

CONSTRUING HAMLET

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This essay should be viewed as a first or basic construct reading of Hamlet. Into this view of the main events and characters of the play, details may be integrated as they come to the reader's, director's, or actor's attention. If some detail seems to contradict some conclusion, constructs and hypotheses can be modified to accommodate an improved construction. As George Kelly said, "A psychological theory should be considered ultimately expendable. The psychologist should therefore maintain personal independence of his theory" (Kelly 1955, 2.44). So should it be with psychological literary criticism and the critic.

Before we begin to construe *Hamlet* through Kellyan construct theory, and consider how a production of the play based on a Kellyan reading would differ from productions informed by other psychological theories, we need to refresh our memories about the psychoanalytic view of *Hamlet* which has dominated the field of psychological literary and dramatic criticism for so long, and contrast it with the less well known Adlerian view of the play.

THE FREUDIAN VIEW

The Freudian reading of *Hamlet* is so familiar that I need describe it only rather briefly. It is firmly based on the concept of the oedipal conflict, considered by psychoanalytic theorists to be universal. Thus, Hamlet, like Oedipus and all other sons, unconsciously wishes to destroy his father and sexually possess his mother. It is his uncle Claudius, however, who actually murders Hamlet's father, his own brother, and marries his former sister-in-law, Gertrude, who is Hamlet's mother. Hamlet's alleged hesitation about and delay in meting out revengeful justice to his uncle according to psychoanalytic critics arise from Hamlet's unconscious defense against the recognition of his own repressed wish to do just what his uncle has done (Jones, 1954 [1910], 51-79; 94-95).

In addition to this major element of the psychoanalytic pronouncement on *Hamlet*, we should note the lesser but still significant details of the psychoanalytic position as stated by Ern-

est Jones in his *Hamlet and Oedipus*. Jones first makes it clear that the purpose of his essay "is to expound and bring into relation with other work an hypothesis suggested many years ago by Freud in a footnote to 'Traumdeutung'" (Jones, 1954 [1910], 23).

Jones begins with the statement that one must pretend that the characters of a play are real living people in order to perform dramatic criticism (Jones, 1954 [1910], 20). He diagnoses Hamlet as a neurotic, making it appropriate for the critic to be a "medical psychologist" (Jones, 1954 [1910], 18; 76). Jones then decides that Hamlet is paralyzed because of his neurosis by "intellectual cowardice, that reluctance to dare the exploration of his inmost soul, which Hamlet shares with the rest of the human race" (Jones, 1954 [1910], 103). Jones concludes that Hamlet's conflicts reflect those of Shakespeare and agrees with Taine that "Hamlet is Shakespeare" (Jones, 1954 [1910], 24).

According to Jones, there is no doubt that Hamlet trusts the ghost from the beginning (Jones [1910] 1954, 61). Jones is anxious to prove that Hamlet never doubts the ghost, because his argument that Hamlet delays when he has no conscious reason to do so is threatened otherwise. Jones acknowledges the live in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy in which Hamlet calls death "the undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveller returns," but denies that it means that he does not believe his father's ghost has returned; he further denies that Hamlet's speech at the end of act 2 when he plans the mousetrap play means that Hamlet mistrusts the

ghost, although Hamlet says that he fears the ghost may be a devil which abuses him to damn him.

Hamlet is more interested in putting an end to Gertrude's incestuous relationship with Claudius than with avenging his father's murder, in Jones's view (Jones, 1954 [1910], 110), and he believes that Hamlet's attitude toward Ophelia is complex and largely conditioned by his attitude to his mother, while as for her father, Jones thinks Hamlet sees Polonius as a "... prating sententious dotard" (Jones, 1954 [1910], 98).

Jones's view of *Hamlet* has been to some extent supplanted among psychoanalytic thinkers by the view of Jacques Lacan. Certainly Lacan's emphasis is different, although he repeats many of the same psychoanalytic formulas. He sees *Hamlet* as a tragedy of human desire and accords Ophelia a far more important part in the tragedy than does Jones (Lacan, 1977 [1959], 11). So important is Ophelia to Lacan that he invents an etymology for her name. He says, "I'm just surprised that nobody's pointed out that Ophelia is *O phallos* ..." (Lacan, 1977 [1959], 20). From this point on Lacan "harps on" the *phallus* quite as much as Polonius perceives Hamlet to "harp on" his daughter. Lacan's discussion seems somewhat mystical and difficult to follow, and his perception of incidents in the play appears to be somewhat inaccurate. He speaks, for instance, of Hamlet's appealing to Gertrude in the bedroom scene to abstain from going to Claudius' bed but says that he then sends her there "into the arms of the man who once again will not fail to make her yield" (Lacan, 1977 [1959], 13). When we examine the scene, we find that Hamlet does indeed ask the queen to abstain from going to Claudius' bed. He then warns the queen that she must not let Claudius make her "ravel all this matter out, / That I essentially am not in madnesse, / But mad in craft" (3.4.187-89). He reminds the queen that he must go to England, prepares to remove Polonius' body, and says "Good night mother" (3.4.187-218).¹ At no point does he send her to Claudius' bed. Perhaps

Lacan misread this passage by failing to apply the negative in line 182, "Not this by no means that I bid you do:" to the rest of Hamlet's speech which continues, "Let the bloat king tempt you again to his bed" (3.4. 183-84).

And again Lacan seems to be reading a different play when he says, "Or think of him awakening in the dead of night on the storm-tossed ship, going about almost in a daze, breaking the seals of the message borne by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, substituting almost automatically one message for another ..." (Lacan 1977, [1959] 24). The only account we have in the play of this scene is Hamlet's own description of it to Horatio:

*Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarfed about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them, had my desire,
Fingered their packet, and in fine withdrew
To mine own room again, making so bold,
My fears forgetting manners, to unseal
Their grand commission; where I found, Horatio
– O royal knavery! – an exact command,
... ..
My head should be struck off.
... ..*

*I sat me down,
Devised a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and laboured much
How to forget that learning; but sir, now
It did me yeoman's service ...*

(5.2.12-37)

Far from being in a daze and writing automatically, Hamlet seems to have acted purposefully and energetically yet with the required stealth in discovering the commission and the plot against him. He then remedied the situation by devising with great care and skill – the opposite of writing automatically – the counterfeit commission which orders Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's deaths instead of his own.

Not only does Lacan seem to misperceive certain actions in *Hamlet*, but like Jones he passes over many events of the play which do not interest him or do not fit his preconceptions. For instance, he attaches great phallic significance to Ophelia's drowning among the flowers called

¹ These and all subsequent *Hamlet* quotations unless otherwise noted are from the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Hamlet*, 1988 [1985], Philip Edwards, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

“dead men’s fingers” (Lacan 1977, 23), but says nothing at all about the other flowers that Ophelia strews about just before her death, and he makes no attempt to understand the language of flowers that she uses in her last appearances before the audience.

For Lacan, *Hamlet* seems to be reduced to simple “*Phallophany*” (Lacan, 1977 [1959], 39) – evidently a learned word made up of *phallos* and the element *-phany* which means *manifestation* or *appearance*. It is a play, Lacan seems to say, about desire and mourning and the desire and mourning seem to be for the *phallus*, somehow real, somehow imagined, somehow symbolic.

Any reader who is unfamiliar with the psychoanalytic interpretations of *Hamlet*, should certainly acquaint him/herself at the very least with Freud’s discussion of the Oedipus legend, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1965 [1900] [1913]). Further reading should include at least *Hamlet and Oedipus* by Ernest Jones (Jones, 1954 [1910]) which I have discussed above, K. R. Eissler’s *Discourse on Hamlet and Hamlet: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry* (Eissler 1973), and the Jacques Lacan essay on *Hamlet* which I have just cited (Lacan, 1977 [1959]).

THE ADLERIAN VIEW

Adler never wrote about *Hamlet* in detail although he mentions Hamlet in his discussion of melancholia (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, 446). However, Philip Mairet, who was an editor and translator of Adler’s works and a lecturer at the *International Society for Individual Psychology* in London, and who also was at one time a Shakespearean actor, has published an Adlerian interpretation of *Hamlet*. In his article he first reviews earlier criticism including that of Goethe, Coleridge, Bradley and finally that of Freud as developed by Ernest Jones. He then offers the contrasting viewpoint of Individual Psychology. Mairet feels that, “Apart from certain exaggerations, the psychoanalytic theory of *Hamlet* is deeper and more comprehensive than any of those we have mentioned. In this view, Hamlet’s

case represents an extreme exacerbation of a ‘complex’ which is present in every male human being” (Mairet 1969, 74-75). But he further believes that in the final analysis the psychoanalytic interpretation, although that interpretation beautifully illustrates Freud’s theory of unconscious motivation, “*says nothing at all about Shakespeare’s Hamlet* [italics mine] or of “the unique individual person, of the values, aim and ambitions by which he lives” (Mairet, 1969, 75).

Mairet, as an Adlerian, prefers to examine Hamlet’s life style. Hamlet, he believes, has a goal of godlikeness, and in modern Adlerian language his life style, then, is that of *The Person who Has to be Right*. If he is to commit suicide, for instance, it must be a perfect suicide with perfect result; if he is to carry out an act of vengeance, it must be perfect vengeance. He cannot, for example, risk killing Claudius when the king’s soul is clean from confession but must send him from life to hell in a state of sin. Furthermore, since Hamlet must be godlike, he distances himself from other people, even from Horatio. Although the solution to his problem lies in his leading a palace revolution, Hamlet isolates himself and is unable to relate to other people and, therefore, is incapable of such leadership.

Hamlet’s tragic flaw in Mairet’s Adlerian view is his lack of social feeling which leads to his tendency to depreciate others. In his self-imposed aloneness he resorts to an attitude of pessimism in which he must depreciate himself too. Mairet clearly states, however, that he does not wish to declare Hamlet neurotic. Hamlet does not display the clinical symptoms of neurosis; rather,

“he exhibits the fundamental dilemma of a mind pursuing its fictive goals of superiority in the face of harsh realities that it cannot cope with. He still pursues what he feels to be an objective duty, and ultimately fulfills it, though at the greatest cost to himself and others ... He is not mad at all; you cannot make drama out of pathology, though madness may be introduced as an element in the whole ...” (Mairet 1969, 75) [An interesting theoretical statement, by the way.]

Mairet concludes that

“Hamlet’s tragedy is that he cannot take his

friends into his (-confidence, since this would, after all, lead to action; and he cannot bring about the action which the situation is demanding [sic] because in order to do so he would have to join with others on an equal footing as co-conspirators, and descend from the height of his noble spirit and enter the common battle for a desecrated crown" (Mairet, 1969, 86).

It is only "when [in the final duel] reality takes him inescapably by the throat [that his] godlike ambition vanishes and he acts with a vigor nobody expected, himself least of all" (Mairet, 1969, 86).

Mairet does not specifically discuss one tenet of Adlerian psychology which should be made explicit. That is, that Adlerians do not believe that internal conflict exists. For the Adlerian, every bit of behavior the person exhibits is in the service of the final goal. Thus when a person appears to be 'conflicted' he really has but one purpose and that is to delay – to maintain the status quo. He uses the idea of internal conflict as an excuse not to act. For the Adlerian, then, Shakespeare seems to be investigating in *Hamlet*, as Mairet puts it, "the springs of inaction" (Mairet, 1969, 72) in service of Hamlet's final goal.

THE CONSTRUCT VIEW

In the construct view, there is no concern with any repressed 'unconscious' or oedipal complexes as in the case of psychoanalytic theory, and there is less concern with social interest than in Adlerian theory. Although the psychoanalytic and Adlerian theories are diametrically opposed in many ways, they both might be called *content* theories in that they look at the content of the mind rather than the operation of the mind as construct theory does. The tendency of critical theorists of the *content* type is to go through a work looking for bits and pieces of material that match the contents of their particular theory. Thus any father/son/mother relationship is likely to be seen as 'oedipal' by a psychoanalytic critic, while whenever Hamlet or any other character walks alone in order to think, he is likely to be perceived as displaying a failure of social interest to the Adlerian. Unfortunately *content* theo-

rists of whatever persuasion often fail to notice the presence of other types of materials, especially those that might seem to cancel out or negate their own preoccupations. They search, in construct terms, for similarities to their own preoccupations while ignoring differences. The Kellyan construct critic, on the other hand, who is a *process* theorist would begin by looking at as many details as he/she could manage in order to construe the play, constantly revising his/her constructions as different elements come to attention, and would entertain the hypothesis that Hamlet, like the rest of us, is man-the-scientist who experiences the universal need to predict and control. A first reading from this point of view would examine the text to see if the author incorporated attempts to predict and control into his plot. *What* is predicted will be less important at this point than the process of prediction.

