dominating woman, but another aspect of her character is revealed in her next soliloquy. She shows her hardness and her deep desire to fulfill her plan:

"Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, topfull
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it!"

(I,v,41-47)

She believes in herself--Macbeth will be great with her help:

"The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements."

(I,v, 39-41)

Her aggressiveness and her faithfulness to the deed at hand are reflected in her plan to commit the murder herself:

"Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of Hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry 'Hold, hold!'"

(I,v, 51-55)

The first time that Macbeth and his wife are together, one notices how highly Lady Macbeth regards her husband:

"Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!"

(I,v,56-57)

The affection is returned to Lady Macbeth for Macbeth says,

"My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight."

(I,v,59)

Notice, however, that Lady Macbeth does not use affectionate language as Macbeth does; she is more respectful of him.

Macbeth tells her that Duncan will be staying the night and will be leaving them the following day. Lady Macbeth, however, is able to see through her husband's false face. Her lines indicate that Macbeth is ambitious and that he really wants the crown:

"Oh, never
 Shall sun that morrow see!
 Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men
 May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
 Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue. Look like the innocent
 flower
 But be the serpent under 't."

(I,v,62-66)

Lady Macbeth shows herself to be an exacting hostess and a domineering woman who takes charge:

"He that's coming
 Must be provided for. And you shall put
 This night's great business into my dispatch,
 Which shall to all our nights and days to come
 Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.
 ...
 Only look up clear.
 To alter favor ever is to fear.
 Leave all the rest to me."

(I,v,66-74)

When Duncan arrives, she clearly shows herself to be a gracious hostess--charming, dignified, and warm, but at the same time she is also a hypocrite because she plans to murder her guest:

"All our service
 In every point twice done, and then done double,
 Were poor and single business to contend
 Against those honors deep and broad wherewith
 Your Majesty loads our house. For those of old,
 And the late dignities heaped up to them,
 We rest your hermits."

(I,vi,14-20)

In their next scene together, one is made aware of the fact that Macbeth is very conscious of public opinion. He does not want to run the risk of being held responsible for the murder of Duncan because he will lose public favour:

"We will proceed no further in this business.
 He hath honored me of late, and I have bought
 Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
 Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
 Not cast aside so soon."

(I,vii,31-35)

Lady Macbeth replies by questioning her husband's manhood.
 She is clever in handling Macbeth by taunting him:

"Was the hope drunk
 Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
 And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
 At what it did so freely?"

(I,vii,35-38)

She doubts his love:

"From this time
 Such I account thy love."

(I,vii,38-39)

The final blow occurs when she suggests that he may be a coward:

"Art thou afeard
 To be the same in thine own act and valor
 As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
 Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life
 And live a coward in thine own esteem,
 Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
 Like the poor cat i' the adage?"

I,vii,39-45)

Macbeth then defends himself by stating that he is a leader among men. No man can do more than he and still be considered human:

"I dare do all that may become a man.
 Who dares do more is none."

(I,vii,46-47)

This comment is very interesting because Macbeth can only be considered a brave man when he is a soldier. He certainly does not resemble a brave man in any other instance. He kills Duncan in his sleep and he hires murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance, as well as the family of Macduff. Ordering innocent children to be murdered can hardly be considered an act becoming a man.

A clear contrast of the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is illustrated in this scene. Lady Macbeth stands firm in her conviction to murder Duncan while Macbeth is very unsure and is hesitant to commit this deed. She is very much upset because Macbeth has broken his promise to her:

"What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man,
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man."

(I,vii,48-52)

Lady Macbeth is so committed to their promise that she would have killed her baby rather than break this promise:

"I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this."

