MURDER MOST FOUL

HAMLET THROUGH THE AGES

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For Stephen Greenblatt and Ranie Targoff
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necessity in human life in act 5, scene 2 ("There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will," etc.). Melville's Pierre (1852) draws a series of parallels between its central figure and Hamlet, especially in the close relation of son and mother and the son's struggle to be a writer. In George Eliot's Felix Holt, the Radical (1866), the eponymous hero borrows the language of Hamlet's inquisition of Ophelia (3.1.122ff.) in his tirade against Esther. In The Mill on the Floss (1860), Eliot draws comparisons between Maggie Tulliver and Hamlet. Karl Marx, in Das Kapital (1867), deliberately misquotes Hamlet's "Well said, old mole!" (1.5.171) with a modern substitution, "Well grubbed, old mole!" to express Marx's expectant cry of justification at the imminent and inevitable collapse of the capitalist system.

In summary, the appreciation of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century in the theatre, in the library, and in publishing houses signaled an ever-increasing celebration of Great Britain's greatest poet-dramatist as the fountainhead of culture at home and around the world. Throughout the Romantic and Victorian eras, Hamlet stood at the very heart of this cultural enterprise. Its hero was seen as the quintessential Romantic protagonist, sensitive, melancholic, ill-suited to act in a bad world but inspirational as a thinker. Ophelia and Horatio were similarly lauded as innocent and morally upright. Shakespeare's texts were often pruned to emphasize these qualities. Theatre productions grew in cost, size, and splendor. Not coincidentally, this awesome rise to prominence of Shakespeare as national poet-dramatist came at a time of the Industrial Revolution, of growing prosperity for the middle class, of flourishing parliamentary democracy, and of commercial and political success around the globe for British colonialism. Many British people saw their own Victorian age as the natural and appropriate fulfillment of progressive cultural, political, and economic development set in motion in the Renaissance and enhanced by Enlightenment thinking in the eighteenth century. Even the many spoofs of Hamlet attest to the limitless fondness of the English-speaking world for Shakespeare as an observer and champion of English culture. Shakespeare, with Hamlet as his quintessential play, epitomized the amazing rise to prominence of Great Britain as a nation. Shakespeare's freedom of spirit, his seemingly limitless imagination, and his keen insights into the human condition were seen as splendidly representative of what had made Great Britain great.

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Reform It Altogether: Hamlet, 1900–1980

Perhaps no actor-manager at the turn of the twentieth century captures more perfectly the prevailing style of lavishly expensive productions of Shakespeare than does Herbert Beerbohm Tree, preceding genius at Her Majesty's Theatre from its inception in 1897 until his death in 1917. (That theatre became His Majesty's Theatre in 1901 when Queen Victoria died at the age of eighty-two, having reigned for some sixty-four of those years and having been succeeded by her nearly-sixty-year-old playboy son, Edward VII.) Tree had produced Hamlet in 1892 at the Haymarket Theatre, taking the lead role himself and casting his wife as Ophelia. The show ran for 116 performances.

As manager at Her Majesty's in 1897 and afterward, Tree did all he could to outdo his great predecessor, Henry Irving. Tree's production of King John (1899) made an elaborate tableau of the King's yielding to his barons at Runnymede in 1215, even though Shakespeare never breathes a word about Magna Carta. In Tree's Antony and Cleopatra (1907), the famous meeting of the lovers on the river of Cydnus took place in the theatre with as much pomp and circumstance as Tree could muster, thus actualizing the verbal account spoken by Enobarbus in Shakespeare's play to Maccenas and Agrippa (2.2). The number of scenes in the play had to be greatly reduced to make room for the spectacle. In a similar vein, live rabbits scampered through a carpet of thyme, wild flowers, and blossoming thickets in Tree's A Midsummer Night's Dream (1904). Olivia's Italian-style garden in Twelfth Night (1901) featured statues, fountains, terraces, a handsome staircase, real grass, and a scenic backdrop of hills and trees. Effects like these were not only costly to build; they were not easily moved, so that Tree
found it expedient to rearrange the scenes with the action at Olivia's house presented in a continuous sequence rather than interspersed as in Shakespeare's text, with scenes at the palace of Duke Orsino on the seacoast of Illyria. Tree returned to Hamlet in 1909 and 1910 at His Majesty's, as part of a London Shakespeare Festival.

Yet a seismic shift was at hand. Johnston Forbes-Robertson chose a simpler style of staging for his Hamlet in 1897, albeit with an orchard full of apple-blossoms for Ophelia's mad scenes. Encouraged by George Bernard Shaw, Forbes-Robertson restored the long-absent Fortinbras to the final act, thus ending the production with an impressively dignified funeral cortège in honor of the fallen hero. F. R. Benson's Hamlet at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1899–1900 went still further in restoring Shakespeare's text: this uncut second-quarto/Folio version ran to no less than six hours, from 3:30 to 11:00 p.m., with a sizable interval for dinner. A performance of this sort had to rely on simple scenic effects and rapid movement. Benson needed to be able to take his productions on tour. A full-length production of Hamlet had seemingly never been attempted before, probably not even in Shakespeare's day. The undertaking struck some reviewers as academic and the performances by Benson's provincial repertory company inclining to be spotty, but the challenge to nineteenth-century staging orthodoxy was plain for all to see.

More significantly still, on 16 April 1881 William Poel had directed a single amateur reading of Hamlet at St George's Hall on Regent Street, London, based on the 1603 quarto, on an unadorned stage surrounded on four sides by red curtains through which the entrances and exits were effected. Along with Poel's other work, this experimental venture signaled a new direction that the theatre was to take. William Poel, visionary and eccentric, established the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1894 with a view to putting on plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries in something like their original theatrical settings. He wished to learn more about Elizabethan stage practice, partly as a matter of scholarly interest but more largely as a means of challenging the costly and spectacular production methods of Irving and Tree. The discovery in 1881 of Johannes de Witt's 1596 sketch of the Elizabethan Swan Theatre (see Illustration 2) provided Poel with the rationale he needed for mounting productions on an open stage with continuously swift-paced action by a troupe of ensemble players in close proximity with their audience. His revivals paid close attention to Elizabethan period costume. He made use of an inner stage as well as the open platform. He eschewed cuts as much as possible, and did away for the most part with intermissions. He and his collaborator, Philip Ben Greet, hired vacant halls or theatres on low budgets to see what could be learned about the texts of the plays when they were put on in something approaching the conditions of the original Globe Theatre. Henry V appeared thus at the Lecture Theatre in Burlington Gardens in 1901, and Twelfth Night in 1903 at the Court Theatre. Poel produced The Comedy of Errors in 1893 at Gray's Inn, where it had been staged by Elizabethan actors in 1594. He cast a girl of fourteen as Juliet and a younger of seventeen as Romeo in his Romeo and Juliet, 1905. George Bernard Shaw was impressed, and indeed was an enthusiastic supporter of the reforms to which he and Poel were both committed. Poel revived his production of Hamlet at the Little Theatre in London in 1914.