Unlike Ernest Jones, the construct theorist will be quite aware that Hamlet is a fictional character and that it was only his creator Shakespeare who was the living person; nevertheless he/she will from time to time talk about Hamlet and other characters *as if* they were real people. But the *as if* stance will never be forgotten.

Furthermore, the construct theorist/critic will not assume as does Jones, along with Taine, that Hamlet *is* Shakespeare but rather will believe that Hamlet and other characters in this and other dramas embody certain of their author's(s') constructs.

Character will be revealed through plot, and remembering Kelly's indication that time is the line along which the world must make sense because we abstract, predict and control on the basis of chronological ordering of events (Kelly 1955, 1:7), we will, at least in this instance, follow the action of the plot chronologically, construing character through events as we go.

Hamlet begins with a dramatic hint that the condition of Denmark is unsure. There is great concern with the need to predict Denmark's fate and control it. In act 1, scene 1 there is much talk of omens, prophecies and foreshadowings – all the folk ways of predicting events. At this point the appearance of the ghost of Denmark's dead king is associated in the minds of those who have witnessed it with the situation of Denmark and not with any suspicion that the king has been

murdered. The problems discussed by the soldiers at the guard post are ones of information, construing, and prediction: What is happening in Denmark? What is going to happen? Will there be war with Fortinbras whose forces lie massed on the border? The nervous exchange between Francisco and Bernardo at the change of the watch at the very beginning of the play sets the mood of uncertainty. The need to challenge and to know who or what walks is in the air. Francisco says that he is “sick at heart,” and Horatio and Marcellus, arriving, begin to talk of the “thing” that has appeared, and immediately Horatio makes a prediction that the apparition will not come again. But his prediction is promptly invalidated when the ghost of King Hamlet appears. The audience thus has one event (Horatio’s disconfirmed prediction) from which to begin its own prediction of what will happen – in short something strange and weird.

Horatio now views the appearance of the dead king as a prophecy (prediction) which “bodes some strange eruption for our state” (1.1.69), and the talk turns naturally to the need for information. Marcellus asks why labor and warlike preparations go on day and night and wonders, “What might be toward ...?” (1.1.77). Horatio can only answer, in sibilants that intensify the clandestine spirit of the conversation, that “the whisper goes so” (1.1.80) that young Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, comes to recover lands forfeited by his father to the former king of Denmark whose apparition now walks the night. Bernardo and Horatio connect the apparition of the dead King Hamlet with the preparation for war and with Denmark’s danger. They talk of precedents for prediction from history: In Rome, they say, “... graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead / did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets,” and astrological signs appeared, similar to ones seen recently over Denmark, “As harbingers preceding still the fates / And prologue to the omen coming on ...” (1.1.115-23). As if to confirm their hypothesis, the ghost appears again, and Horatio immediately demands of it, “If thou art privy to thy country’s fate, / Which happily foreknowing may avoid, Oh speak” (1.1.133-34). A clearer expression of the desire to predict and control would be hard to imagine.

But the spirit is frightened away by the crowing of the cock heralding dawn, and Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo are left behind to discuss what is said of spirits and to hypothesize about them and how to control them.

Horatio, breaking up the watch, now suggests that they impart what they have seen to Prince Hamlet, and he ends the scene by making another prediction: “This spirit dumb to us, will speak to him” (1.1.171). The watchers thus have, as men-scientists, made observations, formed theories, derived hypotheses, made predictions, have confirmed or disconfirmed them through tests, have revised their hypotheses and made new predictions. This pattern of hypothesis formation, prediction, and test, which is developed in the first scene before the first appearance of the protagonist will continue throughout the play. The construct theorist seems on firm ground in hypothesizing that Shakespeare, too, saw humans seeking to predict and control, predicating their actions on the way they anticipate events.

Another pattern, the importance of which will appear later, has also been established: Horatio, who is not a soldier but a friend to Prince Hamlet, has been invited to share the watch in order to see the apparition which the others have witnessed in order that he may “approve [test; try the goodness of] our eyes and speak to it” (1.1.28). This pattern of distrusting, to a greater or lesser degree, one’s own perceptions, of seeking confirmation of observations and conclusions from more than one observer, of being unsure what constitutes standards of evidence, is repeated over and over again throughout the play.

The audience must wait several scenes for a further investigation of the ghost, and this delay is largely taken up with Claudius’ and Gertrude’s speculation about the threat Fortinbras poses. Claudius attempts to subsume the constructs with which Fortinbras construes the state of Denmark:

*...young Fortinbras
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking of our late dear brother’s death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame,
Collegued with this dream of his advantage,*

*He hath not failed to pester us with message
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, with all bands of law,
To our most valiant brother ...*

(1.2.17-25)

But Claudius' construct system leads him to construe the situation more broadly and he predicts that "Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras," who is "impotent and bedrid," will suppress his nephew's warlike gestures toward Denmark when he hears of them, and Claudius sends emissaries to Norway to arrange with the king to control Fortinbras. The audience first sees Claudius, then, whatever evil may be in him, as a man of clear thought with prompt decision and action. His construct system later proves to be accurate in regard to Norway, for the emissaries return with news of the successful conclusion of their mission. The busy administrator-king, after dispatching his emissaries to Norway, gives his attention to Laertes who asks permission to leave Denmark and the home of his father Polonius, who is the king's Lord Chamberlain, to return to Paris.

Only when that business is efficiently disposed of does Claudius turn to Hamlet. His address to him reveals the present king's difficulty in construing his cousin-son/subject-successor, for he calls him "my cousin Hamlet, and my son ..." (1.2.64). Hamlet's first words reveal a subtle mind which is also experiencing difficulty in construing the uncle-father, for the sardonic bipolar construct Hamlet offers to the audience for the relationship is "A little more than kin, and a little less than kind" (1.2.65).

It becomes immediately clear that the major problem in construing reality which faces Claudius and Gertrude is what to make of the melancholy of their son-nephew/subject-heir Hamlet. Claudius' method of argument to Hamlet is to try to convince him that his predictive system has failed in only one small area – i.e., in relation to the *time* of the death of his father – and that he need only rectify his constructs in regard to this in order to find his way to felicity again. Claudius argues that one must predict that sooner or later one's father will die and that it is unreasonable of Hamlet to be so upset about the recent event. There is much talk in this scene of

"seeing" and "knowing" and "seeming," indicating that cognitive and epistemological questions are to be a major part of this play.

The principal question which arises for the audience as the play progresses is why Claudius and Gertrude do not wish Hamlet to return to Wittenberg as he wishes to do. The audience has just heard Claudius give Laertes permission to return to Paris; it would seem that if Claudius fears Hamlet's discovering the murder of his father he would hurry him away. The audience therefore must assume that Claudius predicts that no such thing will happen. Nor would it happen if it were not for the ghost. But it is clear that the supernatural is not a part of Claudius' construct system, and he cannot anticipate the return of his victim. It seems likely that Claudius and Gertrude wish Hamlet to remain in Denmark during this time of trouble because the prince is popular with the people and his presence signifies to them the unity and strength both of the royal family and of the country. Of course Hamlet must stay or there would be no play, but Shakespeare had to motivate his staying and the reason I have just suggested seems most likely to me. It is of course possible to entertain a darker theory, i.e., that Claudius and Gertrude, or at least Claudius, fear that Hamlet already knows that his father was murdered and believe that they must keep him under direct surveillance to prevent his masterminding a counter plot. Although there is little or no direct evidence in the play to support this hypothesis, there is also little to contradict it. A director who chooses to interpret the play on the basis of this view might give us a very intriguing production.

Hamlet reveals his construct system and the reason for his melancholy to the audience and at the same time brings them up to date on the recent events in Denmark in his "that this too too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy. The emergent poles of the constructs through which he views the world are 'weary,' 'stale,' 'flat,' and 'unprofitable.' The submerged poles seem to lie in that area of never-verbalized perfection for which Hamlet apparently yearns. It is clear that his disillusionment is due more to his mother's marriage to his uncle so soon after his father's death than to the death itself as Claudius wishes to believe – or at least wishes to make Hamlet be-

lieve. Hamlet obviously had not predicted that marriage, and clearly states how he construes the difference between his father and his uncle, i.e., as “Hyperion to a Satyr,” but he quickly adds, “I must hold my tongue” (1.2.140,159). At this point he has no concrete evidence of any wrongdoing, only an intuition and judgment that his mother's remarriage, although not illegal, is unethical and unfeeling.

But then Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo come to tell Hamlet that they have seen the dead king walk during the night watch and predict that the apparition will come again. Hamlet takes this as an omen and his first instinct as man-the-scientist is to state his constructs and offer a prediction: “My father's spirit in arms! All is not well. / I doubt some foul play ... Foul deeds will rise / though all the earth o'erwhelm them to men's eyes” (1/2/254-57). The rhyming form of the predictive words lends the certainty of closure to their message. At this point, because of the specter's being armed, Hamlet's prediction of evil-to-come is still related to the possibility of war with its attendant terror and destruction.

And yet again before we see the confrontation between Hamlet and his father's ghost, we are given even more information with which to construe the events and characters in the play and perfect our predictive systems. We now hear in Laertes' leave-taking speech to his sister Ophelia his appraisal of Hamlet's intentions toward her. Laertes, too, is involved in predicting – specifically in predicting Hamlet's behavior toward Ophelia. He hypothesizes that Hamlet's interest in her is transitory and predicts that Hamlet will desert her, for he must marry according to his station. Laertes warns her to be wary, “best safety lies in fear” (1.3.43).

And now, too, we meet Polonius and note that the advice he gives Laertes in his pompous list of precepts (a parody, it seems, of the advice given Euphues by the old gentleman of Naples) is predictively useless, unlike the concrete constructs Laertes has just shared with Ophelia. And yet, once Laertes is gone, we learn that Polonius can deal with the concrete. He, too, distrusts Hamlet's intentions toward Ophelia and orders her to see and talk with Hamlet no more. The audience can thus predict that Ophelia will, in obedience to her father and brother, now spurn

Hamlet's attentions and can also predict that Hamlet, not having enough information to construe the situation accurately, will see Ophelia's rejection of him as he already construes his mother's remarriage: as another instance (or replication as Kelly would call it) of the inconstancy of women. Indeed even before Ophelia's rejection of him, Hamlet has construed, and made a general statement of a construct based on his mother's behavior, “Frailty, thy name is woman!” (1.2.146).

Ophelia's action dictated by Laertes and Polonius is to validate his construct and the predictions he bases upon it.

Finally we come to the meeting between the spirit of the dead king and Prince Hamlet. While waiting for the appearance, Hamlet remarks sadly on the noisy revelry of the king and his court and points out that:

*This heavy headed revel east and west
Makes us traduced and taxed of other nations.
They clepe us drunkards and with swinish
phrase
Soil our addition; and indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed at
height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute.*

(1.4.17-22)

This is not just empty moralizing, nor is it just a lead-in to Hamlet's characterization of Claudius as one who bears within himself some “vicious mole of nature” (1.4.24) which will give rise to corruption; it is a statement of a prince's view of how his country is construed by other foreign powers. The theme of Denmark's place as a nation still holds the forefront of Hamlet's concern which is, up until he speaks to the ghost, political. His personal grief at this father's death and his mother's remarriage is at this time secondary to his concern for the nation ruled by Claudius and Gertrude to whom he gives his fealty out of national duty which overrides private unhappiness.

When Hamlet now sees the ghost he tries to construe it through several constructs of which both poles are emergent (verbalized): *Spirit of health vs. goblin damned* (1.4.40), *heaven-sent vs. hell-devoured*, *wicked vs. charitable* (1.4.41).

His first charge to the ghost is, “Let me not burst in ignorance,” and he demands to know “What may this mean, / That thou, dead corse again in complete steel, / revisits thus the glimpses of the moon” (1.4.54). The information Hamlet receives – that his father has been murdered by his uncle whom his mother has married – is blow enough, but, in addition to that, the ghost of the dead king charges Hamlet with the responsibility for avenging the murder against Claudius without harming Gertrude. It is this charge which provides the blow which shatters, for a time, Hamlet’s construct system and his ability to cope with events. He now sees that the interests of the state and his own personal grief are not separate. “O my prophetic soul!” (1.5.40) is his acknowledgment that what he half suspected and intuited – that is, what he predicted on the basis of preverbal constructs – when he said he must keep silent is now confirmed to the extent that he can trust the spirit.