(I,vii,54-59)

Lady Macbeth tells her husband that when he promised to do the deed, he was a man and by doing the deed, he will even be more of a man. Refusal to murder Duncan would prove to her that Macbeth was less of a man and this she knows will entice him

By the end of this scene, Macbeth seems to be settled and prepared to do the deed. They must put on a show for Duncan even though they are committed to kill him:

"I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show.
False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

(I,vii,79-82)

In the murder scene, Lady Macbeth displays her commitment to the attainment of her goal by carrying out her plan of action faithfully:

"The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms
Do mock their charge with snores. I have drugged
 their possets,
That death and nature do contend about them,
Whether they live or die."

(II,ii,5-8)

It is quite apparent that Lady Macbeth can be counted on to fulfill her task. In direct contrast to her is her husband. She has little confidence in Macbeth because she realizes that there is a very real possibility that he will not fulfill his task:

"Alack, I am afraid they have awaked
And 'tis not done. The attempt and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready,
He could not miss 'em."

(II,ii,10-13)

One can see how frantic Macbeth has become in this scene. He speaks in very short, quick sentences which illustrate his agitated state of mind:

"I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?"

...
 When?
 ...
 As I descended?
 ...
 Hark!
 Who lies i'the second chamber?
 ...
 This is a sorry sight."

(II,ii,15-20)

It is easy to see that Macbeth is extremely guilt-ridden. He believes that everyone knows that he has murdered Duncan:

"There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried
 'Murder!'
 That they did wake each other. I stood and heard
 them.
 But they did say their prayers, and addressed them
 Again to sleep.

...
 One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other,
 As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
 Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen'
 When they did say 'God bless us!'
 Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!
 Macbeth does murder sleep'--the innocent sleep,
 Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,
 The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
 Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
 Chief nourisher in life's feast."

(II,ii,23-40)

Clearly, Macbeth is in a frenzied state of mind. It is Lady Macbeth who displays her strength in trying to calm down Macbeth:

"Consider it not so deeply.
 ...
 These deeds must not be thought
 After these ways. So; it will make us mad."

(II,ii,30-34)

Macbeth will never be able to sleep again because of the evil he has committed:

"Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more!"

(II,ii,42-43)

Notice that the thought of not being able to sleep again plagues him. He refers to himself using his three titles, all of which will be doomed to sleeplessness.

Lady Macbeth tries to comfort her husband. He must not think about what has happened; she is still in control:

"You do unbend your noble strength to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood."

(II,ii,45-50)

The mere fact that Macbeth cannot say "Amen" shows that he is now governed by evil and the witches, and not by goodness and God. The act that he has just committed has really terrified him, so much so that he refuses to go back to the scene of the murder with the bloody daggers:

"I'll go no more.
I am afraid to think what I have done,
Look on't again I dare not."

(II,ii,50-52)

Lady Macbeth realizes that she must take charge because her husband is in a terrible state. She will not be afraid because the dead and the sleeping are pictures and only children

are afraid of pictures:

"Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt."

(II,ii,52-57)

Macbeth is so full of guilt that his imagination becomes wild--every noise appalls him and his hand cannot be washed free of Duncan's blood:

"Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me when every noise appals me?
What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine
eyes!
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red."

(II,ii,58-63)

Clearly, the blood of Duncan weighs very heavily on Macbeth's mind. He exaggerates by saying that trying to wash away the blood on his hand would turn the seas red with blood rather than cleanse his hand.

When Lady Macbeth returns, it is evident that she too is afraid. She cannot comprehend the seriousness of the crime and how it will affect them because she feels that by washing her hands, she will be freed of a guilty conscience:

"My hands are of your color, but I shame
To wear a heart so white.
...
A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy is it then!"

(II,ii,64-68)

Also note that her rationalization about the dead being pictures does not prevent the deed from frightening her, which shows her to be vulnerable to a degree. Even though she is in a frightened state, she still maintains enough composure to think things through and to take charge:

"I hear a knocking
At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber.

...
Hark! More knocking.
Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us
And show us to be watchers. Be not lost
So poorly in your thoughts."

(II,ii,65-72)

Clearly, Lady Macbeth remains level-headed enough to cover up their guilt. Macbeth, however, is approaching a mood of near hysteria and his character is beginning to break down. He regrets having committed the deed:

"To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou
couldst!"