Harley Granville-Barker, at the Savoy Theatre in 1912–14, was inspired by Poel's example to recapture the fluidity and presentational openness of Elizabethan staging, though in modified ways that were sensitive to the demands of a commercial theatre, thereby avoiding what must have seemed cliche and even pedantic in some of Poel's experiments. Granville-Barker opened with a rapid-paced The Winter's Tale in 1914, with no footlights or scenic backdrops and with the action limited to three acting areas. He also did away with the broadly burlesque style of acting in which the below-stairs characters had often been presented.

In his Preface to Hamlet (1936), Granville-Barker maintained stoutly that Shakespeare did not conceive the play (or any other, for that matter) in five-act form, and that imposing such a structure on stage production is hypothetical at best: "It cannot but to some extent thwart his technique." Indeed, at what is conventionally marked as the end of act 3 and the beginning of act 4, after Hamlet's killing of Polonius, the indication of an act division may be, as Granville-Barker says, seriously misleading. It was not introduced in editorial practice until the sixth quarto of 1676, long after the Folio of 1623. In the earlier texts, Hamlet exits from his mother's chamber, dragging in the dead body of Polonius, whereupon in the Folio text Claudius enters ("Exit Hamlet tugging in Polonius. Enter King") seemingly to Gertrude, who is not named in the exit stage direction. A plausible inference is
that she remains on stage throughout, thus contradicting the conventional marking of act 4. The first quarto of 1603 can be similarly interpreted: the stage direction reads “Exit Hamlet with the dead body,” not naming the Queen, who nevertheless speaks both before and after this stage direction and thus may (or may not) have been on stage throughout. No exit is indicated for her in the second quarto text either, though the stage direction does then specify that she is to come on stage with her husband after Hamlet’s exit (“Enter King, and Queen, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern”), so that the Q3 text might seem to indicate that a scene break has occurred. The absence of an exit for Gertrude in Q2 does not necessarily mean that she remains on stage; original stage directions often fail to specify exits, presumably because actors could be counted on to know when they should get off stage. On the other hand, only rarely on the Elizabethan stage do we find an exit and bare stage followed immediately by the re-entrance of one or more of the exiting characters.

The point here is that Granville-Barker’s attempts to understand Elizabethan staging alerted him to the hazards of giving too much credence to neoclassical conventions of act-scene division. These observations were prompted by Granville-Barker’s own production of Hamlet in London in 1936, in which, despite Granville-Barker’s misgivings, a scene break was provided, whereupon a new scene took place in “the King’s dressing-room.” (Recently it has been argued, by Gary Taylor, in Taylor and John Jowett, Shakespeare Reshaped, 1660–1623, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, pp. 3–50, that after about 1608 Shakespeare did conceive his plays in five acts, probably as a result of indoor performances in the Blackfriars theatre, but Hamlet was, of course, written and performed several years before that proposed date).

In 1912, Edward Gordon Craig, illegitimate son of Ellen Terry, co-directed (with Konstantin Stanislavsky) and designed a renamed Hamlet at the Moscow Art Theatre. Craig had played Hamlet earlier, in 1897, at the Olympic Theatre, wearing Henry Irving’s costume from a decade before. His set in 1912 made use of elaborately symbolic non-representational screens that were hinged in such a way as to facilitate a quick shift from interior to exterior. He championed a new method in stage lighting by doing away with traditional footlights in favor of lights placed above. Color and light were central to his concepts of stage picture. Fervently dedicated to the proposition that theatre is the craft of the director, he strove to highlight relationships between movement and sound and between line and color. Throughout he aimed at integration of a concept uniting the acting company with its theatrical milieu. Experiments such as these inevitably opened up Hamlet to new interpretations and new staging methods. Through his use of screens, subtle lighting, and minimal amounts of painting, Craig offered suggestion and subtlety in place of theatrical overstatement. Such at any rate became the battle cry among adventurous younger directors in the early years of the twentieth century.

Japanese audiences witnessed some performances of Hamlet in a non-traditional mode during these years, notably that of Otojiro Kawakami in 1903 and Shoyo Tsabouchi in 1906 (abridged) and 1911 (with a male actor playing Gertrude), followed later by Tsuneori Fukuda in 1955. In China, Gu Wuwei’s 1916 amalgam of Hamlet and Macbeth, entitled The Insurer of State Power, aimed its political message at Yuan Shikai’s attempted overthrow of the republic. Jiao Juyin, in 1942, staged the play in a Confucian temple in Sichuan Province to which the Chinese government had retreated in the face of Japanese attack, in order to make the political point that nicety and delay could be fatal.

The acting company at the Old Vic Theatre, which had been built in 1818 and renamed the Royal Victoria in 1833, adopted the new style of production under the leadership of Philip Ben Greet and his theatre manager, Lilian Baylis. Greet staged a production of Hamlet in this theatre in 1916 based on a full text of the 1604 quarto. In 1930, still under the management of Lilian Baylis, Harcourt Williams directed John Gielgud, aged 26, in Hamlet at the Old Vic (and then at the New Theatre in 1934, where it ran for 155 performances) in a memorable and largely uncut production (see Illustration 12).

To be sure, some well-known Shakespearean actors of the early twentieth century continued to please audiences with what we would probably recognize today as traditional interpretations of Hamlet. In America, Walter Hampden, as a kind of successor to E. H. Sothern, was a favorite in the role of Hamlet, in New York and on tour, right after World War I, John Barrymore, making his debut in the role of Hamlet at New York’s Sam Harris Theatre in 1922, with Arthur Hopkins as director, performed in the role for 101 nights, breaking Edwin Booth’s record of 100 performances in 1854–5. Barrymore succeeded in London as well, with Fay Compton as his Ophelia. Although Robert Edmond Jones’s set design for the 1922 production
Maurice Evans, after playing at the Old Vic in 1935, scored his greatest triumph as Hamlet in New York in association with Katharine Cornell in 1938 and afterwards, whereupon he toured the production in its “entirety.” As a member of the U. S. armed forces in 1941, Evans took his “G. I. Hamlet” on tour in the South Pacific and then, in 1945, in New York. He was trumpeted by one critic in 1938 as “the finest Hamlet that we have seen in our town since John Barrymore’s classic portrayal of the role” (13 October, New York Herald-Tribune). “Classic portrayal” is a telling phrase. These popular successes were, not surprisingly, transatlantic. Leslie Howard played Hamlet on Broadway in 1936 in a production that fared poorly in New York, owing to its being in competition with that of Gielgud, but did better on tour.