But the specter’s validity, in spite of Ernest Jones obdurate assertion to the contrary, is certainly in question. Hamlet tells those who have watched with him and seen the apparition that “It is an honest ghost” (1.5.138); however, he is not confident enough of that construct to predicate irrevocable action upon its honesty, for we see him still seeking evidence of the murder of his father and Claudius’ responsibility for it when in act 2 the players arrive. Hamlet is all too aware of the opposite pole of his construct concerning the ghost and causes the players to play “The Murder of Gonzago” so that he may observe the king’s reaction to a reenactment of King Hamlet’s murder in order to determine for himself whether or not the ghost was indeed honest. In his “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I” soliloquy Hamlet expresses quite clearly the opposite pole of his *honest ghost* construct:

*The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil – and the devil hath power
T’assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps,
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me.*
(2.2.551-56)

And again Hamlet expresses his doubt about the

honesty of the ghost as he asks Horatio to watch the king’s reaction to the mousetrap play:

*Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan’s stithy.*
(3.2.70-74)

Hamlet’s encounter with the ghost has led him to hypothesize that his responsibilities for the welfare of the state, for the troubled soul of his dead father, and for the honor of the royal house through the wreaking of vengeance on his uncle who has murdered his father, seduced his mother, and usurped the throne are now joined.

The often asked questions: why does Hamlet delay vengeance? or, does Hamlet delay vengeance? can be answered in a new way by construct theory. Since Hamlet construes the ghost and the information it gives him through a bipolar construct, and since Hamlet cannot immediately move from this construct to a higher level construct, he can do no more at this time than rattle back and forth in the slot between the two ends of his construct relevant to the ghost. When he is at the *honest ghost* end of the construct, he believes what the spirit has told him and feels that vengeance is the goal he must seek, but before he can do anything about it he slides away to the opposite end of the construct *ghost as devil sent to damn*. At that end of the construct he knows he should not act without further evidence and doubts the ghost almost as much as he doubts Claudius. Kelly sees this kind of movement as superficial and points out that the person caught up in such a “contrast reconstruction” is likely to engage in “seesaw behavior” ad infinitum (Kelly 1955, 2:938). Hamlet recognizes his need to be sure which pole of the construct relevant to the ghost accords with reality. The need to be sure that he construes reality correctly and that the vengeance that seems to be required is indeed just leaves his construct system in shreds and largely inoperable.

But even with his construct system in shreds, Hamlet must try to predict and control. He swears his witnesses to secrecy, predicting that they may be tempted to seem wise when he puts

on the “antic disposition” he intends to employ. He therefore forces them to swear that they will pretend to no knowledge of him at all. It is the most that he can do at that moment, for he must have time to reorganize his construct system.

I have taken so long to describe in detail the events of act 1 precisely because those events, with the exception of Hamlet’s encounter with the ghost, are judged relatively unimportant – indeed so unimportant that they are barely perceived – in the Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet*. In that view the important elements are the father-son relationship and the murder-incest theme of the play which cannot be discerned until after we have seen Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet interacting in a later scene, and after the ghost has given Hamlet his message. Unfortunately, modern directors, probably influenced by the psychoanalytic reading of the play which has become so popular, tend to hurry through or even cut parts of the first act. It is as though critics and directors believe that Shakespeare started his play too soon, i.e., not *in medias res*. Lines are rushed and action hurried in too many productions; certain “unnecessary” or “irrelevant” speeches or scenes are omitted in some productions in order to cut playing time and bring the play more into line with the popular psychoanalytic view of *Hamlet*. Even when the director’s reading is not overtly psychoanalytic, the influence seems to operate. Lest the reader think I am exaggerating the abridgment of *Hamlet* in many recent productions, I offer the following excerpt from Gordon Ross Smith’s account of “The McCarter Theater Company’s *Hamlet*” (Princeton New Jersey, October 27–November 14, 1982). This account begins, “This production of *Hamlet* was one of the most effective I have ever seen ...” In the third paragraph, however, after talking about Hamlet as romantic hero, Mr. Smith says:

In this production the text has been cut to three hours playing time. All references to Fortinbras and Norway have been cut. Conversations with Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Horatio and Osric have been heavily cut as well, and so also the bedroom scene, the long conspiratorial interview of Claudius and Laertes, and the watches on the platform, including the mole of

nature speech. But the four great soliloquies are retained, and all the best passages of poetry in those scenes which have been reduced. The result is a much faster-moving, unencumbered plot that keeps its emphasis upon emotion.

(Smith, 1982, 106-08)

The construct theorist could only say that it may be an “effective” production, but it is not Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. And with so much of the plot eliminated, is the emotion which is expressed valid?

To the Kellyan critic the ideal and constructs of this first act regarding Norway and Fortinbras as well as the watches on the platform do not encumber the plot but are absolutely essential to the rest of the play. At the end of an uncut act 1 the audience knows that Denmark is in danger of war from without and corruption from within; that Hamlet is the only true hope, but that he, disillusioned by his mother’s desertion to Claudius, is soon to be rejected by Ophelia because his intentions are misconstrued by her brother and father. His main task seems to him to be to determine the validity of the ghost’s message. If that message is true, then his task must become one of setting things right through revenge.

Hamlet trusts no one at this point except Horatio and even seems to qualify his trust in him. Hamlet, unsure of reality, faces the odds alone. Even the first audience could not have helped predicting that he would lose the game he finds himself forced to play, but they must have been, as we are, intrigued by the steps he takes to realize catastrophe.

POLONIUS

The Kellyan interpretation of Hamlet would not only give greater attention to the human need to construe, predict and control in general and to the problems of Denmark and the need to predict national fortunes in particular, it would construe Polonius as a far more important and sinister character than he is usually thought to be. Silly old fool that he may appear, Polonius sets the style of both petty and grand intrigue in the court. In spite of Ernest Jones’ belief that Hamlet sees Polonius as a fool and feels no need to re-

strain his hostility against him because there is no family tie between them (Jones, 1954 [1910], 98), the construct theorist will see that Polonius is not without power and will be aware that even Prince Hamlet cannot shake off the influence of Polonius and indeed falls into the same style of testing and attempting to validate hypotheses through keyhole listening and indirectly manipulating others in order to elicit evidence. Part of Hamlet's self-disgust may well lie in his recognition that he is more like Polonius than he would like to admit. It is in fact – thanks to Polonius and the style of intrigue that he has established – not the realistic dangers themselves which destroy the royal house of Denmark but the “accidental judgments,” the use of “cunning and forc'd cause,” and the “purposes mistook” which have “fallen on the inventors' heads” (5.2.399-64).

Significantly we see Polonius playing at intrigue as act 2 begins. He is – in that scene which seemed to T. S. Eliot (Eliot, 1932, 46-50) so unrelated to the rest of the play – making explicit to the audience his preferred ways of obtaining information, for he is sending his envoy Reynaldo to spy on his son Laertes to determine whether that young man is engaging in “gaming,” “drinking, fencing, swearing / Quarrelling, drabbing” (2.1.24-26), while away in Paris. He teaches the envoy-spy how to entrap and lead witnesses in order to elicit intelligence about Laertes' activities:

*See you now
Your bait of falsehood take this carp of truth,
and thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bias,
By indirections find directions out.
So, by my former lecture and advice,
Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?
(2.1.60-66)*

He has just dispatched the spy when Ophelia comes to him with the news that Hamlet has visited her in a distraught state, “as if loosed out of hell to speak horrors” (2.1.81-82). The audience, knowing Hamlet's view of the inconstancy of women and his intention to put on an antic disposition (which Ophelia and Polonius have no knowledge of) sees what is happening. A con-

struct theorist hearing Ophelia describe how Hamlet holds her by the wrist and “falls to such perusal of my face / As he would draw it” (2.1.88-89) would very likely hypothesize that Hamlet is trying to decide whether or not he can trust her, but Polonius immediately misunderstands the situation and, using the only construct he has with which to construe it, decides that Hamlet is mad with love for Ophelia.

Ironically, Polonius herein seems to offer a pattern of misinterpretation to Freud, and other psychoanalytic critics who follow his reading, for just as Polonius, using the only construct he has – an impoverished one at that – jumps to the conclusion that Hamlet is sick with love, Freud, Jones, and Lacan using the only constructs which they possess with which to construe Hamlet, rush to the conclusion that he is psychoneurotic because of his oedipal sexual conflict or that he is obsessed by the *phallus* [*Ophelia* – *O phallos*, etc.,etc].

At any rate, Polonius now has an hypothesis to offer Claudius – one that will be welcome to him, since it seems to indicate that Hamlet does not suspect the murder of his father by Claudius which, we must now conjecture, Polonius may be privy to. If I were directing the play I would certainly see that it was played as if Polonius had that guilty knowledge of the former king's death, for Polonius would become a much more dramatically interesting character than the silly old fool the psychoanalytic critics, among others, make him out to be.

Acting upon Polonius' construction of the situation, Claudius and Polonius can now set up a ‘laboratory’ test of their hypothesis that Hamlet is mad with love for Ophelia by eavesdropping on a confrontation which they plan between the melancholy prince and the Lord Chamberlain's daughter. Thus, a nice balance is achieved between act 2, scene 1 in which Polonius uses an envoy to create intelligence about his son and act 2, scene 2 in which he uses his daughter as bait for “lawful espials,” as Claudius calls the method (3.1.32), to create intelligence about Hamlet. Seen in this way, Polonius' scene with Reynaldo is an integral part of the structure of the play, an event which must be construed and its similarity to other events abstracted. We learn to construe Polonius through this scene and can better pre-

dict his behavior toward Ophelia and Hamlet because of it. Thus it reveals character and is not, as Eliot seems to have believed, merely gratuitous.

HAMLET'S MADNESS

Hamlet in the meantime has chosen to assume his antic disposition – a facade of madness used, from the construct point of view, to give him time to rebuild his construct system. His assumed madness will allow him, he hopes, to catch people off guard. He can then, à la Polonius, “by indirections find directions out,” and observe how others react so that he can form some conclusions about them.

It is important from a Kellyan point of view to proceed through the play scene by scene as Shakespeare wrote it, for, as Kelly said, “time provides the ultimate bond in all relationships” (Kelly, 1955,1:6). We develop our systems by construing the replications of events through time. We thus need to see how the characters in the play as well as the audience construe and abstract replications from the incidents of the plot and what they predict on the basis of their replications. Therefore, before we consider the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia, we must construe the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and try to understand their relationship to Claudius and Gertrude and to Hamlet, and also note, in its proper place, the return of the emissaries from Norway with the news that Norway’s king has reacted as Claudius predicted he would.

Claudius is clear enough in telling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern why he has sent for them, and, since Gertrude too is present to welcome them, we can assume that the king speaks for her as well when he says,

*Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation – so call it,
Sith nor th' exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father's death, that thus hath put
him
So much from th' understanding of himself,*

I cannot dream of.

(2.2.2-10)

The audience is entitled to suspect, however, that Claudius by now does indeed fear that Hamlet may suspect the manner of his father’s death and hopes that he may employ Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to “by indirection find direction out” as Polonius has put it. Claudius says that they have sent for them to “draw [Hamlet] onto pleasure,” but the most important part of their task is clearly to be to “glean / Whether aught to us unknown afflicts him thus” (2.2.15-18).

Gertrude has said in greeting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that she is sure that “two men there is not living / To whom he more adheres” (2.2.20-21). If we believe that she construes accurately and tells the truth as she sees it, we will predict that Hamlet will welcome his two old friends with joy and will confide in them, but before we can see whether our prediction is validated or not, we, like Claudius and Gertrude, must deal with Polonius and the ambassadors who have returned from Norway.

The ambassadors bring the news that the king of Norway has suppressed his nephew’s levies and has rebuked Fortinbras and has set him against Poland instead of against Denmark. That matter settled in a manner which leads Claudius himself and the audience to view the Danish king as one who construes and predicts well, Polonius can now turn to his news that Hamlet is mad with love for Ophelia. The letter from Hamlet to Ophelia which he reads aloud to the king and queen does seem to indicate that Hamlet is, or has been, in love with her. When Polonius tells them that he has instructed Ophelia not to see or communicate with Hamlet, the king and queen, somewhat doubtfully it seems, admit that it may be as Polonius believes – that Hamlet’s madness has resulted from his unrequited love for Ophelia. Polonius, sensing their doubt, tests their construing of his own reliability:

*Hath there been such a time, I'd fain know that,
That I have positively said, 'tis so,
When it proved otherwise?*

When the king admits that he cannot remember an instance of Polonius’ being wrong and asks

how they may test his hypothesis, Polonius proposes that they arrange a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia while Polonius and the king hide behind an arras to mark the encounter. Polonius is even willing to make a jocular bet on his prediction, so sure is he:

... if he love her not,
And be not from his reason fallen thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a farm and carters.

Just as the king agrees to try the scheme, Hamlet enters, reading a book. We can, if we like, suspect that he has heard part of the conversation, but whether he has or not, he is clearly suspicious of Polonius. When Polonius asks Hamlet if he knows him, Hamlet answers that he is a fishmonger. When Polonius denies that calling, Hamlet counters with “Then I would you were so honest a man” (2.2.174). When we consider that fishmongers are notorious for swearing that their wares are fresh when they are not, we can see the depths of Hamlet’s skepticism about Polonius. Hamlet reveals so many cogent constructs in riddles while keeping up his “antic disposition” that even Polonius has to realize that “Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t” (2.2.200).