(II,ii,73-74)

In Act III, Macbeth and his wife converse again. She is worried about him because he keeps closely to himself. She tells him that he must not dwell on the past because it cannot be changed:

"Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have
died
With them they think on? Things without all
remedy
Should be without regard. What's done is done."

(III,ii,8-12)

Lady Macbeth realizes that the troubled Macbeth is having problems because he has committed three murders and the thoughts of these actions weigh heavily on his mind. Lady Macbeth's philosophy is that what has been done cannot be undone--one cannot change the events that have transpired in the past; therefore, Macbeth should not think about such things.

Another thought that bothers Macbeth is the fact that Banquo and Fleance live. Banquo is a constant reminder of their common crime. This thought is said to be one that Lady Macbeth is in agreement with. In her brief soliloquy, she says:

"Nought's had, all spent,
Where our desire is got without content.
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy."

(III,ii,4-7)

Immediately before this soliloquy, Lady Macbeth was inquiring about Banquo:

"Is Banquo gone from Court?"

(III,ii,1)

William Toppen supports the idea that Lady Macbeth is bothered by the fact that Banquo lives, for he states that

The fact that her reference to Banquo links up immediately with her brief soliloquy seems to suggest that, to her as well as to her husband, the existence of the noble Banquo is an unbearable reminder of their common crime.¹

Macbeth, therefore, believes that he is not yet safe. He

¹Toppen, p. 225.

has no peace of mind and cannot sleep at night:

"We have scotched the snake, not killed it.
 She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice
 Remains in danger of her former tooth.
 But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds
 suffer,
 Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep
 In the affliction of these terrible dreams
 That shake us nightly."

(III,ii,13-19)

Macbeth does not like the position which he is in presently. He does not want to live in fear; truly, it would be better if he was among the dead. Duncan is now free, no longer to be tormented by any being. Nothing can touch him:

"Better be with the dead,
 Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
 Than on the torture of the mind to lie
 In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave,
 After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
 Treason has done his worst. Nor steel, nor poison,
 Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
 Can touch him further."

(III,ii,19-26)

Lady Macbeth sees that her husband is tortured with the memory of killing Duncan. His unrest is very noticeable so he must disguise his real feelings and appear to be happy and content in the company of his guests at the banquet:

"Come on,
 Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks,
 Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight."

(III,ii,27-29)

Macbeth fears Banquo but for now they both must be flattering and pretending to regard Banquo highly:

"Let your remembrance apply to Banquo,
 Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue,
 Unsafe the while, that we
 Must lave our honors in these flattering streams
 And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
 Disguising what they are.

...
 Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
 Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives."

(III,ii,30-37)

Macbeth will not rest more easily until he has disposed of Banquo. He decides that he will act again; he looks to darkness and evil for the strength to do it:

"There's comfort yet, they are assailable.
 Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
 His cloistered flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
 The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
 Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
 A deed of dreadful note."

III,ii,39-44)

Macbeth will rest more easily when Banquo is dead because Banquo probably suspects that he is guilty of murdering Duncan. Also, because the prophecy promised the kingdom to Banquo's descendants, Macbeth thinks it possible that Banquo might be waiting to murder him in order to make way for the future blessings of his own lineage. In Act I, Macbeth says,

"that we but teach
 Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
 To plague the inventor."

(I,vii,8-10)

The bloody instructions that Macbeth followed in killing Duncan will now plague the inventor. Banquo will do to Macbeth

what Macbeth did to Duncan. Without hesitation or remorse, Macbeth procures Banquo's murder. Note that he will not do the bloody deed himself this time. By not doing this murder, he will not be haunted as he is with Duncan's murder--or so he thinks, and he has an alibi which will imply his innocence.

Macbeth does not tell his wife what he is about to do. This clearly shows that his character is changing. He is no longer dependent on Lady Macbeth but takes matters into his own hands without consulting her. He no longer needs to be prodded into action by her:

"Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed."