John Gielgud was also in some ways a “classic” heir to Barrymore in the 1930s and 1940s. Gielgud did indeed dress traditionally in his early performances, but he also aligned himself with cutting-edge directors and acting companies, and became an innovative director himself. During the 1930s and 1940s he played Hamlet hundreds of times and in several productions: at the Old Vic in 1930 as mentioned above, at Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1930s, at London’s New Theatre in 1934 with himself as director (see Illustration 12), at New York’s Empire Theatre in 1936 (directed by Guthrie McClintic, with Lillian Gish as Ophelia and Judith Anderson as Gertrude), at the Lyceum in London in 1939 and at Elsinore Castle in Denmark (with production design by Motley) in the same year, at London’s Haymarket in 1944–5 (directed by George Rylands), and then on tour in the Middle and Far East. By then he was in his early 40s, ready to move on to other things. In 1964 he would direct Richard Burton as Hamlet (see below). Princeely and elegant, gifted with a superbly resonant voice, Gielgud was identified for decades more than any other actor with Hamlet, in good measure because he thought through the part with such extraordinary intelligence. He was not afraid to acknowledge his inheritance of a rich stage tradition, yet he also knew how to make the part uniquely his own.

The role of Hamlet has been coveted not only by male actors but by many actresses, long accustomed to being on stage in male attire in such plays as As You Like It and Twelfth Night. Charlotte Cushman took on the “breeches” part of Hamlet in 1851. (Previously, she had played Romeo to her sister Susan’s Juliet in a very successful run of Romeo and Juliet at the Princess’s Theatre in 1845; she also played Cardinal Wolsey in Henry VIII.) Sarah Bernhardt, after playing a manly and
resolute Hamlet in male attire (in French prose translation) at the Adelphi Theatre in 1899 (see Illustration 13), pioneered in a five-minute silent filming of the dueling scene in Hamlet shot at the Paris Exposition of 1900. She also brought her Hamlet to North America.

Perhaps the most unusual "breeches" performance of Hamlet was that of Asta Nielsen in a German seventy-eight-minute silent film of 1920, directed by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall. In this version, Hamlet (Nielsen) appears at first (to most of the other characters, though not to us) to be a man, but is discovered in the final scene to be a woman, having been sheltered thus by her protective mother from the perils of a cut-throat, male-dominated world of courtly politics. This idea of a female Hamlet who is disguised as a male to preserve his/her lineage came to the film directors from Edward P. Vining's The Mystery of Hamlet (Philadelphia, 1881), in which the hero's female identity helps explain the purported inability to carry out revenge. In the film version, similarly, the last-minute identification of Hamlet as a woman offers, in retrospect, a possible explanation as to why he/she has been so reluctant to act and why he/she feels such deep fondness for Horatio.

Other "breeches" Hamlets have included Judith Anderson, on a tour of the United States and in Carnegie Hall, 1970–2, at the age of 73; Angela Winkler, in a production directed at Hamburg and Edinburgh in 1999 by Peter Zadek (who had previously staged the play at Bochum in 1977); Teresa Budzisz-Krzyzanowska in Andrzej Wajda's production at Krakow, Poland, in 1989; Frances de la Tour at a London fringe theatre, the Half Moon, in the 1980s; Diane Venora, under Joseph Papp's direction at the Public Theater, New York, in 1982–3; and Black Eyed Susan, in Ethyl Eichelberger's female version called Hamlette for Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company in 1990.

The year 1925 saw the first modern-dress Hamlet, under the direction of Barry Jackson and H. K. Aylliff, first at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and then at London's Kingsway Theatre. Colin Keith-Johnston, as Hamlet, belonged entirely to the modern world: he smoked, dressed casually, and confronted those he despised with studied rudeness. He could be violent. A balanced cast gave depth to the other characters as well; this was an ensemble Hamlet. The set was suitably spare; for the scene at the gravesite of Ophelia (Muriel Hewitt), a large flower-decorated grave stood mid-stage in front of a tall, simple cross and a non-scenic back wall, while the mourners gaped at the spectacle of Hamlet (in plus fours) fighting with Laertes (Robert Holmes). Modern dress also freed the cast to break with traditional interpretations of character. Polonius (A. Bromley-Davenport), no longer doddering, was instead dapper and shrewd. Ophelia was a child of the flapper generation in the 1920s, fascinated with the prospect of an enlarged sexual freedom while at the same time repressed and anxious (see Illustration 14).

Other modern-dress productions soon followed on the Continent, in Prague (Karel Hilar, director) and Berlin (Leopold Jessner). In a sense, modern-dress production was not new: Shakespeare and his

interpretations intent on finding social and political relevance in Shakespeare's great tragedy. Leopold Jessner's 1926 production in Germany was not just in modern dress; it also presented itself as a highly politicized critique of Kaiser Wilhelm and the German ruling class, with Hamlet (Fritz Kortner) as the rebel hero defying the autocratic regime of Claudius. This left-leaning view of the play did not suit the purposes of the Nazis when they came to power in the 1930s. In their opinion, Shakespeare really should be thought of as a German author; Germans generally were immensely proud of the Schlegel-Tieck translations and regarded these texts as more authentically Shakespearean and more contemporary (because in modern German) than the English text. Accordingly, the Third Reich encouraged interpretations that cast the playwright more in the role of a German national poet, with Hamlet as the fair-haired Saxon son of a brave Nordic prince who had "smote the sledged Polacks on the ice" (1.1.67), as the Germans were to do again in the late 1930s. Gustaf Gründgens was a national-socialist hero in this mold in a 1936 production that ran for some 130 performances. In Russia, a production at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1924–5 under Michael Chekhov's direction ran into trouble with the Soviet authorities for its anti-authoritarian (and hence "reactionary") political slant. Theatrical performances of Hamlet were subsequently banned until after Stalin's death in 1953. Boris Pasternak had to proceed cautiously in order for his 1930 translation of Shakespeare to be published.

Tyrone Guthrie's 1937–8 Freudian interpretation of Hamlet responded to the growing crisis of a Europe between two world wars by exploring the psychological dimensions of existential uncertainty and dilemma. Laurence Olivier, in the role of Hamlet, was a tragic protagonist for an era fascinated with psychoanalysis as a key to understanding of the human psyche. Ernest Jones's Hamlet and Oedipus (1910 in essay form, revised for book publication in 1949) had given wide currency to Sigmund Freud's hypothesis that Hamlet is driven by a subconscious incestuous desire for his mother and hence a psychological inability to punish his uncle for having done what Hamlet fears most in himself—an explanation, in psychoanalytic terms, for the presumed delay in Hamlet's quest for revenge that had so fascinated Goethe and Coleridge. (I shall say more about Freud shortly.) Guthrie and Olivier adopted the Freudian interpretation as their governing concept in 1937–8, although in practice Olivier was so athletic,
forceful, and muscular that some critics wondered how such a Hamlet could have succumbed to self-scrutiny and doubt. The set, with its platforms and ramps, gave Olivier ample room for a display of frenetic vigor. His duel with Laertes (Michael Redgrave) was protracted and spellbinding. The production was taken to Kronborg Castle near Helsingør (i.e. Elsinore) in Denmark for a short run in late spring, ignoring the inconvenient fact that the castle we can visit today was extensively restored and remodeled after a fire in the 1630s and Swedish bombardment in 1658–60. The first performance had to be moved indoors, owing to inclement weather, with unexpectedly beneficent results: the improvised event, staged as theatre-in-the-round, proved to be a revolutionary experience for the participants. Alec Guinness called this opening night “the most exciting theatrical experience most of us ever had” (Barry Gaines, in Inside Shakespeare: Essays on the Blackfriars Stage, ed. Paul Menzer, Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006). Olivier later directed a production of Hamlet, starring Peter O’Toole, at London’s National Theatre in 1961, Olivier having just been appointed as the company’s first artistic director.