One of the points that encourages Polonius, however, is Hamlet’s “harping on his daughter.” Like Freud, Jones and Lacan, Polonius can see in Hamlet’s remarks about Polonius’ daughter (“Let her not walk i’th sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive – Friend, look to’t” [2.2.182-83]) only sexual aberration, obsession and compulsion, and not what the sexual image conceals through Hamlet’s adroit *double entendre* which reverses the usual process of the trope and states in apparently risqué sexual terms the even more indecent manipulation and use of Ophelia by her father and the king. The construct theorist, in contrast to the psychoanalytic theorist, might interpret Hamlet’s trope about conception in this manner: Let Ophelia not walk in enlightenment (the sun) or she may understand (conceive) what is going on in your and the king’s exploitation of her. Look to it! Since Hamlet’s feelings for Ophelia have been both romantic and sexual it is no wonder

that a sexual image occurs to him. The construct theorist is quite willing to construe people and characters under constructs of sexuality but insists that other constructs also may be necessary in order to understand the character or person more fully.

Hamlet in his conversation with Polonius takes a great risk of revealing that he is not mad; he ventures very close to manifesting his sanity to Polonius but gambles that he knows the old man’s construct system well enough to draw him out and still defeat Polonius’ probing of his assumed love-madness. Polonius unconsciously takes up Hamlet’s sexual imagery, since it seems to fit in with what he wants to believe, when he says in his aside to the audience, “How *pregnant* sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be *delivered of* [italics mine]. I will leave him, and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter” (2.2.203-07).

But before the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia, the audience must deal with Hamlet’s encounter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Shakespeare has cleverly used the structure of his play both to allow us to predict, and to throw us off balance. In this respect his plot is surely a close representation of life, for he allows us to construe characters in situations, form some constructs about them, make some predictions about them and then makes us wait, just as we must often do in real life, to test those predictions. The scenes are cleverly interwoven in order to separate prediction from validation. Just as we begin to construe the relationship between Polonius and Hamlet and Hamlet and Ophelia we are forced to reconsider the predictions we made about how Hamlet would greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter just as Polonius is about to exit, it seems that Hamlet, in accordance with the queen’s prediction, will greet them with sincere happiness to see them. When Hamlet asks, “How do you both?” Guildenstern clearly tries to identify with Hamlet. He seems to predict that it would not do to appear too happy or afford too much contrast to the reputedly melancholy prince, and so he answers, “Happy in that we are not over-happy;

On Fortune's cap we are not the very button" (2.2.220-21).

As the conversation continues, complete with sexual puns and pseudo-jolly-good-fellowship, Hamlet questions them more in particular about why they have come to "prison" in Denmark. When they reply that it does not seem a prison to them, Hamlet answers as many construct theorists might, "Why then, 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison" (2.2.239-40). (Or as George Kelly said, "Because he can represent the environment, he can place alternative construction upon it and, indeed, do something about it if it doesn't suit him. To the living creature then, the universe is real, but it is not inexorable unless he chooses to construe it that way" [Kelly, 1955, 1:8]). When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern insist that they have come only to visit Hamlet, he becomes more specific, "Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come, deal justly with me. Come, come. Nay, speak" (2.2.261-62). When they still evade his question, Hamlet states his construction of their visit: "You were sent for – and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour. I know the good king and queen have sent for you" (2.2.264-67).

Finally they confess that they were sent for. And like a true construct theorist again, Hamlet states his interpretation of their visit, "I will tell you why. So shall my anticipation prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather" (2.2.278-79). Hamlet tells them of his melancholy; they to cheer him tell him that a troupe of players are on their way to the castle. Just before Polonius comes to announce the arrival of the players, Hamlet, on impulse it seems, tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, " – but my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived ... I am but mad north-northwest. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw" (2.2.344-48). Does he speak on impulse, or is he ready to have word get back to the king and queen that his madness is feigned? We must reserve judgment and wait for more evidence.

Hamlet's welcome to the players is clearly sincere, and he seizes the opportunity to set the

trap for the "conscience of the king" by having the players play "The Murder of Gonzago," so that he can watch the king's reaction to a re-enactment of the former king's murder by his brother. Hamlet's "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I" soliloquy which is usually cited as evidence of Hamlet's disgust at his delay in avenging his father's murder, must be examined carefully by the construct theorist. It comes just after Hamlet has instructed Polonius to "see the players well bestowed." When Polonius answers that he will use them according to their desert, Hamlet says,

"God's bodkin man, much better. Use every man after his desert and who shall scape whipping? Use them after your own honour and dignity; the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty."

(2.2.485-88)

Hamlet, it seems, is trying to follow his own advice. The construct theorist begins to suspect that Hamlet is behaving, or trying to behave, toward Claudius and Gertrude, toward Polonius and Ophelia, and toward Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as well, with a strange kind of hostility – a hostility that is well understood from a Kellyan point of view, for he is indeed trying to extort from these people in his life validation for a prediction that has already failed (Kelly, 1955 1:510-14). Hamlet, who wants to be a good and just man – a man who at least tries to use people according to his honour and dignity and not according to their failings – is trying to extort goodness, loyalty, and honesty from those whose frailty, pride, arrogance, or evil make it impossible for them to validate Hamlet's wishful prediction of their behavior. In the construct theorist's view of *Hamlet*, the protagonist prince does not delay because he cannot bring himself to punish the man who has done the evil he unconsciously wanted to do, but because he cannot bear to cut off all hope of validation of his prediction of goodness which has failed. Although his prophetic soul tells him otherwise, he hopes to be proved wrong in his suspicions of evil and proved right in his hopes for redemption of those who have erred. He does indeed doubt the ghost and in having the mousetrap play performed

hopes to settle his doubts that the ghost abuses him to damn him. Hamlet in this soliloquy has rattled to the *honest ghost* end of his construct about the apparition and is thinking in terms of the ghost's reliability, although only moments before at the *devil sent to damn* end of the construct, realizing that he is not sure of the reality of the situation, he has arranged the mousetrap play in order to prove to himself that Claudius is guilty as the ghost says he is. Even at the *honest ghost* end of the construct where vengeance seems appropriate, Hamlet cannot forget what it feels like to be at the other end of the construct, and since this construct is subordinate to the construct which determines his treating others according to his own honour and dignity rather than according to their deserts, he cannot and will not act vengefully unless and until further evidence of the King's treachery changes the structure of his construct System.

The king now, in talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, seems no longer to doubt that Hamlet is feigning madness. We may assume that they have told him that Hamlet has said that he is mad only north-north west, for at the beginning of act 3 the king says to them, "And can you by no drift of circumstance / get from him why he puts on this confusion, / Grating so harshly all his days of quiet / with turbulent and dangerous lunacy?" (3.1.1-4). Receiving no definitive answer from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the king sends them back to Hamlet to encourage him to enjoy the players, and turns to Polonius and his plot to eavesdrop on Hamlet and Ophelia.

Just before the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia, the audience finds Hamlet alone and hears his famous "to be or not to be" soliloquy. George Kelly commented on this passage at length, exploring whether Hamlet was involved in a Creativity Cycle (which is characterized by loosely organized constructs which might lead to an assortment of predictions but ends with tightening of construction and a validated prediction) or in a Circumspection-Preemption-Control Cycle (which involves propositional thinking, consideration of an element under one superordinate construct rather than under many, and a control choice which leads the individual into action). Kelly's view is that Hamlet is involved in both

types of cycle but is unable to complete either of them (Kelly 1955, 2:1061-63).

Kelly notes in Hamlet's need to arrange the mousetrap play, his inability to articulate his problem clearly in words. Referring to his Choice Corollary, Kelly points out that although Hamlet moves toward an elaborative choice he retreats into circumspection and fails to take action early in the play. Kelly sees Hamlet, however, moving toward a tightening of his constructs which will lead him into impulsive action. Turning from Hamlet to clinical theory, Kelly concludes that although tightening of one's constructs is necessary to action, if such action is premature it may lead to disastrous results (Kelly, 1955, 2:1063). And indeed so it is with Hamlet, as we shall see when we come to the scene in which Hamlet stabs Polonius as he hides behind the arras in Gertrude's bedroom.

Although Kelly does not discuss the fact that the action of the mousetrap play is to be presented in dumb show before it is presented with dialogue, it is clear from a construct view that Hamlet is dealing with preverbal constructs and that he is hoping somehow to elicit preverbal constructs from those who witness the dumb show before the mousetrap play begins. We suspect that Hamlet senses that the mime performance that begins the play can, perhaps more clearly than the lines he is to insert in the play, clarify other issues for him as well as the issue of the king's guilt.

Hamlet's attempt to order his construct system in the "to be or not to be" soliloquy is interrupted by the arrival of Ophelia, whom Hamlet apparently still thinks of hopefully and affectionately, for when he sees her coming he says to himself, "The fair Ophelia. – Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remembered" (3.1.89-90). As the interview progresses, however, it becomes clear to Hamlet that he cannot extort from Ophelia the loyalty he desires and by the end of the interview he construes her no longer as *nymph* but as *breeder of sinners* or as a *wanton*.

The audience is far better acquainted with Hamlet's construct system than with Ophelia's when their meeting takes place in act 3, scene 2. Not only have we followed Hamlet closely throughout the play but we have his "To be or

not to be” soliloquy just before the meeting. We would do well, however, to pause a moment to consider what constructs Ophelia must bring with her. Perhaps Ophelia appears so inane and/or mindlessly wanton in so many productions, precisely because no one has stopped to consider what she must be thinking or feeling at this moment; or if anyone has, it seems he has considered only her sex life and little else. The construct theorist/critic, however, will consider that Ophelia has been through a rather disconcerting time lately. The death of King Hamlet certainly would have distressed her, and she must have been confused by the queen’s marriage to her former brother-in-law. Ophelia’s own brother Laertes has come home from France for the king’s funeral and the wedding of the new king and queen and has no doubt upset her daily schedule, and has even taken it upon himself to give her big-brotherly advice. Hamlet has come home from Wittenberg and has wooed her, but has then descended into a strange melancholy which she does not understand. Her father has reinforced her brother’s doubts about Hamlet’s intentions toward her and has told her to have nothing to do with the prince, and Hamlet has come to her at least once in a condition which leads her to doubt his sanity. Now her father and the king are using her as a decoy and she knows that they will be seeing and hearing all that passes between her and Hamlet. She is aware of her father’s theory that it is Hamlet’s love for her that has driven him mad and she must feel a strange mixture of guilt, power, and helplessness about all this. To crown it all, the queen has just said to her,

*And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet’s wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours.*
(3.1.39-42)

Ophelia must be carrying a terrible burden of responsibility and must be having a very difficult time in construing the tangled affairs in which she finds herself and in sorting out her loyalties. How is she to act towards Hamlet to be fair to

him, obedient to her father and the king, and compliant to the queen’s wishes? And to make matters worse, it seems to the audience that Hamlet knows or at least suspects that the king and Polonius are conducting one of their “lawful espials,” and plans to use this occasion as a test of Ophelia’s loyalty to him while maintaining his facade of madness.

Hamlet upsets Ophelia’s precarious balance immediately, for when she tries to return certain “remembrances” to him he denies that he ever gave her anything. She insists that he knows that he did, and adds – rather wistfully – “And with them words of so sweet breath composed / As made the things more rich ...” (3.1.97-99). Hamlet may be moved, he may simply want to continue with his test, but he asks “... are you honest?” (3.1.103). It has often been remarked by critics that the word *honest* in Elizabethan times carried the connotation of chastity, but there is no doubt that it also carried the meaning that we understand most commonly today – that is a quality of being honorable and especially being sincere, candid and truthful. Hamlet, it seems, chooses again to speak in *double entendre*, using sexual imagery to convey his deeper meaning. Hamlet seems to be trying to give Ophelia a chance to be truthful and candid with him. When she does not seem to understand he rephrases the question, asking “Are you fair?” (3.1.105). *Fair* has a double meaning too. It can mean *good to look upon* or, like *honest*, can mean *truthful* and *just*. Ophelia still does not understand or pretends not to understand what Hamlet is asking. He tries again, “... if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty” (3.1.107-08). And still Ophelia parries; knowing that the king and her father are listening, the best she can offer is the rhetorical question, “could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?” (3.1.110). She is after all her father’s daughter.

But Hamlet has given her her chance to indicate that she knows she is being used as a decoy and she has failed the test. If she were to so much as lift an eyebrow to indicate the presence of the king and Polonius, Hamlet could trust her and think her honest and fair in all senses of those words, but he sees it is not to be and regretfully says, “Ay truly, for the power of beauty

will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once” (3.1.111-14).