(III,ii,44-45)

Lady Macbeth no longer has a hold on Macbeth. She now speaks only a few lines, and what she does say is in the form of practical advice. When Macbeth mentions Banquo being the source of worry, Lady Macbeth says,

"You must leave this."

(III,ii,35)

Angela Pitt supports the contention that Lady Macbeth loses control of her husband and as a result becomes less active in the play:

Her function is to give Macbeth the vital initial push and then sustain him until he can hold his own against his conscience. Once this has been achieved,² she ceases to take an active part in the play.

²Angela Pitt, Shakespeare's Women, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981), p.66.

Macbeth is becoming more and more engrossed with the powers of evil. He calls on the powers of darkness and evil to terminate Banquo and Fleance so that they will not be ancestors to a line of kings. This thought troubles Macbeth greatly:

"Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale!"

(III,ii,46-50)

As night approaches, evil is let loose; then it will be possible to commit the evil deed--the murders of Banquo and Fleance. Lady Macbeth seems to be totally confused by what her husband is saying:

"Thou marvel'st at my words. But hold thee still,
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
So prithee go with me."

(III,ii,54-56)

In the Banquet Scene, hospitality, "welcome", and "degree" are emphasized--the things that Macbeth has brutally broken:

Macbeth	"You know your own degrees, sit down. At first And last the hearty welcome. ... Ourself will mingle with society And play the humble host. Our hostess keeps her state, but in best time We will require her welcome.
L. Macbeth	Pronounce it for me, sir, to all our friends, For my heart speaks they are welcome.
Macbeth	See, they encounter thee with their hearts' thanks. Both sides are even. Here I'll sit i'the midst. Be large in mirth, anon we'll drink a measure

The table round."

(III,iv,1-12)

As one can see, hospitality is plenteous here. When Macbeth withdraws to talk to the murderer, Lady Macbeth stresses the graces of good hostship by verbalizing her thoughts of welcome:

"My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold
That is not often vouched, while 'tis a-making,
'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home,
From thence the sauce to meat is ceremony,
Meeting were bare without it."

(III,iv,32-36)

to which Macbeth answers,

"Sweet remembrancer!
Now good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both!"

(III,iv,37-39)

Social friendliness and order is shaken rapidly with the appearance of Banquo's ghost. It corresponds to the hideous, murderous deed that Macbeth is responsible for. In his guilt he says,

"Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake
Thy gory locks at me."

(III,iv,50-51)

Macbeth is very agitated and upset. He did not commit the murder himself so why should he be as plagued by conscience as he is concerning Duncan? Lady Macbeth tries to comfort him and calm him down. It is her presence of mind and her quick

thinking that help her in explaining her husband's peculiar behavior to the guests:

"Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you keep seat,
The fit is momentary, upon a thought
He will again be well. If much you note him,
You shall offend him and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not."

(III,iv,53-58)

She tells him that his imagination is running wild, just as it had done at the time of Duncan's death when he saw the daggers before him:

"Oh, proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear.
This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
Led you to Duncan."

(III,iv,60-63)

She insults Macbeth by saying that this kind of behavior would become a woman but it is shameful to see such behavior in a man of his character:

"Oh, these flaws and starts,
Impostors to true fear, would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire;
Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool."

(III,iv,63-68)

Macbeth disregards his wife. He wants to convince her that he is not imagining the image that he sees before him:

"Prithee see there! Behold! Look! Lo! How
say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too."

(III,iv,69-70)

Lady Macbeth retorts,

"What, quite unmanned in folly?"

(III,iv,74)

Paul A. Jorgensen states that blood unmans Macbeth:

The feature of guilt which, especially unmans Macbeth is the blood. Banquo's lock are "gory" (III,iv,50), "twenty thousand murders" are on his crown (III,iv,80), and his "blood is cold" (III,iv,13). Macbeth, who knew it only in theory before, knows now in practice that it will not be done, when 'tis done and that bloody instructions will return.