Olivier carried the idea of psychological paralysis forward into his film version of Hamlet in 1948, shortly after Alfred Hitchcock’s Spellbound (1945) bore witness to a trendy belief in psychoanalysis as a potential cure-all for mental illness. In the film Hamlet, Olivier is alternately despondent and alive with energy. At one moment we see him meditating on suicide in a voice-over of “To be or not to be” while Hamlet gazes down “from the dreadful summit of the cliff/That beetles o’er its base into the sea.” At other moments the castle becomes a living presence as the camera follows Hamlet through the winding passageways and staircases of Elsinore. In his conversations with Horatio (Norman Wooland) and the gravedigger (Stanley Holloway), Olivier’s Hamlet is wisely compassionate and insightful about death and destiny. He interrupts the “maimed rites” of Ophelia’s burial in act 5 with a brave proclamation of his royal title: “This is I, Hamlet the Dane” (5.1.219, 257–8; see Illustration 15). The finale is visually emblematic in a way that film can do so well: Claudius (Basil Sydney), unable to prevent Gertrude (Eileen Herlie) from drinking the poisoned cup intended for Hamlet, since he cannot publicly confess that it is poisoned, is stabbed by Hamlet and falls to the floor, reaching out desperately toward the throne, the crown, and his queen—the guilty possessions for which he has committed his terrible crime and that will now elude him forever. Hamlet dies reconciled to his mother. A grieving Horatio brings the film to a close with the hope that “flights of angels” will sing Hamlet to his rest (5.2.362). The deletion of the Fortinbras story and all its political ramifications focuses the film instead on the death of a noble prince who, had he been invested in the throne, would have “proved most royal” (400). Soldiers carry the dead Hamlet to the ramparts.2

Innovative period setting and costuming offered yet another way to steer interpretation of Hamlet towards a commentary on the contemporary world of the mid-twentieth century. Period setting became very popular with Shakespearean theatre companies at about this time, in good part because it offered the director a rich opportunity to put the mark of his concept on his work. Modern-dress productions, as in 1925 and 1926, had made the point of topical relevance. Michael Benthall carried the idea a significant step further by proposing that the abandonment of Elizabethan mise en scène need not mean limiting
the choice to modern dress. Bentall established an important precedent at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1948 by setting Hamlet in Victorian times. Presumably his intent was to ask audiences to ponder the Victorian-like complacencies of their own bourgeois existences. No less original was Bentall's decision to cast two actors, Paul Scofield and Robert Helpmann, in the title role on alternate nights, thereby exploring multiple approaches to Hamlet's psyche and dilemma. Bentall's experiment was soon followed by period-setting productions of other Shakespeare plays: All's Well That Ends Well set in Edwardian England of the 1900s (Tyrone Guthrie, Stratford, Canada, 1953), Much Ado About Nothing set in the American frontier southwest (American Shakespeare Festival, 1957), the same play in midwest America at the end of the Spanish-American War of 1898 (New York Shakespeare Festival, A. J. Antoon, 1972), and many more.

In the years following World War II, the political temperature heated up more and more rapidly in performance, as it did in the society being mirrored on stage and in film. Grigori Kozintsev's Hamlet, produced in Leningrad in 1954 immediately following the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, was the work of a director who had spent much of the war in a prison camp. His mission was to analyze what, in his words, was “happening in the prison state around him.” The Hamlet of this production was an existential hero in his resistance to oppression, as in Leopold Jessner's anti-authoritarian German production of 1926, in Russian versions by Sergei Kirov in 1932 and by Yuri Lyubimov at Moscow's Taganka Theatre in 1971-80 starring the protest poet Vladimir Vysotsky, in Poland (Crakow) in 1936, in Czechoslovakia (Prague) in 1941 at the Vinohrady Theatre, and as an absurdist farce in 1978 at the Balustrade Theatre in Rumania (Bucharest) in 1989, among others; see Anthony B. Dawson, “International Shakespeare” and Wilhelm Hor mann, “Shakespeare on the Political Stage,” in The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage (2002).

For his black-and-white film version of 1964, Kozintsev teamed up with Boris Pasternak as textual translator and with Dmitri Shostakovich as musical composer, both of whom were as passionately committed as was Kozintsev to the cause of artistic freedom in a police state. Kozintsev's intent, to be sure, was not solely political: as a film artist, he saw his work in metaphorical and visual terms as a study of the elemental natural forces of earth, sea, stone, and fire. The film images are thus both topical and universal. Hamlet's thinking is dangerous to the state because it is political. The many monumental statues of Claudius (Mikhail Nazyanov) are suggestive of the Stalinist cult of personality. The instructions of Polonius (Yuri Tolubeyev) to Reynaldo to keep a close watch over Hamlet in Paris are in perfect keeping with the eavesdropping mentality of the Danish court. The constrictive metallic corset and petticoats of Ophelia (Anastasia Vertinskaya) are emblematic of a lost personal freedom. Elinore, with its stone walls, drawbridge, and huge spiked portcullis, becomes a state prison. A runic monumental cross in Ophelia's graveyard, timeworn and neglected, testifies to the forgetfulness of human history. The gravedigger's hammer resounds with harsh impersonality as he nails down the lid of her coffin. Sand and dirt pour out of Yorick's skull as it is held up by Hamlet (Innokenti Smoktunovsky) in his ironic inquiry into the senseless triviality of a human existence drained of spiritual meaning (see Illustration 16). Against this hollowness stands Hamlet as existentialist rebel and sacrificial victim.