Hamlet has tried to use Ophelia according to his honor and dignity but she has refused to be so honored. And, frustrated in his attempt to gain Ophelia’s loyalty, hostilely trying to coerce her to validate his prediction concerning her which has already failed, he goes further and says, “I loved you not.” Ophelia’s “I was the more deceived” (3.1.118), conveys something of a sad and confused dignity, for the audience understands, if Hamlet does not, that poor Ophelia is in an impossible situation and that her construct system is far more in shreds than Hamlet’s.

And now when Hamlet again begins to speak we must decide if he is using *double entendre* or if he means to be taken literally when he says “Get thee to a nunnery” (3.1.119). As in the case of the word *honest*, critics have been fond of pointing out that the word *nunnery* often was used in Elizabethan times to mean its exact opposite – *brothel* (Jones, 1954 [1910], , 97). I believe that Hamlet means here just what he says and that from this point to the end of the scene he speaks quite literally in asking, “Why would thou be a breeder of sinners?” And after analyzing his own faults and stating his bitter pessimism about male/female relationships, he suddenly demands, “Where’s your father?” There is no reason for Hamlet to ask, unless he is again testing Ophelia to see if directly confronted she will be honest and fair. Again she fails the test for she answers, “At home, my lord.” Hamlet answers, “Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in’s own house. Farewell.” When Ophelia cries, “O, help him sweet heavens!” (3.1.128-29), he continues, “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. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them” (3.1.131-35). Ernest Jones has said that Hamlet childishly sees women in general and Ophelia in particular either as madonna or whore (Jones, 1954 [1910], 97); we can agree with him at least

in so far as saying that that is certainly one bipolar construct which Hamlet applies to women. We can hypothesize that Hamlet’s use of the word *nunnery* may indicate that he is trying to construe Ophelia under one or the other of the poles of that construct, but the construct does not carry for Hamlet an exclusively sexual meaning, although that too is included. Hamlet looks to both his mother and Ophelia for some kind of loyalty, a love that includes a personal allegiance to him, a steadfastness of concern, but they, troubled by conflicting loyalties, are unable to give him what he seeks.

Ophelia’s “Oh what a noble mind is here o’erthrown!” (3.1.144) has a rich ironic meaning for the audience, for, although Ophelia really believes Hamlet to be mad – what else can the poor girl think, not understanding that Hamlet knows her father and Polonius are hidden, not understanding his *double entendre* tropes – the Kellyan critic sees that Hamlet’s nobility is lessened (o’erthrown) by his adopting Polonius’ devious methods which Hamlet despises and yet uses. Indeed, he has just set the trap with the players to “catch the conscience of the King.” In accordance with the established pattern, he cannot trust his own perceptions but must enlist Horatio to check his observations of Claudius’ reaction to the “Murder of Gonzago” which the players are to play out before the king.

But though he has tried to maintain his cover of madness, and has succeeded with Ophelia, Hamlet has revealed himself to Claudius who now exclaims to Polonius “Love? His affections do not that way tend; / Nor what he spake, though it lack’d form a little, / Was not like madness” (3.1.156-58). And Claudius, a man who construes reality with a high degree of accuracy, determines to send Hamlet to England, ostensibly to collect Denmark’s neglected tribute but in fact to be executed. Polonius, however, still is convinced that the origin of Hamlet’s grief has sprung from neglected love (the construct theorist would agree but not in Polonius’ sense of the word *love*), and in order to test his construct sets up the next turn of the plot by requesting that after the play the queen call Hamlet to her apartment and “entreat him to show his grief” (3.1.-176-77), while Polonius hides behind the arras to overhear their conversation. Again

Shakespeare has used structure as well as content to force the audience to predict what will happen and wait for a validation of their predictions, for the mousetrap play intervenes and we must test our hypotheses concerning that before we see what happens between Hamlet, his mother, and the spying Polonius.

It is Hamlet's turn to watch the king who reacts during the mousetrap play as Hamlet has predicted. Horatio, alerted to the trap, confirms Hamlet's judgment of the king's guilty response. Hamlet now believes the ghost, and says, "O good Horatio, I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound" (3.2.260-61). The individual reader or member of the audience must now predict whether or not Hamlet will construe events from now on under the *honest ghost* pole of his construct, suspending or submerging the *devil sent to damn* pole, or whether he will again slide to that other end of his construct.

Hamlet is still exulting over the validation of his prediction concerning the king's reaction to the mousetrap play when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come to convey the queen's command that Hamlet come to her. When Rosencrantz further seeks to do the king's bidding and questions Hamlet about "the cause of his distemper," there occurs a scene that strikes delight into the heart of the construct theorist/critic for Hamlet picks up a recorder and tells Guildenstern to play upon it. When he protests that he cannot, Hamlet says,

Why look you now how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass – and there is much music, excellent voice in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be play'd on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.

(3.2.329-36)

Hamlet, construing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at a higher level than he has been construed, expresses his resentment that they have tried to do the same to him and articulates here, in figurative language and in action, precisely what George Kelly expresses in his Sociality

Corollary (Kelly, 1955, 1:95-102). Furthermore Hamlet has revealed his sanity, has put aside his mask of madness since he has learned from the mousetrap play that the ghost did not lie. Hamlet is ready to act.

When Polonius enters to remind Hamlet that the queen is waiting for him, Hamlet baits Polonius into agreeing that a cloud he points out is shaped first like a camel, then like a weasel, and finally like a whale, but we suspect that Hamlet's taunting of the old man is nothing more than a rather hostile brand of teasing, for his need to dissemble madness at this point is past. Left alone, he communicates his resolve to the audience; he is now sure of the king's guilt; he is ready to move against him. "Now could I drink hot blood, / And do such bitter business as the day / Would quake to look on" (3.2.35 1-53). But first he must go to his mother. In regard to her he says, "Let me be cruel, not unnatural: / I will speak daggers to her but use none." (3.2.357-58)

But again we must be patient and return to the king and his plotting with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and, that finished, hear Polonius tell the king that he is going to the queen's apartment to hide behind the arras since, "'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother, / Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear / The speech of vantage" (3.3.31-33). And then we see the king at his prayers. In his one soliloquy, the king confesses to the audience his guilt, and communicates his clear realization that he cannot be forgiven his sins, since he retains those effects for which he did the murder – "My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen" (3.3.55). Evil though he is, Claudius does not deceive himself about his evil. Here is no denial, no unconscious defense of rationalization; no hiding from reality in his unconscious as we would expect if Shakespeare agreed with Freud and Jones about the repressed unconscious. And his honest attempt to face his guilt in prayer saves the king's life for the moment at least but dooms Polonius, for Hamlet seeing Claudius at prayer decides not to kill him and risk sending him directly to heaven but wait until he is in sin, so that his soul will go to hell.

Psychoanalytic critics have made much of this 'delay' of Hamlet's, but from a construct

point of view there is no delay to be explained at this point. Hamlet was not sure until he saw the king's reaction to the mousetrap play that the ghost had told him the truth about Claudius. Now he is ready to "drink hot blood," but not to send Claudius straight to heaven. Freud and Jones are willing to insist that their view of Hamlet's motivation is the only correct one; the construct theorist is ready to predict that as soon as Hamlet finds the king in a damning situation from which his death will dispatch him to hell, he will strike to kill.

Hamlet validates our prediction, for when he comes to his mother's apartment and begins his emotional and psychological struggle with her for her allegiance, he soon becomes aware that someone lurks behind the arras. Who would it be but the king in the queen's bedroom? The construct theorist will assume that Hamlet knew that both the king and Polonius were hidden in order to spy on the meeting they had arranged between him and Ophelia, but Polonius' daughter was involved in that. It is reasonable to suspect now, only the king. The argument that the king has not had time to come to the queen's room (Jones, 1954 [1910], 37) will not wash. Dramatic time is very hard to pin down. The change of scene indicates a passage of time but it is difficult to tell how much time has passed. We also do not know the architectural plan of the castle and what short cuts might be available to Claudius that might bring him to Gertrude's room before Hamlet's arrival. But even if Hamlet, upon reflection might realize that it could not be the king behind the arras, his next guess would no doubt be Rosencrantz or Guildenstern or both. But there is not time for him to be, as Kelly would say, circum-spective. He acts instinctively with tightened construct. After stabbing through the drapery with his sword, when he hears Polonius' voice cry "Oh, I am slain!" (3.4.25) and before he sees the old man, Hamlet can only ask in answer to his mother's "Oh me, what has thou done?" "Nay I know not, is it the king?" (3.4.25-26). He clearly still hopes it is, although Polonius' voice, not quite recognized, has caused him to doubt that it is the king. When Polonius' body is revealed, Hamlet's "I took thee for thy better" (3.4.32) leaves little doubt that he has expected the king, though we cannot neglect the double

meaning of the line. Hamlet, who has learned his own style and strategy from Polonius, although he has at times construed him through a construct one end of which was *fool*, would not have expected Polonius to make such a strategic error.

In view of Hamlet's striking through the arras at what he thinks is the king, the construct theorist can say that Hamlet's alleged delay in wreaking vengeance on the king is clearly far more the construct of psychoanalytically oriented critics than an element of Shakespeare's play, for had Claudius been in Polonius' place where Hamlet thought he was he would now be dead, and Shakespeare would have had to write a very different end to his play. The construct theorist/critic will make a prediction from the incident of Hamlet's killing the wrong person, however. He/she will look at Hamlet's rash act and predict that Hamlet will move more cautiously in the future, and perhaps now *will* delay action because he must construe Polonius' death as a disaster, not only for himself and his plans but for Ophelia whom, say what he will, Hamlet once loved and still regrets.

The construct theorist is entitled to believe that Hamlet, as Shakespeare created him, must have deep regret over his killing of Polonius, for, in spite of the fact that his actions must have seemed malignant to others because of his hostile attempts to extort from them the kind of virtuous behavior he desires, he still desires to, and tries to, use people according to his own honor and dignity rather than according to their deserts as he sees them. Hamlet must construe Polonius' death as a serious mistake and must predict from it that rash action is likely to lead to further mistakes. Hamlet will thus err in future through an excess of *sophrosyne* and not through *hubris*. Hamlet has violated the rights of Polonius by taking his life and this seems to be the one incident of *hubris* on Hamlet's part in the play.

The construct theorist is likely to believe that, in spite of his rueful view of the event, Hamlet would construe the accidental nature of Polonius' death as more regrettable than the fact that he has killed the old man. We might even have reason to believe that he may feel – because of his stupidly rash intrusion into Hamlet's affairs – that Polonius deserved to be killed but that Hamlet did not deserve to be the instrument of his

death. Hamlet does not repent of his treatment of Ophelia, for he offered her a chance to be honest with him, and he does not in a later scene regret sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, for there is no mistake about the fact that they have betrayed him willingly and knowingly. They have given up their rights to be treated as honorable men; Hamlet has not taken away those rights arbitrarily, and Hamlet has warned them in the scene in which he invites them to play upon the pipe as they have tried to play upon him that he will brook no further such attempts. He has thus treated them and has treated Ophelia according to *his* sense of honor. Hamlet has issued no such warning to Polonius, however, and has construed him, at one end of his construct, as an annoying old dotard even while at the other end he saw him as a skilled Lord Chamberlain and imitated his methods. We can now predict that Hamlet will be prudent indeed and will try to avoid any action of which he cannot foresee the outcome. He will, however, continue to try to extort goodness from those who have invalidated his predictions of goodness in the past.

And Hamlet turns immediately from Polonius' body to his mother and redoubles his efforts to extort virtue from her. At the beginning of the interview with Gertrude, Hamlet plays word games with his mother. When she begins by saying "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended [meaning Claudius]," he counters with "Mother, you have my father much offended [meaning the dead King Hamlet]." When she chides his seeming impertinence with "Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue," he parries with "Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue" (3.4.9-12). His hostility – that Kellyan hostility that would extort virtue from the queen – is mistaken by Gertrude for another more commonly understood type of hostility that seems to intend her personal injury, and her fear that Hamlet means to murder her, and her cries for help call forth the movement from Polonius that ends in his death. When Hamlet sees that he has killed Polonius, however, he gives up his word games and his ironic jeering and becomes quite direct and serious.

Psychoanalytic theorists see this scene as the epitome of seductive incestuous love between Gertrude and Hamlet. Adlerian critics would see

it as the unhealthy relationship of a spoiled only son to his too indulgent mother. Construct theorists can easily admit that the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude may include, as Kelly said, "vaguely incestuous" feelings (though I personally reject that interpretation); they can understand, too, that Hamlet, once secure in his position as only son of the reigning monarch and apple of his mother's eye, may be feeling a spoiled child's jealousy over his mother's recent re-marriage, but those perceptions would only enrich the primary construct view that Hamlet intends to coerce his mother and as many others as possible into rectitude and loyalty to him. When the queen now demands to know what she has done, Hamlet begins seriously to present his case. She has done, he says,

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.*

(3.4.40-51)

When the queen still does not seem to understand, Hamlet shows her pictures of his father and his uncle, comparing them as he has done before in his own mind.

*Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
... ..
This was your husband. Look you now what follows.
Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,*

Construing Hamlet

*And waits upon the judgment; and what judgment
Would step from this to this?*

(3.4.53-71)

In true construct fashion, Hamlet puts his argument in the form of making explicit the two contrasting poles of the bipolar construct through which he construes his mother's situation. He demands that she too construe King Hamlet and King Claudius through this same construct. He clearly states a part of his own personality theory:

*... madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd,
But it reserv'd some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference.*

(3.4.71-75)

When Hamlet says that youth has no hope of virtue if "Rebellious hell" can "mutine in a matron's bones," so that "reason panders will" (3.4.82-88), Gertrude begins to succumb to Hamlet's argument. She begs him not to continue for she says he has turned her eyes into her very soul where she sees "... such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct" (3.4.90-91). Hamlet, sensing her weakening, continues to accuse Claudius as "A murderer and a villain, / A slave that is not twentieth part the tithes / of your precedent lord ..." (3.4.97-99), but he is interrupted by the ghost of King Hamlet who comes to whet his "almost blunted purpose." Mere physical vengeance against Claudius, it seems, is all that the dead king wants.

When the queen cannot see the ghost, she returns to the *mad* pole of the bipolar construct through which she has recently viewed Hamlet, the other pole apparently being *sane* or more likely *the old Hamlet* or simply *my Hamlet*. Hamlet, in order to salvage the change he has wrought in the queen's construct system, must protest his sanity.

*Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
That not your trespass but my madness speaks;*

And if we have any doubts about Hamlet's intention to extort virtue from the queen to match his

own – or at least his view of his own – he continues:

*It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. 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. Forgive me this my virtue,
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg ...*

(3.4.148-56)

When the queen exclaims that Hamlet has cleft her heart in twain he entreats her to throw away the worsen part and now consciously stating what he has been trying to extort from her, admonishes his mother to "assume a virtue if you have it not" (3.4.161). In a sketch of role playing that George Kelly would have understood and described as an attempt to achieve movement through exhortation (a kind of directive therapy as opposed to non-directive) (Kelly, 1955, 2:584), Hamlet says, in asking his mother to move from the evil pole to the virtue pole of the evil vs. virtue construct,

*– but go not to my uncle's bed;
Assume a virtue if you have it not.*

... ..

*.....Refrain to-night;
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence, the next more easy,
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
... ..*

(3.4.160-70)

George Kelly would expect such exhortation to produce only superficial movement:

The therapist [and Hamlet is playing therapist to his mother in this scene] who attempts to move a client by exhortation is essentially saying to him, "Look, this is what I would do if I were in your place." If the client is able to construe himself as being like the therapist in some way, he may be able to cast himself in the new role. If not, the admonition is likely to fall on deaf ears. The particular kind of exhortation is actually a form of construct formation, in that the client is asked to

identify his future self with the therapist and to contrast the two with his past self.

(Kelly, 1955, 2:584-85)

Hamlet as therapist and moral guide is asking the queen to identify her future self with him and contrast this self with her former self. He is not concerned that he is being authoritarian as a modern therapist might. He can only hope that once set upon a virtuous course of action, the queen will deal constructively and elaboratively with the new situations which Hamlet at this point no doubt means to provide.

Before he leaves his mother Hamlet realizes that he must maintain that facade of madness which he had earlier been ready to abandon, because now that he has killed Polonius he is sure to be the object of the king's retaliation – not only because Hamlet has killed his confederate but because the king will understand that Hamlet meant to kill him. For his own protection Hamlet makes one stipulation. The queen's compliance with his request will be a test by which both he and the audience will construe the change, if any, which Hamlet has wrought in the queen. Hamlet's stipulation is stated thus in answer to the queen's "What shall I do?"

*Not this by no means that I bid you do:
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed,
Pinch wanton an your cheek, call you his mouse;
And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damned fin-
gers,
Make you ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft ...*

(3.4.183-89)

The queen answers, "Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath And breath of life, I have no life to breathe what thou hast said to me" (3.4.198-200). We can predict that the queen will or will not keep her promise to Hamlet but we have not long to wait to test our predictions.

As act 4 begins we see the king, the queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter and hear the king ask Gertrude about her son's whereabouts. Sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern away, the queen, keeping her promise to Hamlet, tells

Claudius that Hamlet, mad, in a lawless fit has killed Polonius. The king's immediate reaction, "It had been so if we had been there" (4.1.13), seems a masterpiece of understatement, but he is quick enough to turn the event to his own advantage and point out that Hamlet, mad, is a danger to everyone and on this basis rationalizes his plot to send Hamlet to England, ostensibly for his own good, actually, without Gertrude's knowledge, to be put to death.

OPHELIA'S MADNESS

Ophelia, the one person who seems to have believed completely in Hamlet's madness, has now been driven mad herself. It is the death of her father at Hamlet's hands that seems to have destroyed her wits, but the construct theorist will see that calamity simply as the last straw which caused the collapse. Freud and Jones say surprisingly little about Ophelia's madness – one would have expected them to diagnose – but then Ophelia, being a woman, commands relatively little interest. Freud and Jones are much more interested in Hamlet's attitude toward Ophelia than in Ophelia herself. Lacan calls her "that piece of bait" (Lacan, [1959] 1977, 11), and is more concerned with turning her name – with no etymological basis – into *O phallos* than with her character. Mairet, the Adlerian critic, barely mentions her. The construct theorist, however, finds her an intriguing character because the Kellyan theorist asks, how must Denmark and the characters of the play be construed by Ophelia. What does she expect to happen and what can she control? We have already examined her construct system to some extent, but we need now to review and extend our understanding of Ophelia.

Ophelia must have grown up protected and secure. Denmark has apparently been at peace since the battle with Norway was concluded on the day young Hamlet was born. Her father has held a high position of trust and though her own mother is evidently dead she has not lacked for a feminine role model, for she has been close enough to Queen Gertrude, it seems, to be held in daughterly esteem by her.

But then unexpected events began to happen.

Construing Hamlet

The first of these was the sudden death of King Hamlet and then Gertrude's unforeseen marriage to Claudius. Still these events of themselves would not have seemed a direct threat to the young girl. But then Hamlet has come home because of his father's death, and his attentions to her and his behavior have both flattered her and troubled her. Her older brother has taken it upon himself to advise her to be wary with Hamlet and her father has forbidden her to see him, so that she has begun to feel very confused indeed. She had made predictions that she would be Hamlet's wife; now she has been told that such predictions cannot be expected to come true. Now, too, there is talk of war and the whole kingdom seems to be disordered. Hamlet's eccentricity suddenly has seemed to become overt madness and he has broken in upon her in a manner that frightens her. When she has dutifully told her father about it, he has jumped to the conclusion that Hamlet is mad with love for her and she has found herself being used as a decoy to determine if that is so, and she has had to try to talk to Hamlet while the king and her father hid themselves to listen and observe. The queen has said that if her beauties have driven Hamlet mad it is to be hoped that her virtues will bring him to himself again. She must do what her father and the king and queen expect of her, but she cannot be devoid of feelings for Hamlet. Now when he speaks to her cruelly, crudely, and tauntingly in riddles she does not understand, she can only assume that he is truly mad and beg heaven for him.

And then Hamlet kills her father. She must wonder how much she might be to blame. It must seem to her that there is indeed a Manichean Devil running the universe, changing not only the rules but the game itself every time she dares a gambit. Ophelia has not one person to whom she can turn for support. Hamlet has rejected her, and she must now consider him an enemy of her family; her brother is in France, but if he were at home he would only lecture her; her father is dead; the queen is not accessible to her. Ophelia can neither construe her world nor predict one event that will happen in it. She has no control over her life, but has been exploited by everyone she trusted. No wonder she is as Shakespeare puts it, "distracted." Her confusion is mirrored in

her seemingly meaningless patter, for once she is in the presence of the queen – who refuses to see her until Horatio reminds her that "'Twere good she were spoken with; for she may strew dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" (4.5.14-15) – she sings a little verse that indirectly points up the need to construe and predict:

*How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.*

(4.5.23-26)

Readers have been fond of asking why it is that an innocent young girl then sings in her madness a seemingly irrelevant bawdy ballad. It seems to some to indicate that Ophelia is not so innocent after all. The construct theorist would go a step further and ask why the bawdy ballad that she sings is about the seduction and betrayal of a young girl. The ballad goes like this:

*Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.*

*Then up he rose, and donned his clothes
And dupp'd the chamber-door;
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more.*

Claudius: Pretty Ophelia!

Ophelia: Indeed la! Without an oath I'll make an end on't.

*By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame,
Young men will do't if they come to't.
By Cock, they are to blame.*

*Quoth she "Before you tumbled me,
You promis'd me to wed. «*

He answers:

*"So would I 'ha done, by yonder sun,
And thou hadst not come to my bed."*

(4.5.48-66)

Just as Hamlet has done in his feigned madness, Ophelia in her genuine delirium uses an upside-down *double entendre* trope with the usually disguised risqué sexual content made explicit in order to represent deeper, preverbal constructs concerning betrayal and exploitation. Ophelia is vaguely aware that like the maid in the ballad she has misunderstood the rules of the game. She has tried to comply with what she thought was expected of her and has been rejected, exploited and bereaved by those she believed she could trust.

And like Hamlet, there is method in her madness too, though not the calculated method of an antic disposition but the natural method of a human mind trying to construe, trying to represent what it has no verbal constructs to represent. Ophelia in her distraction talks a great deal about *knowing*; she poses enigmas and says things that she could never say were she deemed responsible. For instance when the king asks, “How do you pretty lady?” Ophelia answers, [and if I were directing the play she would answer with some asperity, not with the wistful gentleness so often imposed upon her] “Well God dild you! They say the owl was a baker’s daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table” (4.5.42-44). The need to know, that is to construe and predict, shows clearly through Ophelia’s deranged wits, for when the king offers a diagnosis, “Conceit upon her father,” she counters with “Pray let’s have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:” and she begins the ballad about betrayal which I have printed above.

And Ophelia has found another way of struggling with and expressing her preverbal constructs – i.e., through the language of flowers. After her brother Laertes arrives, she offers rosemary for remembrance, pansies for thoughts, fennel and columbines, daisies and rue – especially rue – (“We may call it herb of grace a Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference” (4.5.178)). The well-established language of flowers must serve as constructs through which to represent her world. Laertes (like Lacan who can only grasp the phallic pos-

sibilities of the flowers called “dead men’s fingers”), fails to understand the language of flowers and the ballads Ophelia sings, and rejects Ophelia’s attempt to make some sense of the world and communicate her trials. Laertes sees only that, “She turns to favour and to prettiness” (4.5.184).

Laertes is more interested in revenge than in his sister’s troubles, and Claudius, anxious that that revenge shall not be directed toward him, plots to justify himself in Laertes’ view. Hamlet, Claudius believes, is on his way to England and to death and the king must predict that if he can control Laertes, he can resolve the crisis. He will not hesitate to use Polonius’ death and Ophelia’s madness to his own advantage against Hamlet.

HAMLET RETURNS

Horatio and the audience learn before Claudius does that Hamlet has returned. To Horatio and the audience Hamlet reveals that he has discovered the plot to send him to his death, and has contrived to provide Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with a counterfeit commission that orders their execution as soon as they arrive in England, and has escaped their ship by boarding a pirate ship during a brief skirmish. Hamlet sends letters to the king which arrive while Claudius is engaged in convincing Laertes that Hamlet alone was to blame for Polonius’ death and that he intended to kill the king as well. When Laertes questions the king about why he did not proceed against Hamlet, the king answers that there are two reasons:

*The queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks, and for myself,
My virtue or my plague, be it either which,
She’s so conjunctive to my life and soul
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
I could not but by her. The other motive,
Why to a public count I might not go,
Is the great love the general gender bear him...*
(4.7.11-18)

Claudius, as all skillful plotters do, tells the truth whenever he can. When Laertes vows revenge, however, he cannot risk telling him that Ham-

let's death in England is already arranged. The queen might hear of it. He says merely that "You must not think that we are made of stuff so flat and dull / That we can let our beard be shook with danger and think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more" (4.7.33). Claudius' prediction is validated immediately.

They do indeed hear more, but not what Claudius expects to hear, for a letter from Hamlet is now brought to him. The construct theorist will see that the letter Hamlet has written is well calculated to upset Claudius' construct system and his predictions. Hamlet says that he is "Set naked" on Claudius' kingdom and that he will come tomorrow to recount the occasion of his "sudden and more strange return." A postscript says "alone" (4.7.43-46;50). Claudius is human enough to allow his difficulty in construing the letter to be apparent to Laertes, but recovers control and, using Laertes' desire for revenge, concocts a final plot against Hamlet.