Macbeth, guilt ridden, admits that he has killed Duncan and has committed other murders as well. He will not have any peace because his victims have come back to haunt him:

"Blood hath been shed ere now, i'the olden time,
Ere humane statute purged the gentle weal--
Aye, and since too, murders have been performed
Too terrible for the ear. The time has been
That when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end. But now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
And push us from our stools. This is more strange
Than such a murder is."

(III,iv,75-83)

Lady Macbeth interjects at this point in order to steer Macbeth's troubled mind away from the terrible imaginings which are a product of his own guilty conscience:

"My worthy lord,
Your noble friends do lack you."

(III,iv,84-85)

In this instance, she is successful in redirecting Macbeth's

³ Jorgensen, p.89.

train of thought. He tells his friends that his poor behavior is the result of an illness which those who are his friends ignore, and he resumes his role as host:

"Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends.
I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to
 all,
Then I'll sit down, Give me some wine, fill full.
I drink to the general joy o'the whole table,
And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss.
Would he were here! To all and him we thirst,
And all to all."

(III,iv,85-92)

Again, Macbeth loses control with the re-entry of the ghost of Banquo. Lady Macbeth comes to the rescue by making excuses for her husband's erratic behavior:

"Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom. 'Tis no other,
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time."

(III,iv,97-99)

Macbeth is completely oblivious to his surroundings and speaks only to the apparition. He compliments himself on being a brave man with firm nerves able to face anything that opposes him; however, he trembles at the sight of only one thing--the horrible shadow:

"What man dare, I dare.
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger.
Take any shape but that and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,
And dare me to the desert with thy sword.
If trembling I inhabit then, protest me
The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow!
Unreal mockery, hence!"

(III,iv,99-107)

His now hopeless recognition of expanding blood takes the form temporarily of the futility of trying to conceal murder, because blood engenders blood, and all of Nature reports the deed and enlarges its horror.

"It will have blood. They say blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak.
Augurs and understood relations have
By maggot pies and choughs and rooks brought
forth
The secret'st man of blood."

((III,iv,122-126)

One thing that bothers Macbeth is the fact that Macduff had refused to come to the coronation and banquet. This causes him to become very suspicious of Macduff--perhaps Macduff knows of his treachery. At any rate, Macbeth decides to return to the Weird Sisters so that he may find out what the future holds for him:

"How sayst thou that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?
...
I will tomorrow,
And betimes I will, to the weird sisters.
More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know,
By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good
All causes shall give way. I am in blood
Stepped in so far that should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

(III,iv,128-138)

Macbeth has gone too far. He cannot stop the bloodshed. Already, he is thinking about killing the Macduff family:

"Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned."

(III,iv,139-140)

⁴Jorgensen, p.89.

and,

"We are yet but young in deed."

(III,iv,143)

Macbeth and his wife do not converse ever again. Their conversation together illustrates effectively Macbeth's character and Lady Macbeth's character. One is able to see the changes that take place by looking at their dialogues together. When they first converse, Lady Macbeth is a strong woman who is an equal partner to her husband. This is illustrated by the fact Lady Macbeth speaks equally long or longer than Macbeth in their conversations together. In their dialogue scenes that follow, however, she speaks less and less. She no longer can be regarded as an equal partner because Macbeth now dominates in their conversations, and acts on his own accord.

Many critics, such as Anna Jameson, believe that Lady Macbeth was a cruel, calculating woman while others, such as William Toppen, believe that she was not really as strong as she appeared to be.⁵ I believe that Lady Macbeth was not a strong, cruel woman. Perhaps one of the best proofs is to be found in this soliloquy. She asks the spirits to

"fill me from crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it!"

(I,v,43-48)

⁵Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women, (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1967), p. 371; William Toppen, p. 250.