John Gielgud's successful Broadway 1964 modern-dress Hamlet, at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre with Richard Burton in the title role, was reformulated by Bill Colleran for Electronovision in that same year. Several hand-held cameras, variously positioned in the course of three live performances, provided a multiple perspective shot from various angles. Collated into a single show, this Hamlet was then broadcast four times to some 970 movie theatre audiences throughout the United

States. Partly because Electronovision was as yet a relatively untried technology, the broadcast was of poor quality in picture and sound. The cameramen with their hand-held cameras had to manage as well as they could with the production’s stage lighting; no compromises were allowed here. Still, by means of cutting and selecting among the alternative shots, the producers did at least capture a truly memorable performance by Burton. Rejecting entirely the melancholy and passive Hamlet of Goethe-Coleridge tradition, Burton, the son of a Welsh coal-miner who had found his theatrical métier in the Oxford University Dramatic Society, is virile, witty, sardonic, tempestuous, and rough-edged; he swaggered, pouts, threatens, and brawls. His soliloquies are internalized rather than directed to the audience. The informal costuming consists of open-necked shirts and wool sweaters and the like, as if at a rehearsal (see Illustration 17). The setting, as in the original staging, is utilitarian and unadorned. A nearly uncut text enables us to see Hume Cronyn in the role of Polonius, Eileen Herlie as Gertrude (her role also in Olivier’s 1948 film), John Gielgud as the


off-camera voice of a shadowy Ghost, Alfred Drake (not successfully) as Claudius, and Linda Marsh as Ophelia. Flawed it undoubtedly is, but we can still be grateful that it is available today in voice recordings and on videocassette. Burton insisted in his contract that all copies be destroyed, and his wishes were carried out almost to completion, but one surviving copy has been discovered.

Discouragement about contemporary social and political life in the era following the outbreak of the nuclear arms race, Civil Rights activism and its backlash, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and of Jack and Bobby Kennedy, controversy over the Welfare State, and the increasing social unrest over military actions in Vietnam and elsewhere (including the Falkland Islands crisis of 1982) all prompted a search for challenging questions in Shakespearean productions, as though asking what that mighty playwright would have thought of the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s if he were to come back to life. A prevailing mood of cynicism led some directors to see Hamlet as no longer a hero against despotism, but instead a sufferer of universal ennui. Peter Hall, directing Hamlet for the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1965, wrote in his program notes that the production “was about the disillusionment which produces an apathy of the will so deep that commitment to politics, to religion or to life is impossible.” The impasse that divided Denmark from Norway in this production reminded audiences of Europe’s Iron Curtain. David Warner as Hamlet responded unheroically to the utter hopelessness of his situation. His declaring to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that “Denmark’s a prison” (2.2.244) took on an ominous topical resonance. Glenda Jackson played Ophelia as a neurotic shrew. Hall’s production came only a short time after Peter Brook, also at Stratford-upon-Avon, had staged his enormously influential King Lear (1962), with Paul Scofield in the title role, based on the apocalyptically dark reading of that play in Jan Kott’s Shakespeare Our Contemporary (translated into English in 1964). (Less famously, Scofield played Hamlet under Brook’s direction at Birmingham and then at London’s Phoenix Theatre in 1955.) During these same years, at the Heile Selassie I Theatre in Ethiopia, Tsegaye Gebre Medhin had great success with a Hamlet attuned to audiences for whom magic, ghosts, fate, and warrior kings were familiar icons.

The noble and sensitive prince of Hamlet tradition, though thoughtfully embodied in Michael Pennington’s graceful performance for the
Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1980, with John Barton as director, was becoming more and more a thing of the past. Stratford, as the home of the Shakespeare industry, might still be hospitable to intelligently traditional readings, but elsewhere the mood of the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era was one of disillusionment.

Nicol Williamson, as Hamlet in a production directed by Tony Richardson at London’s Roundhouse Theatre in 1969, was anything but the delicate aristocrat of nineteenth-century tradition: he was tough and serious, snarling, ill-tempered, facing the harsh realities of his situation with splenetic determination. Williamson’s non-standard British speech, his mumblings, pitiful rhythms, and other vocal mannerisms caused quite a stir. The show was taken to New York and then (1969) was filmed, with Tony Richardson as director, Anthony Hopkins as Claudius, Judy Parfitt as Gertrude, Mark Diggan as Polonius, and Marianne Faithfull as Ophelia. No attempt was made in the filming as in the stage production, to hide the industrial origins of the Roundhouse as a circular building with a turntable in the center that had once enabled railroad locomotives to be housed, repaired, and rotated onto new sets of tracks. In his rebellious attitude toward the Establishment, Williamson as Hamlet seems a plausible stand-in for the Angry Young Men of postwar Great Britain: dissatisfied, underemployed, and despairing of a world given over to ethnic and racial tensions and calamitous post-imperialist wars. A claustrophobic sense of No Exit is enhanced by close up shots. Williamson is brilliant, willful, unpredictable, not very likeable, stuffy, and self-important. Alienation is at the heart of this portrayal.

Buzz Goodbody (the first woman to direct a major British Hamlet), in a Royal Shakespeare Company studio production at The Other Place at Stratford-upon-Avon and then at the Roundhouse in London in 1975–6, pursued Peter Hall’s prison image by converting the whole auditorium into the playing space, so that when Hamlet (Ben Kingsley) commanded, at 5.2.314, “Oh, villainy! Ho, let the door be locked,” the audience realized with a start that the theatre doors were indeed being shut upon them. The set designed by William Dudley for Richard Eyre’s 1980 production at London’s Royal Court was in effect another prison: the armed guards stationed at the many doors were a manifestation of a state control so oppressive that Hamlet (Jonathan Pryce) was under constant surveillance. When, in act 4, he attempted to evade his pursuers, he opened one trompe l’oeil door after another only to find an armed spy behind each. Polonius (Geoffrey Chater) was a self-satisfied, miserly bully, the creature of a police state.

Even more revisionary and experimental stage interpretations of Hamlet appeared in the decades leading up to the 1980s, on the Continent as well as in the United Kingdom and the United States. In New York, at the Public Theater in 1968, Joseph Papp went well beyond Peter Hall in jarring his audiences with a psychological nightmare of Oedipal and incestuous conflict. The opening image on stage was of Hamlet (Martin Sheen) in a coffin-like crate at the feet of a huge bed occupied by Hamlet’s hated uncle and Hamlet’s mother, thus literalizing in the theatre Hamlet’s obsessive imaginations of the two of them living “In the rank sweat of an unseamed bed, / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty” (3.4.94–6). Heiner Müller’s Die Hamletmaschine, written in 1977 and produced in Paris in 1979, explored from an East German point of view the angst of the artist/intellectual in an era of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. Müller later directed a seven-and-a-half-hour version (in which Die Hamletmaschine served as the play-within-the-play) in Berlin, 1989–90, as a dirge for a regime that was about to collapse and leave in its wake an uncertain world of globalized conflict. This play was not an adaptation so much as a strenuously avant-garde disquisition between two speakers, one of them schizophrenic and impotent (Hamlet) and the other implacably revolutionary (Ophelia). The Hamlet of the Polish director, Andrzej Wajda, in 1982, dressed Fortinbras in the uniform of the hated Polish Security Forces. Liviu Ciulei, directing the play at the Arena Theater in Washington, D.C., in 1978, chose as his mise en scène the world of Bismarckian Germany.