The king construes Hamlet extraordinarily well and decides to play upon Hamlet's pride in his swordsmanship by setting others to praise Laertes' skill. Hamlet, to defend his honor, the king knows, will allow himself to be manipulated into a duel with Laertes. Laertes need have no fear that Hamlet will win, for the king will arrange it so that Laertes may kill him. Claudius states one of his constructs concerning Hamlet and makes a prediction about his behavior based on this construct:

*He being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils, so that with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated, and in a pass of practice
Requite him for your father.*
(4.7.133-38)

In case this plan should fail, the king will have ready a poisoned cup to offer Hamlet when he becomes hot and calls for drink. The construct theorist, aware of the evil of Claudius, cannot help but admire his ability to construe accurately and predict and control, for knowing Hamlet's view that he should use others according to his own honor and dignity we do not doubt that Claudius is right about Hamlet's unquestioning

acceptance of the dueling weapons. And if the king has any doubt about Laertes resolve, it is dispelled by the queen's announcement that his sister Ophelia has drowned. The audience's tense anticipation of the duel to come between Hamlet and Laertes is now drawn out by the famous Graveyard Scene.

THE GRAVEYARD SCENE

Ernest Jones says very little about the Graveyard Scene. Because he is primarily interested in finessing the play to agree with his and Freud's view of it as an expression of the oedipal complex, Jones seems barely to perceive this scene (and several others for that matter), for he is able to extort little oedipal material from it. Jacques Lacan talks about the Graveyard Scene at some length in terms of mourning, the object of desire, and "the veiled phallus – the signifier that can be purchased only with your own flesh and your own blood" (Lacan, [1959] 1977, 38), and K. R. Eissler calls the Graveyard Scene "the peak point of the play" (Eissler, 1971, 402). When he discusses Osric's part in it (Eissler, 1971, 402-03), however, I begin to wonder if we are talking about the same scene, for Osric does not appear at all in act 5, scene 1 which is the Graveyard Scene, but does his sinister comic bit in scene 2 which takes place, not in the graveyard, but in the Castle. I will limit my discussion of the Graveyard Scene to the events which take place in act 5, scene 1 and will consider Osric when we come to him in the following scene.

As in many other instances, construct theory does not have to disprove or invalidate another view in order to assert its own view; construct theory can simply subsume as much of any other as seems appropriate. For instance, Eissler's discussion of the Graveyard Scene in which he takes into account what he calls a "three-layered structure" (Eissler, 1971, 402) has much of value in it. The gravediggers might indeed be seen as representatives of a realistic or naturalistic view of death, Hamlet's ruminations do seem to provide a metaphysical view, and Ophelia's funeral does present "the shattering actuality of death's presence". When Eissler begins to talk of the "highly cathected imagery referring to life and

death" (Eissler, 1971, 403), the construct theorist/critic must politely say he is not much interested in the concept of 'cathexis,' for he is convinced that the idea of an investment of emotional energy in an idea or image is an unfortunate reification of an intervening variable adapted from the physical sciences and will believe, like George Kelly, that "that which is considered by the analysts as 'emotional' is often better understood merely as that which is not word-bound" (Kelly, 1955, 2:803).

The construct theorist, then, is likely to see the highly verbal graveyard scene in *Hamlet* as a masterpiece of representing imagistically and connotatively in words and in action (certainly there are 'sight gags' in Shakespeare's tragedy) that which cannot be stated directly in denotative words. Bipolar constructs are presented imagistically from the very beginning. As soon as the audience realizes that the two Clowns who enter are grave diggers and that they are digging Ophelia's grave, the contrast between the young, beautiful, delicate, and aristocratic Ophelia and the coarse, contentious, insensitive bumpkins who are alive while she is dead take control of the scene.

The type of word play most prevalent in the scene is punning which by a construct definition involves subsuming one word under at least two constructs. In addition to the punning, Shakespeare seems to invite the audience to try to construe characters, and, by extension humankind in general, under constructs of their rank and station in life contrasted to the absurdity of these in the face of death; e.g., consider one of Hamlet's musings:

*Why may that not be the skull of a lawyer?
Where be his quiddities now, his quillets, his
cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he
buffer this rude knave now to knock him about
the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell
him of his action of battery?*

(5.1.83-87)

The first Clown begins the scene with the marvelously ironic question about Ophelia for whom they prepare the grave, "Is she to be buried in Christian burial, when she willfully seeks her own salvation?" (5.1.1-2). We are asked to con-

strue not only Ophelia but salvation vs. damnation and perhaps Christianity as well. The clowns' pseudo-judicial arguments, complete with decomposed Latin affectations like *se offendendo* – so meaningful in its naivete – for *se defendendo*, and *argal* in place of *ergo* (5.1.8-11), distract us from death and make us laugh at the incongruous, case-hardened disinterest with which they prepare a grave for a fellow mortal. As Hamlet has done in earlier scenes, they deal in riddles. Indeed, the two gravediggers, the first the leader and chief jokester, the second the loyal follower, may be perceived as parodies of Hamlet and Horatio, forming an opposite pole to our imagistic construct through which we construe the prince and his noble friend.

And indeed when Hamlet arrives with Horatio, he does take up, in a more exalted vein and in more dignified diction, themes similar to those which the clowns have been developing. And he too assumes an air of disinterested inquiry into death. When the gravedigger throws skulls up onto the stage, Hamlet can speculate whether each, as it arrives at his feet, might have belonged to a politician, a courtier, or a lawyer and can invent amusing ironies to divert himself, Horatio, and the audience form a closer perusal of death while still offering constructs relevant to human life and death. But finally they come to the skull of Yorick, and when the gravedigger names the skull and reminds Hamlet of the king's fester, Hamlet begins to be less objective, for he remembers Yorick. Even so, his grief is remote and philosophical rather than immediate and emotional; he can throw down Yorick's skull in disgust at its evil smell and go on to more half-playful, half-ironic talk of Alexander's dust stopping the bung-hole of a barrel of beer.

The turn in the scene comes now, as Ophelia's funeral procession enters. Hamlet must recognize that it is some member of the royal household who is to be buried, for the first person he sees is the king. He recognizes that the rites that the members of the royal party are offering are "maimed" and that the corpse "with desperate hand [did] fordo its own life" (5.1.187-88). He further realizes that the dead person is "of some estate." He would not think it strange that Laertes is among the party, for he would have been sent for upon the death of Polonius. It

is not until Laertes chides the churlish priest and says, "I tell thee ... a minist'ring angel shall my sister be when thy liest howling" (5.1.207-08) that Hamlet realizes that it is Ophelia's funeral which he is witnessing. Each reader, actor, or director must decide for him/herself why Horatio has not told Hamlet of Ophelia's madness and death. Horatio was present at the first "mad" scene and was ordered by Claudius to follow Ophelia and watch her closely (4.5.73), so that we assume that he knows of her death as well as of her madness. This seeming fault in the plot may arise more from a textual than an artistic lapse, but should be noted. At any rate, Hamlet has not heard of these events and the unexpectedness of Ophelia's death and the manner of his learning of it cannot fail to move him in some way.

The construct theorist must also note that it does not seem that Laertes and Polonius construed and predicted very accurately when early in the play they warned Ophelia that Hamlet was merely trifling with her affections and that he would have to marry someone else whose station more nearly matched his own, for the queen now scatters flowers on the grave and says,

*Sweets to the sweet farewell.
I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's
wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet
maid,
And not t'have strew'd thy grave.*
(5.1.210-13)

Laertes seems unwilling to see or at least to admit that he is at least partly responsible for his sister's death. If he had kept his brotherly advice to himself, he might have avoided erecting a barrier between Ophelia and Hamlet, for Polonius seems not to have worried about their relationship until Laertes began his campaign. If Hamlet had not found, and resented the fact, that Ophelia was more loyal to the commands of her father and brother than to his hinted love and devotion, the outcome (and we must speak here *as if* these are real people, not predetermined puppets of the playwright, never forgetting, however, that they are fictional characters) might have been very different indeed, because Hamlet, finding loyalty

in Ophelia, would have found reason to doubt that all women are as frail in their commitments as his mother seems. Ophelia's love and loyalty might not only have distracted him from his obsession with an unrealistic revenge on Claudius but might have helped him determine on a realistic cleansing of Denmark. Perhaps just *because* Laertes does experience some guilt, he now, leaps into Ophelia's grave and calls down curses on Hamlet's head:

*O, treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursed head
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
Depriv'd thee of!
... ..
Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead ...*
(5.1.213-16)

Hamlet, stung into action as much by the curse, we suspect, as by his grief over Ophelia's death now comes forward and declares himself. What seems to some to be Hamlet's hypocrisy is understood in a construct view as his once more rattling from one end of a construct to another. Hamlet has suddenly bolted from one pole of his construct concerning Ophelia which seems to have been something like *frail, disloyal*, or even perhaps (figuratively) *whore* to the opposite pole *beloved*. The construct theorist/critic will be interested that during the fight at the grave with Laertes, Hamlet tells him how to construe him:

*For though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I in me something dangerous
Which let thy wiseness fear.*
(5.1.228-30)

How one construes Hamlet's protestations of love for Ophelia and his contest with Laertes over who loved her more, will depend, perhaps, on constructs not derived entirely from the play. Somehow to my ear, both Hamlet and Laertes seem, as Gertrude said of the queen in the mousetrap play, to protest too much. The queen, knowing full well that Hamlet is not mad, seems to think it is time to stop the extravaganza, and using the now-accepted myth of Hamlet's madness – for after all the king is there to hear – says,

*This is mere madness,
And thus awhile the fit will work on him;
Anon, as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping.*
(1.5.251-54)

Hamlet, perhaps chastened by his mother's unflattering image and prediction, tries to recover a bit of his dignity. He does not seem to understand, however, why Laertes is so wroth with him and seems slightly bewildered when he asks, "What is the reason that you use me thus? I loved you ever" (5.1.156-57). Eissler, focused unwaveringly on sex as usual, sees in this statement a conversion of "fraternal rivalry and jealousy into homosexual attachment" (Eissler, 1971, 417). A construct theorist/critic at this point sees a Hamlet who is not construing Laertes very well but expects Laertes to construe him as he wishes to be construed. We long to take Hamlet aside and point out that Laertes may be just slightly upset because Hamlet – mad or sane – has killed his father Polonius, and might point out that should Claudius make the same argument to him [Look, Hamlet, I murdered your father, but I have always loved you, so why do you behave as if I were some kind of monster?], he would be, with good reason, infuriated. Hamlet seems to feel, however, that Laertes should understand that he did not mean to kill Polonius and that he is trying to treat Laertes – and in spite of appearances treated Ophelia as well – according to his own honor and dignity, failing to take into consideration their honor and dignity, and failing to subsume the constructs through which they have construed his actions. A construct theorist would say that Hamlet's rhymed couplet of prediction which he offers as a parting shot to Laertes and the royal family, is a cryptic expression of his new fatalism which he expresses to Horatio in the next scene.

*Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew, and dog will have his day.*
(5.1.258-59)

THE NEW HAMLET, HORATIO, AND OSRIC

Osric is now about to have his day. Ernest Jones does not discuss Osric, nor does the Adlerian critic Mairet mention him. Eissler, seemingly confused about just where Osric appears, says in his discussion of the Graveyard Scene, "To be sure, it is only Osric who is a truly comical figure in this scene, and the role is usually acted in a laughable manner. The gravediggers, by contrast, occupy a middle ground between the tragic and the comical; they are truly naturalistic in character" (Eissler, 1971, 403). A few pages later he quotes Harold C. Goddard's view that "Hamlet himself passed through an Osrician stage of which the letter is a relic" (Eissler, 1971, 421).

The letter in question is of course the letter, ostensibly from Hamlet to Ophelia, which Polonius reads to the king in act 2, scene 2. If the letter, which surely is of less than poetic quality, was meant by Shakespeare to be accepted as written by Hamlet, there is – without assuming some kind of identity or doubling between Osric and Hamlet – a perfectly acceptable reason for its lack of style. The construct theorist/critic will remember what Hamlet tells Horatio about his forging of the commission which is to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on to their deaths in England. Hamlet, you will remember, says,

*I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair, and laboured much
How to forget that learning; but sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know
Th'effect of what I wrote?*
(5.2.33-37)

His account of his flowery phrases makes it clear he is talking of diction and structure, not mere penmanship when he speaks of writing "fair." Hamlet has simply written to Ophelia in the graceless manner dictated by the *baseness to write fair* end of his construct. That construct is evidently subsumed under another through which he would construe "statists" like Polonius and his poor imitation Osric as contemptible. There is no reason to cloud our construing of Hamlet by talking about his "Osrician stage."