Clearly, Lady Macbeth does not have the strength to do this act alone. She asks that the spirits remove her womanhood--all that is gentle and kind--and fill her with cruelty. In this way, nothing will shake her purpose and she will be successful. Lady Macbeth's invocation to the spirits of evil and to darkness show her unwomanly determination, yet if she were not womanly and kind, she would not need the spirits to fill her with cruelty. Lady Macbeth realizes that she must become man-like in order to direct Macbeth. Clearly, there is a paradox of sexual confusion inherent in this play, as well as a lack of insight and understanding on the part of Lady Macbeth, for she does not consider the effects her dominance over Macbeth might have upon his personality. As Coppelia Kahn states,

...virile warrior-heroes, supreme in valor, are at the same time unfinished men--boys, in a sense, who fight or murder because they have been convinced by women that only through violence will they achieve manhood....These women, seeking to transform themselves into men through the power they have to mold men, root out of themselves and out of their men those human qualities--tenderness, pity, sympathy, vulnerability to feeling....In the intensity of their striving to deny their own womanliness... they create monsters: men-like beasts or things insatiable in their need to dominate, anxiously seeking security in their power and their identity.

Another weakness in Lady Macbeth's character can be seen when she must fortify her courage with drink. This can lead one to believe that innately she is a much gentler wo-

⁶ Coppelia Kahn, Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 151.

man than she appears to be:

"That which hath made them drunk hath made
me bold,
What hath quenched them hath given me fire."

(II,ii,1-2)

A womanly, weaker quality shines through in Lady Macbeth when she cannot do the killing herself because Duncan resembles her father:

"Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't."

(II,ii,12-13)

This excuse shows that she is not strong enough to actually commit the murder herself.

In Act V, Lady Macbeth reveals herself as she really must have been, behind the assumed mask of cruelty and hardness. Her character is totally opposite to the character presented in the beginning of the play. The once strong, capable woman now sleepwalks and has lost her mind because she cannot face up to the horrors that she has become a part of:

"Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two
--why, then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky.
Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need
we fear who knows it, when none can call our power
to account? Yet who would have thought the old
man to have had so much blood in him?

...

The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is
she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean?

...

Here's the smell of the smell of the blood still. All
the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little
hand. Oh,oh,oh!

...

Wash your hands, put on your nightgown,
 look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's
 buried, he cannot come out on's grave.

...
 To bed, to bed, there's knocking at the gate.
 Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's
 done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed."

(V,i,38-75)

It is evident that Lady Macbeth is suffering from a conscience ridden with guilt. She tries desperately to rid her hands from the blood of Duncan. The other murders bother her too. She mentions the murder of Macduff's family, the slaughter of innocents, and Banquo's murder. All of these thoughts plague her conscience and cause her to become insane.

One important point is worth noting. Lady Macbeth never sought help from her husband, but she was always there for Macbeth in his suffering. She concealed her own mental anguish and devoted herself to strengthening him and protecting him as illustrated in the Banquet Scene, for example. She helped Macbeth but she never asked for his help in coming to terms with the deed that they had committed. She never betrayed her husband, not even in the end.

Lady Macbeth's efforts to assist her husband and to subordinate her own natural instincts proved too great a strain for her and brought about her breakdown and ultimately, her death. One can see the changes that her character undergoes. She appears to be a strong woman in the beginning, only to become a very weak one in the end. Larry S. Champion describes Lady Macbeth in a way which supports the notion that she is a

changing character. He states that

She delivers four soliloquies for a total of 65 lines, 21 lines in her sleepwalking scene (a passage which clearly has the impact of soliloquy since she is oblivious to the presence of the doctor and the gentlewoman) and 123 lines either in private conversation with Macbeth or in asides to him. In the course of these lines she evolves from steely ambition, to concerned affection for her husband, and ultimately to despair and madness.

At all times in the play, she is the exact opposite of her husband's character--when she is strong, her husband is weak, and as she deteriorates, Macbeth becomes stronger until finally Macbeth is strong and she is weak.