Literary criticism of Hamlet in the twentieth century down to the 1980s begins with A. C. Bradley’s Shakespearean Tragedy, 1904, and its affinities to the soon-to-vanish Victorian world of Henry Irving and Beerbohm Tree. Hamlet is one of the four “great” Shakespearean tragedies studied by Bradley in his influential book, along with Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. What these four plays have in common, in Bradley’s view, is that they deal with universal issues of good and evil, temptation and sin, self-knowledge and self-betrayal. The Roman and classical plays, including Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, and Coriolanus, focus on political conflict; the great plays of
Shakespeare's "Tragic Period" are more profoundly spiritual and moral in their concerns. In these terms, Bradley refuses to see Hamlet as "one-sidedly reflective and indisposed to action," as Goethe and Coleridge had maintained. Instead, Bradley views Hamlet as an ideal of deep moral sensibility, who is for that very reason unusually vulnerable to the violent shock presented to him by the murder of his father and his mother's over-hasty remarriage. His passion for generalization prompts him to reflect, perhaps "too curiously" (5.1.205), on the larger meaning of everything he observes. The violent shock and his generalizing imagination conspire to drive him into a deep melancholy. "His whole mind is poisoned." He can never think of Ophelia as he did before, since she is a woman, like Hamlet's own mother. "He can do nothing." Hence "his vain efforts to fulfili this duty [of revenge], his unconscious self-excuses and unavailing self-reproaches, and the tragic results of his delay."

In all this, Bradley seems to sum up the best of nineteenth-century criticism, with its close attention to the study of character as a model for human behavior. Shakespeare's tragic world is, to Bradley, ultimately explicable and moral in the most enlightened sense of that term. Great dramatic literature should be "improving" and inspirational. As Bradley writes (of King Lear): "Good, in the widest sense, seems thus to be the principle of life and health in the world; evil, at least in these worst forms, to be a poison. The world reacts against it violently, and, in the struggle to expel it, is driven to destroy itself". Bradley is, like Henry Irving, one of the last of the Victorians.

Just as theatrical performances in the early twentieth century increasingly sought a return to a simpler and more "Shakespearean" open stage, scholarly criticism too mounted a crusade for better historical understanding of theatrical methods and conditions in early modern England. Sir Walter Raleigh (Professor of English Literature at Oxford, not to be confused with the Raleigh or Raleigh of the Elizabethan and Jacobean court) emphatically rejects the premises of nineteenth-century character criticism, insisting that "A play is not a collection of the biographies of those who appear in it." Character is not "a chief cause of the dramatic situation," nor is Hamlet "a Moral Play, like one of Miss Edgeworth's stories" (Shakespeare, London: Macmillan, 1907). Raleigh turns his attention instead to the artistic methods by which this play affects spectators in the theatre. The poet Robert Bridges takes a similar approach, as can be judged from the title of one of his Collected Essays (London: Oxford University Press, 1927–36), "The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama." E. K. Chambers, an invaluable researcher into Elizabethan archives, insists that the tired old question of the nineteenth century, "Was Hamlet mad?" is "not merely insoluble; it cannot even be propounded in an intelligible guise" (E. K. Chambers, ed., The Tragedy of Hamlet, London: Blackie, 1894). The German scholar Leun Schücking studies ways in which Shakespeare strives more for vivid dramatic effects than for coherence, partly because the brutally Gothic nature of his primitive source story has not been fully assimilated into Hamlet's Christian European world (Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays, 1917, translated, London: G.G. Harrap, 1923).

The title of Edgar Elmer Stoll's Art and Artifice in Shakespeare (1933, London: Methuen, 1963) suggests a rigorously historical commitment to the idea that reliable factual scholarship should not allow itself to be seduced by moral, biographical, or psychological interpretation. A play, he argues, is an artifice arising out of a particular historical milieu. Its structure and method are governed by a set of conventions to which the playwright, the actors, and the spectators implicitly agree. To be ignorant in our modern age of these conventions is to invite anachronism and romantic fumfum. Following this principle, Stoll deduces that Hamlet is not a play about moral scruples or psychological paralysis; it is instead a revenge story constructed out of certain conventional revenge motifs and reshaped by the resourceful dramatist. Hamlet's delay serves the purpose of testing Claudius's guilt; it is a device needed to carry the story forward to its exciting conclusion. Postponing the catastrophe is a stratagem often found in blood tragedies, as in Sophocles's Oedipus the King (see Stoll's Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1919).

Lily Bess Campbell, in Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1952), pursues a similarly historical line of argument: a play like Hamlet cannot be adequately understood without a knowledge of Elizabethan ideas on melancholy and the moral function of tragedy in offering consolation for grief. Hamlet, she argues, is a study in the passion of grief, in Fortinbras and in Laertes no less than in Hamlet himself. Claudius and Gertrude represent the mortal sin of allowing passion to overwhelm reason.

Historical scholarship of the twentieth century has added greatly to our knowledge of dramaturgy on Shakespeare's stage and has
introduced many lively debates. John Dover Wilson (What Happens in Hamlet, 1935) takes exception to the work of some historical scholars, like Schücking who insist that Shakespeare, in refashioning an old story and an old play, has not succeeded in fusing the old with the new. Wilson's intent is to show that Shakespeare knew what he was doing. Wilson asks a number of probing questions. "What is the dramatic purpose of the long conversation between Hamlet and the First Player immediately before the play ['The Murder of Gonzago'] begins? Why is the play preceded by a dumb show? Why do not Claudius show any signs of discomfiture at this dumb show, which is a more complete representation of the circumstances of the murder than the play which follows it? What is Hamlet's object in making the murderer the nephew and not the brother of the king?" These are essentially dramaturgical questions of the sort not often asked before Wilson posed them, and they are ones that demand an extensive knowledge of early modern culture as well as of theatrical conditions.

No less intriguing is the question for which Wilson's book is perhaps best known: does Hamlet suddenly perceive, through some noise or movement backstage, that he is being eavesdropped upon by the King and Polonius as he converses with Ophelia, and is this discovery the explanation as to why he turns on her suddenly with "Get thee to a nunery" and "Where's your father"? (3.1.122–31). Wilson insists that some such stage action is implied and necessary. This present book, in chapter 2, has argued that an Elizabethan audience probably would not need such stage business because the audience would be able to see everything, including the hidden eavesdroppers; but that is not the point here. Wilson's position on the matter is not as important as the kinds of questions he is now posing.4

Historical criticism can provide a useful way of thinking about ghosts and other spirits. We need to get over the anachronistic notion, in Wilson's view, that Shakespeare and his audience were generally skeptical of ghosts. Eleanor Prosser, in Hamlet and Revenge (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), also urges that we must attempt to understand such metaphysical matters in Elizabethan terms, although she arrives at a very different and more problematic conclusion. When we accept that the world of Hamlet is a Christian world, says Prosser, then we must acknowledge that the ghost of Hamlet's father is "demonic" and that his commandment of revenge should not be obeyed. Most critics (including myself) find this too simplified a view of revenge in Hamlet, but Prosser is at least asking an important question.