Eissler believes that the comparison of Hamlet to Osric goes too far and says that "... Osric is at best a caricature of what Hamlet was up to the point when the trauma brought about by the revelation of his mother's behavior cruelly taught him that the world in which he believed did not exist" (Eissler, 1971, 421). The construct theorist would believe that if Osric is intended as a caricature of any other character in the play it would be of Polonius, and would say that a comparison of Osric to Hamlet depends on the fallacy of talking of likeness without talking of difference. The construct theorist/critic will take quite a different view of Osric. But before we deal with that messenger of death, we must examine the few brief minutes Hamlet and Horatio have together before Osric's entrance.

Since Hamlet's return, he has seemed different somehow. He has forgotten himself at Ophelia's grave and has shared in that emotional scene with her brother, but before that, in talking to Horatio and the gravediggers, it seemed somehow that Hamlet was no longer melancholy, no longer immobilized in seeking the solution to the problems of Denmark. We sense that same mood in him at the beginning of act 5, scene 2 as he tells Horatio about his escape and return. He says that he has come to trust in a kind of fate, in a "divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11). It is not that he is relieved of acting, but that he now has some sense that fate is on his side and after he begins to hack out justice, fate will do the fine finishing. He has come to this feeling of trusting fate through his experience at sea. At first, he says,

*Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes.*

(5.1.4-5)

But, having nothing to lose, he rashly stole out of his cabin and groped until he found the commission which Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were carrying to England. Thanks to his rashness, his presence of mind, and his skill, and to the power that he has come to trust – call it destiny or fate – he was able to replace the commission which commanded his death with one which he forged to command the death of Ros-

encrantz and Guildenstern as soon as they set foot on English soil.

Heaven was even "ordinant" in that Hamlet had with him his father's signet which was the model of the Danish seal and so could give a convincing finish to his new forged document. When Horatio seems perhaps a bit troubled about Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet dismisses them. They will receive only what they have bargained for. Horatio reminds him that it cannot be long before information about the end of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrives from England, but Hamlet says that the interim is his. He clearly has a plot in mind, but before he can reveal it, talk turns to Laertes, and Hamlet says,

*But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause, I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors.
But sure the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion.*

(5.2.75-79)

Psychoanalytic critics might be expected, as in the case of Osric and Hamlet just discussed, to seize this statement of Hamlet's construing a certain similarity between his own and Laertes' situations as a reason to postulate 'doubling' or identity between the two characters, just as they also see 'decomposition' of certain characters – i.e., as Jones puts it, "we can regard Hamlet and Polonius as two figures resulting from 'decomposition' of Laertes father, just as we did with the elder Hamlet and Claudius in relation to Hamlet" (Jones, 1954 [1910]. 158). The construct theorist, on the other hand, will argue that similarity does not necessitate a construct either of doubling or decomposition; to the construct theorist, similarity does not constitute a mysterious identity between the two characters but simply means (as it apparently did to Shakespeare), that in some respect Hamlet and Laertes are alike and different from someone else. Hamlet cannot be faulted for hoping to show Laertes how he is like Hamlet and different from Claudius. It is in demonstrating that likeness and difference to Laertes that Hamlet means to "court" Laertes' favors.

And what has Hamlet in mind for the king? When we think about it carefully, it is no wonder that Hamlet can now resign himself to some construct of fate or destiny and use it to predict success. He can do so, for he now holds some very strong cards in his game with the king. Hamlet now has in his possession the original commission commanding his death – that evidence of “royal knavery” which he shows to Horatio. And besides, he had known before he was forced to leave for England that his mother had kept her promise not to reveal his sanity. Because she has kept her promise to Hamlet and has now twice used Hamlet’s madness as an excuse for him, though she knows full well he is sane, Hamlet has good reason to believe that he has begun to win her from her attachment to Claudius. He is sure of Horatio, and now it seems that he begins to court Laertes. Perhaps he is about to lead that palace revolution that Mairret saw as the remedy to his situation. If I were Hamlet I would play the game in this way. I would do all I could to gain support from the queen and the rest of the court and would bide my time until the messengers should come from England with news of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s deaths; then I would produce in front of Claudius, Gertrude and the whole court that royal commission which had ordered my own death, and before those ambassadors and the court confront the king with hard evidence of his treachery. How could the king escape?

But the king is an experienced player at this game. The construct theorist will see that he must predict that some information will soon come from England, and, although he cannot anticipate the news of the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he must anticipate some answer to his commission. He cannot want Gertrude to hear a message which says that the English very much regret that because he has been captured by pirates they cannot strike off her son Hamlet’s head as Claudius requested. He must forestall that and he must eliminate Hamlet. We have already seen what his plans are and how he intends to use Laertes. He must strike quickly, and so he sends Osric to tell Hamlet of the king’s wager on his swordsmanship in a bout against Laertes.

The construct theorist will admire Claudius’

(or Shakespeare’s) stroke of genius in sending Osric to Hamlet with his invitation to the duel with Laertes, for the Kellyan theorist will see that the king knows that Hamlet will construe his messenger as a silly fop and will never think him sinister. Hamlet will spend so much time gulling Osric into absurdities, trying to extort from him validation of his failed prediction of what a true Danish courtier should be, that he will not notice that it is he himself who is gulled. And then too, Hamlet wishes to somehow make it up to Laertes for his behavior at the grave of Ophelia. It would be churlish to refuse an honest challenge, and the rules of duelling have been so time-honored; the sport is so hemmed round with custom and the heritage of chivalry, and Hamlet is so “remiss, most generous and free from all contriving,” as the king has told Laertes, that there is little doubt that Hamlet will accept the challenge that Osric simperingly delivers, although he might suspect the invitation if it were delivered by another emissary. Again Hamlet seems to believe that he can extort virtue from Claudius – at least in regard to honoring the courtly rules of fair swordsmanship, though he has construed him as murderer and villain for some time.

Horatio, however, has not so much trust in the conventions of the duel. He rapidly construes the situation and immediately predicts, “You will lose this wager, my lord” (5.2.183). Hamlet counters that he does not think so. He has, he says, been in continual practice. He predicts that he will win at the odds, but then he adds, construing through some preverbal construct he cannot or will not name,

*But thou wouldst not think how ill all’s
here about my heart; but it is no matter.*
(5.2.185-86)

The construct theorist would think Hamlet had learned to trust those intuitions when he exclaimed to the ghost, “O my prophetic soul,” but he has committed himself to his new trust in destiny. He will listen to no predictions but those he wants to hear, and speaking from his new construct, when Horatio advises him to listen to his preverbal construing, he says:

... we defy augury:

There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all. Since no man owes of aught he leaves, what is't to leave betirres? Let be.

(5.2.193-96)

And with his new-found trust in fate, predicting that Laertes and Claudius must behave honorably at least in public, he accepts the challenge of the duel.

CATASTROPHE

The king has construed and predicted accurately of course. Hamlet does not check the foils, but only asks casually, “These foils have all a length?” (5.2.237), and prepares to play. Laertes with no difficulty can choose the poisoned foil, the point of which is unguarded. Claudius can even put the poison in the wine in front of Gertrude and the whole court by pretending to drop only a pearl in the cup, saying, “This pearl is thine”. (5.2.258).

Hamlet does well. He scores the first two hits. The king, keeping up appearances, predicts to Gertrude, “Our son shall win” (5.2.263). Gertrude, who seems to state reality bluntly when she sees it, answers, “He’s fat, and scant of breath” (5.2.264). No wonder Claudius fears what would happen if she ever discovered his intrigues. But he has failed to predict that she would drink to Hamlet from the poisoned cup. He does not wish her death and tries to stop her, but he is too late. Her collapse at first seems a response to the sudden wounding of Hamlet by Laertes who, his sword being taken by Hamlet, is himself wounded with the poisoned blade. But the queen is not dead, and with her dying words she reveals that she has been poisoned by the drink. Hamlet is now fully aware that there is treachery afoot, but does not yet know that he and Laertes have both been wounded with the poisoned foil. It is Laertes who for the first time in public speaks the truth about the king which Hamlet has uttered often enough in private. “– the king. The king’s to blame” (5.2.300).

Hamlet acts now with the tightened construct that irrefutable evidence has given him – irrefutable evidence not only of the king’s guilt but that time has run out. He stabs the king with the poisoned blade and forces him to drink from the poisoned goblet. The king dies.

Hamlet, a character created by a true construct theorist, spends his last moments in reordering his own construct system. He has learned something extremely important to him. He now knows by the manner of her death that his mother was not a party to this plot on his life, and this one fact, had he time enough, could lead him to reconstrue the events of recent months and perhaps his view of women and his relationships to his mother and to Ophelia, but now that he construes reality more accurately, there is no time to communicate his constructs.

*Had I but time, as this fell sergeant Death
Is strict in his arrest, Oh I could tell you –*

(5.2.15-16)

He must leave it to Horatio to tell the story, and he prepares him to be sure that Horatio will do just that, predicting and forestalling Horatio’s intention to die with him by drinking the dregs of the poisoned goblet himself to keep the poison from Horatio.

With his last breath, Hamlet, construct theorist and man-the-scientist to the end, utters a prediction,

*I cannot live to hear the news from England.
But I do prophesy th’ election lights
On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice.
So tell him, with th’occurents, more and less
Which have solicited – the rest is silence.*

(5.2.333-37)

Hamlet’s last prediction is immediately verified, for Fortinbras and the ambassadors from England arrive.

The audience should be aware that the scene of arrival of the British ambassadors, had Shakespeare not been bent on writing a tragedy and had allowed Hamlet to predict and control more accurately, would have been the denouement of the play. The audience should feel the deep poignancy and irony of the scene and the first

ambassador's "The sight is dismal, / And our affairs from England come too late" (5.2.347-48). The ambassador is concerned with reporting to Claudius and receiving his thanks, not realizing that had he arrived a half hour earlier he would have altered the face of Hamlet and of Denmark.

How are director and actors to emphasize the poignancy of this scene? Somehow, although Shakespeare did not write the scene, we must imagine what it would have been like, and the audience cannot grasp the significance if the actors do not. As a construct theorist I would suggest that the director carefully arrange improvisations of that imaginary scene of the timely arrival of the English ambassadors. Although it will never be played in front of the audience, it must be played in the actors' minds. Let us place this scene at act 5, scene 2, line 239, just as, before the duel begins, Claudius says, "Set me the stoups of wine upon that table."

Before the ensemble improvisation begins, the director would be wise to discuss privately with each actor his or her character, helping the actor review the character's construct system and the predictions which he or she makes about what is to come. The emotion generated by this improvisation should energize the scene of the arrival of the English ambassadors as Shakespeare wrote it to an extent to allow the actors to better convey the poignancy and the loss of what might have been.

And the director might add a bit of stage business which would emphasize what might have happened had the ambassadors arrived earlier. Remember that in an earlier scene Hamlet has shown Horatio the original commission in which Claudius had ordered Hamlet's execution. The director must see to it that this commission is a quite recognizable stage property. He must then decide whether Hamlet keeps it or gives it to Horatio when he says, "Here's the commission, read it at more leisure" (5.2.26). My preference would be for Hamlet to keep it, putting it carefully inside his doublet or shirt with just an edge of it showing. After Hamlet's death, when the English ambassadors arrive, Horatio might be kneeling by Hamlet, laying his hand on his chest, hoping to discern breath or heart beat and noticing the commission which he draws forth

and holds up as the ambassador says his line about arriving too late. And as Horatio speaks his following lines and comes to the words, "And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world / How these things came about" (5.2.358-59), let him lay the commission that would have indicted Claudius open on Hamlet's chest and fold his dead hands across it. This action will help to remind the audience of what might have been if Hamlet had predicted more accurately and had therefore been able to control events until the arrival of the news from England. This bit of stage business would serve to clarify not to distort, I believe, and would surely be less of an intrusion on the play than many of the cuts or added stage business we have seen in recent productions..

As it is it is left to Horatio to explain

*...to th' yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
And in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on th'inventors' heads – All this can I
Truly deliver.*

(5.2.357-64)

As Hamlet's body is borne away, his stillness, the martial music of his dirge, and the sound of soldiers shooting in salute offer us the final imagistic preverbal constructs through which to construe Hamlet and Denmark.

Horatio and Fortinbras to a certain extent, and the audience to a greater extent, have come through the play with elaborated construct systems never permitted to the protagonist or the other characters in the play. *Hamlet* is thus a tragedy of *knowing vs. not knowing*, but of *knowing* with the emotions and the will as well as with the intellect. The personal construct theorist will suspect that the play's unrivaled position in English drama results from its dramatization of the human need for all of us, like Hamlet, to be man-the-scientist who must decide when to trust intuition and emotion (which is after all a way of construing through preverbal constructs) and when and how to state and test hypotheses

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about life and the universe in order to predict and control life events.

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