Even though the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are opposite throughout the play, they do have one similarity--they are both driven by ambition, as Sylvan Barnet points out:

These two characters are fired by one and the same passion of ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike....We observe in them no love of country, and no interest in the welfare of anyone outside their family. Their habitual thoughts and aims are, and, we imagine,⁸ long have been, all of station and power.

Ambition was responsible for their downfalls. All that they did was in vain, for in the end, they achieved nothing:

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

⁷Larry S. Champion, Shakespeare's Tragic Perspective, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 182.

⁸Sylvan Barnet, ed., The Tragedy of Macbeth, (Toronto: The New American Library of Canada Ltd., 1963), p. 166.

And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

(V,v,24-28)

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Hamlet and Macbeth: To be or not to be a Procrastinator

Hamlet and Macbeth are two tragic Shakespearean characters who can be regarded as opposite personalities in many ways. Throughout this dissertation, one was able to formulate conclusions about these two men by analyzing their soliloquies, or thought projections, and by observing them as they interact with their female counterparts. Truly, much of their personalities is revealed through these methods so that one is able to decide that Hamlet and Macbeth are very different in natures.

Hamlet is certainly not as interested in obtaining the crown as Macbeth is. Clearly, Hamlet lacks the ambition that spurs on Macbeth. While ambitious thoughts of being a powerful king and leader plague Macbeth, Hamlet is plagued with thoughts of his mother's incestuous relationship with Claudius, and to a much lesser degree, with Claudius' involvement in the murder of his father.

Hamlet is very cautious about his confrontation with the ghost. He is uncertain as to the verity of its revelation and because of this, he tests the revelation in the Play Scene as a means by which to trap the King and thus prove whether the ghost was a demon, disguised in order to damn Hamlet or if in fact, it was telling the truth. Hamlet wants to be absolutely

sure that Claudius is guilty before acting--even though this is only an excuse to delay action.

Macbeth, on the other hand, welcomes the prophecies of the witches and expresses only the slightest bit of doubt at first. After his first meeting with them, he does not hesitate to take the prophecies as truths which will come to pass. It is Macbeth who actually makes the prophecies come true, and the fact that they do come true increases his faith in the witches. Later, Macbeth actually seeks out the witches on his own accord so that he will know what the future holds for him, which is something that Hamlet never does--after his meeting with the ghost, he never searches or wishes to speak to it again.

Macbeth is very conscious of the way he is regarded by others. He wants to be acceptable to the masses and be admired by them. For Hamlet, this is not a major concern. He actually behaves in a way that would not be looked upon favourably by the masses. Hamlet puts on a facade so that others will believe that he has gone mad. Clearly, a man who is concerned with his public image would not elect to do this.

Macbeth becomes a madman. This is clearly illustrated by his actions after his first murder--the murder of Duncan. After this point, Macbeth willingly kills the groomsmen and Banquo. His brutal and senseless massacre of Macduff's family proves without doubt that he is insane.

Hamlet, on the other hand, feigns madness. While it is true that he does have moments when he is out of control and

is emotionally unbalanced (the latter part of the Nunnery Scene and the Closet Scene), all the other times, Hamlet is only pretending to be mad. His antic disposition is used as a protective measure: firstly, a harmless madman undoubtedly would have a much better chance of entrapping Claudius, unprotected. Secondly, if Hamlet is thought to be a madman, then it is quite possible that the guilty Claudius would let his guard down and hence would reveal himself to be guilty, and thirdly, Claudius, because of his guilty conscience might confess because of the tortuous words spoken by the insane Hamlet which would be meaningless to Hamlet but very meaningful to Claudius.

Macbeth views the woman in his life highly. He compliments her for being strong and able-minded. Hamlet, however, has a negative attitude about women. He is obsessed with the belief that they are weak, sensual, and disloyal. He has an almost perverted view of a woman's sexuality because of his mother's behavior. This view is never illustrated in Macbeth; in fact, he does not express any views on sexuality.