Historical information on Shakespeare's intellectual and cultural background is especially relevant to Hamlet, with its searching inquiries into so many philosophical matters. Theodore Spencer's Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York: Macmillan, 1942) discusses Shakespeare's indebtedness to challenging new thinkers in the Renaissance like Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Copernicus. Hamlet's generalizing mind is much preoccupied with the question of humankind's place in the cosmos. What books has Shakespeare been reading when he has Hamlet discourse on "this goodly frame, the earth," "this most excellent canopy, the air," "this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire," all of which now seem to him only "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (2.2.299–304)? Spencer suggests Thomas Digges's free translation of Copernicus in his Perfect Description of the Celestial Orbs (1576) as one possible answer, along with the writings of neoplatonists like Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), in his Oration on the Dignity of Man. In view of the importance of melancholy in Hamlet, we should read carefully a treatise on the subject by Dr André Du Laurens called Of the Diseases of Melancholy, published in 1599, shortly before Shakespeare wrote Hamlet. Where do Shakespeare's ideas on Reason and Nature come from? What did he need to know about classical stoicism to enable him to write so insightfully about Hamlet's admiration for Horatio as "one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing, / A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards / Hast ta'en with equal thanks" (1.2.65–7)? A. O. Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being (1936) is another rich source of background information on Hamlet's intellectual universe.5

The so-called "New" Criticism, championed in the 1930s and afterwards by G. Wilson Knight, D. A. Traversi, L. C. Knight, and others, mounted a frontal assault on historical criticism, thereby ushering in what was often to become a century of confrontational debate centered on seemingly irreconcilable ideological oppositions. The New Criticism was a revisionary movement, championed by those for whom traditional historical research was the purview of the academic Establishment and a hidebound educational curriculum that unduly valorized research skills in historical archives and the acquisition of many dead languages. As such it was too often dry, philological,
lifeless, out of touch with ways in which Shakespeare should affect us by his poetic power. The New Critics insisted that criticism pay close attention to poetry and language without the encumbrance of lengthy historical or biographical research.


T. S. Eliot, though he also praises the historical critic E. E. Stoddart, for confuting the "character" interpretations of Goethe and Coleridge, insightfully anticipates some of the preoccupations of New Criticism in his analysis of *Hamlet's* failure to achieve an "objective correlative". *Hamlet* is dominated by "an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear" (*Hamlet and His Problems*, *Selected Essays*, 1917–1932, 1932). L. C. Knights reads *Hamlet* as self-indulgent and neurotic; the play itself is a compromise between an "objective study of a peculiar kind of immaturity" and "a spontaneous and uncritical expression of Shakespeare's own unconscious feelings." One can be clear-sighted about *Hamlet*’s weaknesses and yet experience a "lively dramatic sympathy" (*Explorations*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1946). Histrionic and even melodramatic postures impress upon us "the static quality of *Hamlet's* consciousness" (*An Approach to Hamlet*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1960). Harry Levin examines in *Hamlet* a dialectic structure of "thesis, antithesis, synthesis" achieved through "interrogation, doubt, irony." *Hamlet*’s ironic viewpoint becomes the synthesis through which we can attempt to comprehend the play’s pervasive questionings (*The Question of *Hamlet*, 1959).

Common to these critical investigations are an interest in tone, imagery, verbal texture, and dramatic construction. They are roughly contemporary with the developments we have seen in the theatre toward experimental rejection of traditional Victorian interpretations based on lofty appraisals of moral character.

Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935) provided New Critics with a storehouse of image patterns in *Hamlet*, as noted also by G. Wilson Knight above: diseases, blisters, ulcers, mildewed ears, apoplexies, and self-deceptions that "will but skin and film the ulcerous place, / Whiles rank corruption, mining all within, / Infects unseen" (1.4.154–6). Wolfgang Clemen's *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London: Methuen, 1951) adds to imagery study the perspective of how imagery changes in the course of Shakespeare's writing career and how *Hamlet* occupies a pivotal position in that pattern of development. Nigel Alexander, in *Poison, Play, and Duel: A Study in "Hamlet"* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), focuses on the three images of his title as controlling the play's structure and language. Maurice Charney's *Style in "Hamlet"* (1969) enlarges the scope of imagery analysis to include the visual: that is to say, stage picture, actors' gesture, and all that happens in the theatre. These matters are further explored in Charles Forker's "Shakespeare's Theatrical Symbolism and Its Function in *Hamlet*" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 14, 1963, 215–29). For Inga-Stina Ewbank, language is a major thematic concern through which we can explore the possibilities and limitations of speech in *Hamlet* ("Shakespeare and the Power of Words," *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977), 85–102). C. S. Lewis, though hardly a New Critic as defined here, gives a thematic reading of the play as about fear and doubt generated by the unanswerable questions that death poses concerning human life and the nature of the cosmos (*Hamlet, the Prince or the Poem*, British Academy Lecture, 1942).

Psychological interpretation of *Hamlet* becomes a staple of Shakespeare criticism in the twentieth century, for the obvious reason that to many readers *Hamlet* seems to have a problem of delay. Freud bases his analysis of that problem, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899, 3rd ed., translated by A. A. Brill, New York: Macmillan, 1911), on his newly formulated theory of the unconscious, according to which *Hamlet* is driven by an unacknowledged incestuous desire for his mother and is accordingly unable to punish his uncle for having...
done the very thing that Hamlet himself subconsciously wishes to commit, that is, sleep with Gertrude. Freud gives to this uncensored psychological dilemma the name of “Oedipus complex,” in recollection of the ancient classical myth, as dramatized by Sophocles in his Oedipus the King, of the tragic hero whose fate it is to discover that he has killed his own father and married his mother. Ernest Jones elaborates this theory in his Hamlet and Oedipus, as we saw above. Freud's interpretation is a great advancement in psychoanalytic theory, not only as a new reading of Hamlet but more fundamentally as a way of understanding a shift in human civilization from an early, archaic culture in which parochial and incestuous desires were acted upon to a more modern culture in which those feelings are repressed.

In a sense the psychological analysis of Freud and Jones is a continuation of the “character” criticism of the nineteenth century, asking essentially the same question as did Goethe and Coleridge: why does Hamlet delay? Freud rightly insists that he has formulated a bold new way of understanding human motivation, but his presupposition that Hamlet's delay is the result of an emotional imbalance unduly limits the field of critical examination. The classical dictum that a great tragedy must have, in Aristotle's terms, a hamartia or “tragic flaw” also encourages too easily the explanation that Hamlet's delay is his tragic flaw. But what if Shakespeare was not thinking in Aristotelian terms and did not necessarily regard such a “flaw” as the key to understanding Hamlet's tragedy? Or what if we translate Aristotle's hamartia as “tragic error” or “mistake,” rather than as “tragic flaw”?

Given their presupposition, psychologically oriented critics do provide a range of possible interpretations to the celebrated question of delay. K. B. Eisler's Discourse on Hamlet and “Hamlet,” 1971, learnedly reviews the extensive critical literature on Hamlet's supposed madness, pointing out that the first intimations of emotional imbalance come from what Horatio says about Hamlet's “wild and whirling words” (1.5.139), not from Hamlet himself. Similarly, Hamlet's feigned madness is a motif of the plot derived from Saxon Grammaticus, a story in which the hero is anything but hesitant to enact his bloody revenge. Eisler allows some plausibility in Freud's and Jones's Oedipal interpretation but sets it off against a simpler reading of “the manifest content of the play” in which Hamlet bungles his opportunities, the result overall is that Shakespeare makes “at least two readings possible, and at that, two quite opposite ones.” Avi Ellich proposes quite a different reading from that of Freud and Jones, as implied in Ellich's title, Hamlet's Absent Father (1977), namely, that Hamlet's greatest emotional longing is for a strong authority figure who can replace the lost father and thus recover for Hamlet his sense of personal identity. Polonious, Old Fortinbras, Priam, Achilles, Otric, Yorick, and even Horatio are all insufficient fathers in their various ways.

Theodore Lidz gives a lucid account, in his Hamlet's Enemy: Madness and Myth in “Hamlet” (1975), of the psychiatrist's attraction to Hamlet and the various modifications that have been offered to Freud's Oedipus Complex theory as related to the role of the family in intra-psychic conflicts, adding his own emphasis on what we can learn psychologically from the myth of Hamlet as found in Saxon Grammaticus, in the story of Lucius Junius Brutus as founder of Rome's republic, in Euripides's Orestes, in Suetonius's account of The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, in Nero's incestuous attachment to his mother, in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, and in the Fool of folk drama, all of this genre to a study of Ophelia and the female “Oedipal” transition. Norman N. Holland, in Shakespeare's Personality (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), asks what we can perhaps learn about the author himself from the way he depicts Oedipal conflict. 6

A correlative line of investigation has been that of mythological criticism. This method offers a way of exploring, anthropologically and psychologically, the “collective unconscious” of the human race. In part, the movement traces its intellectual origins to the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1875-1961). Gilbert Murray's Hamlet and Orestes: A Study in Traditional Types (British Academy Annual Shakespeare Lecture for 1914) studies the archetype of revenging the murder of a father as an ancient and tribal custom. Such an investigation can give to Hamlet an anthropological universality, seeing his struggle in terms of the primitive and the civilized on both an inner and societal level. Francis Fergusson similarly looks at Hamlet in the context of Greek tragedy and ancient ritual, arguing that the Elizabethan theatre fostered a myth-ritual pattern; Hamlet in these terms can be understood as a species of ritual drama drawing much of its psychic force from “a great deal of the religious culture of the Middle Ages” that “was still alive in Shakespeare's time” (The Idea of a Theater, 1949). Northrop Frye pursues an archetypal line of investigation in his Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance.
(New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), and Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), showing how we respond unconsciously to mythic patterns in our culture by communal participation in drama. All drama celebrates in one form or another the primal myths of seasonal change and rebirth, expressing culturally a constant cyclical movement. In these terms, Hamlet is appropriately autumnal, wintry, melancholic. Robert Ortstein picks up nicely on this idea in his "The Mystery of Hamlet: Notes Toward an Archetypal Solution" (College English, 1959), in which he proposes that Hamlet "is a ritual scapegoat" with a particularly modern twist: "he is Dying God in Juvenile Delinquent." John Holloway examines Hamlet from an anthropological point of view in The Story of the Night: Studies in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

Two particularly impressive studies of Hamlet can perhaps suggest ways in which the critical approaches surveyed thus far need not, and indeed should not, maintain themselves on separate courses. Maynard Mack, in "The World of Hamlet" (Yale Review, 41 (1952), 502–23), looks at that world not in the narrow geographical sense of Denmark but in the artistic and theatrical sense of "the imaginative environment that the play asks us to enter." This is a world dominated by the interrogative mood, reverberating with questions, doubts, enigmas, riddles, and mysteries, all forcing upon us a painful awareness of the problematic nature of reality. Shakespeare's choice of key words, such as "apparition," "seems," "assume," "put on," "shape," "show," "act," and "play" underscores uncertainty and puzzlement, on Hamlet's part and on ours. Hamlet's greatest task, and ours as well, is to come to terms with such a world and learn thereby to understand what it is to be human. Mack's interpretation of Hamlet is thus vividly attuned to image patterns and verbal details, as in the New Criticism that Mack knew well enough from teaching at Yale, but it is also informed by a larger moral vision hearkening back to the best of what A. C. Bradley had to say about the play.

Fredson Bowers's "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge" (PMLA, 70 (1955), 740–9) is also closely attentive to language, especially in the scene of Hamlet's confronting his mother about her marriage: "Heaven hath pleased it so / To punish me with this, and this with me, / That I must be their scourge and minister" (3.4.182) points to Hamlet's realization that he must (as scourge) pay a just retribution to heaven for having killed a man, even while he has unwittingly been heaven's agent or minister in meting out to Polonius a fate that the old man has brought on himself. Bowers shows how the rest of Hamlet plays out just as Hamlet has here predicted: Ophelia goes mad, Laertes returns to Denmark, a duel is fought, and at last all accounts are settled, in a way that Hamlet could not have planned. Both essays combine careful close reading with a well-informed historical perspective and with a complex awareness of the play's overall architectonic shape.

The work of Mack and Bowers, then, along with that of Stoll, Campbell, Wilson, Spencer, Knight, Traversi, Knights, Eliot, Spurgeon, Erlich, Murray, Ferguson, and others can provide some indication cumulatively of what twentieth-century criticism down to about 1980 has to offer in the way of historical, new critical, psychological, and mythological perspectives on Hamlet, much as A. C. Bradley can stand as a summary and capstone of nineteenth-century character criticism. In a similar way, the stage and film productions of Poel, Granville-Barker, Ben Greet, Jackson, Ayliff, Bentall, Guthrie, Olivier, Burton, Hall, Williamson, and others, rebelling against but also partly absorbing the work of traditionalists like Barrymore, Evans, and Gielgud, embody innovative and rapidly changing commentary on the cultures in which they were fashioned. Still to come was the brave new world of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, carrying even further the processes of experimentalism and social critique in Shakespeare production and interpretation. It is to these three most recent decades that we turn for the current story of postmodern Hamlet.