Hamlet is not suspicious in nature which, in the final analysis, costs him his life. He never thinks to examine the foils before his match with Laertes. Macbeth trusts no one. This is one factor that is responsible for his chain of murders. He has Banquo murdered because of his suspicion that Banquo knows of his guilt, or that he will try to murder Macbeth because of the witches' prophecy that kings will be in his lineage.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Hamlet and Macbeth is that Hamlet is a procrastinator and Macbeth acts impulsively and characteristically without thought. It takes Hamlet the length of the play before he finally kills Claudius. Macbeth kills Duncan early in the play and continues killing until the end. Clearly, Hamlet is more intellectual and philosophical than Macbeth, and this being the case, he thinks things over too carefully to the point that he spends more time thinking than acting. He is reflective and talks about the nature of human character, of destiny, philosophy, and life after death. His continual concern with these abstract topics proves that Hamlet is an intellectual.

Macbeth is the exact opposite for he spends more time acting than thinking, especially after the murder of Duncan. He acts on impulse and does not think philosophically. He certainly is not the scholarly type as Hamlet is, but he is the true soldier.

The character of Macbeth can be considered on one plane--action. He spends most of his time acting on impulse and this is clearly illustrated throughout the play--after an initial hesitation, he murders Duncan, then without any hesitation, the two groomsmen, Banquo, and the Macduff family. As his downfall approaches, he is once again the soldier who marks the beginning of the play. Macbeth returns to his element--the battleground, and this battleground is a place of action.

Hamlet's character has two aspects--thought and action,

and these two aspects are ingeniously depicted through two minor characters, Horatio and Fortinbras. Horatio reflects the thinking Hamlet--he is Hamlet's comrade and fellow student from Wittenberg. Fortinbras reflects the acting Hamlet. He is like Hamlet, the revenging son. In the opening speech one is told of the battle between their fathers and how Hamlet's father had won, which resulted in the forfeiture of Fortinbras' lands. Young Fortinbras is trying to recover those lost lands. His actions are looked upon as admirable by Hamlet and may be responsible for bringing Hamlet out of his "over-thinking" state.

From the above discussion, one is able to conclude that the characters of Hamlet and Macbeth are very dissimilar. Is there nothing about them that is similar? Indeed, if one extends the scope to incorporate the plays of Hamlet and Macbeth rather than just the characters of these plays, then a similarity can be found--Hamlet has the same structure as Macbeth. In Macbeth, the crime is committed in the first wave of action. Macbeth murders Duncan, and later, Banquo and the Macduff family. The second wave of action is the retribution for the crime which comes later in the play with the battle scenes.

In Hamlet, the first wave is words. There are the verbal actions of Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern who set out to find out what ails Hamlet, the play-within-a-play scene, the King's prayer scene, and the Closet Scene, where Hamlet confronts Gertrude. The ghost's second appearance marks the

beginning of the second wave of action in which the King's ally and Hamlet's foil is Laertes, the man of action. There is also the drowning of Ophelia, the wrestling of Hamlet and Laertes in her grave, the fencing match, and finally, the deaths of Laertes, Gertrude, Claudius, and Hamlet.¹

From this dissertation, it can be concluded that in analyzing the characters of Hamlet and Macbeth, one is dealing with two distinctly different character types--Hamlet, the contemplating procrastinator whose conscience has a tendency to make him seem cowardly through inaction, and Macbeth, the impulsive instigator whose misguided conscience causes him to take part in much action and without thought. Hamlet himself says that a conscience could render one a coward so this statement seems very appropriate when applied to Hamlet and Macbeth--Hamlet uses his mind and conscience to such a degree that he is inactive and perhaps cowardly. Macbeth, on the other hand, because of his conscience and his fear that someone will do to him what he had done to others, becomes very active. His fear and suspicion of others, then, made him cowardly (as in the murder of Macduff's helpless family):

"Thus conscience doth make cowards
of us all."

(Hamlet, III,i,83)

¹Norman B. Holland, The Shakespearean Imagination, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 160.

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