

## HAMLET AND THE MANNER OF THE MINIATURE

*Painting is an arte, which with proportionable lines, and colours answerable to the life, by observing the Perspective light, doeth so imitate the nature of corporall thinges, that it not onely representeth the thicknesse and roundnesse thereof vpon a flat, but also their actions and gestures, expressing moreouer diuers affections and passions of the minde.*

(Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'Arte Pittura, Scultura et Architectura*, as translated by Richard Haydocke, 1598)

*...Beauty and good favor is like cleare truth, which is not shamed with the light, nor neede not to bee obscured, so a picture a littel shadowed maye be bourne withall for the rounding of it, but so graetly smuted or darkned, as some usse disgrace it, and is like truth ill towld..."*

(Nicholas Hilliard, *The Art of Limning*, 1598)

English renaissance painters long resisted grand scale continental experiments in perspective art. Shakespeare's late tragedies and romances, on the other hand, have often been compared to Italian paintings, especially to the complex, multi-levelled canvases of the mannerists.<sup>1</sup> Usually, the discussion has been one of analogy — *Hamlet* is "like" a Tintoretto or a Parmagianino in its mobility, its use of dark shadows and its unsettling juxtaposition of image and scene. Yet we now know that the case for and against perspective painting was at

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1 See especially the work of Hoy, Sypher and, most recently, Greenwood.

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least being argued in England even as early as 1598. *Hamlet* would follow soon after. In that play Shakespeare makes two specific and charged references to court miniatures of the kind crafted by England's great anti-perspectival artist, Nicholas Hilliard. The play itself — as the persistency of critical comparisons suggests — is composed according to mannerist principles. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare seems quite conscious of perspective art — though he shows his awareness principally by parodying the painterly style most patronized by Elizabeth and her court: that of the portrait miniature.

Just as we have learned to pause over Hamlet's play-within-the-play as his parodic tribute to and critique of earlier modes of native English drama,<sup>2</sup> so too we should consider how episodic structures like "The Mousetrap" (usually scenes-within-scenes) comment on the miniaturist's methods. Set speeches that seem to freeze the action of the outer play keenly resemble the detailed and brightly lit images crafted by Elizabeth's court miniaturist, Nicholas Hilliard. But they are simultaneously the dramatic equivalent of those glass mirrors which Italian perspective painters used in their studios and discussed in their tracts. As Alberti wrote in his *Della pittura*, "I do not know why painted things have so much grace in the mirror. It is marvelous how every weakness in a painting is so manifestly deformed in the mirror. Therefore things taken from nature are corrected with a mirror" (83). In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare transforms his verbal miniatures into mirrors and holds them up to the nature of art itself; moreover, like the mannerist Parmagianino whose famous self-portrait demonstrates a similar awareness, Shakespeare seems acutely conscious of two crucial characteristics of sixteenth century glass mirrors: they are small, and they distort.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The richest discussion of the ways in which Shakespeare self-consciously adapts earlier dramatic modes in *Hamlet* to his own dramatic ends remains Howard Felperin's chapter on the play in his *Shakespearean Representation* (44-67).

<sup>3</sup> As R. M. Frye has pointed out, the only polished glass mirrors (imported from Venice) with which an Elizabethan would be familiar were quite small, "most no more than a few inches across. Many and perhaps most of the glass mirrors available in England at the time (and these were the mirrors Shakespeare knew) were not plane at all, but convex instruments whose spherical shape yielded inevitable distortions..." (282).

Shakespeare draws specific attention to his critique of English aesthetics when he literally places both mirror and miniature not in an artist's but in a moralist's hands. In the crucial "closet scene" (III.iv), Hamlet confronts his mother first with a mirror in which she is to seek out her vice, and then with two miniatures of her two husbands. As we shall see, Shakespeare's charged use of actual portrait miniatures in this and an earlier scene reveals his growing impatience with English theorists like Hilliard whose *Treatise on the Art of Limning* was published just before the composition of *Hamlet*. Shakespeare even seems hostile toward Hilliard's early patron, Sir Philip Sidney, whom Hilliard invoked in his treatise.<sup>4</sup> The Prince echoes Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* when, in a suspiciously pompous manner, he instructs his actors that "the purpose of playing...was and is, to hold as t'were the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (III.ii). Though Shakespeare might ultimately achieve the ends a Sidney would approve, his are not Sidney's, nor Hilliard's, nor Hamlet's means.

Earlier in his career, Shakespeare's acute observation of — indeed, his vested interest in — court fashion would inevitably have drawn his attention to the fact of the English miniature.<sup>5</sup> Sixteenth century fascination with miniatures allowed English painters to master exquisite techniques in portraiture, and "pictures in little" quickly assumed a role in the realms of both social and diplomatic communication. As Linda Bradley Salamon has noted, the court portrait had become especially important to Elizabeth, who joined her continental peers in using such pictures, large and small, "virtually as calling cards" (95). Both Salamon and Patricia Fumerton (57) cite a report prepared in 1564 by Sir James Melville, Ambassador from Mary, Queen of Scots, that poignantly illustrates the strong sentiments the

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<sup>4</sup> Clark Hulse explores thoroughly the relation of Sidney's and Hilliard's aesthetic theories in his *The Rule of Art* (115-56).

<sup>5</sup> In *Tudor Artists*, Erna Auerbach discusses how the English portrait miniature itself evolved from the depictions of monarchs which adorned Rolls of Pleas, letters patent, grants and other legal documents throughout the sixteenth century (119-32). Such evidence suggests another means by which Shakespeare, who may himself have worked as a legal scribe but who most certainly had extensive legal dealings, could have come in contact with miniatures.

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miniature could evoke. Melville describes Elizabeth's little cabinet of small portraits wrapped in paper and then writes:

*Upon the first that she took up was written My Lord's picture.... She seemed loath to let me see it; yet my importunity prevailed for a sight thereof, and found it to be The Earl of Leicester's picture. I desired that I might have it to carry home to my Queen; which she refused, alleging that she had but the one picture of his. I said your Majesty hath here the original.* (Salamon, 95)

With a Queen as forceful as Elizabeth dictating taste, the miniature soon became a court fashion, often worn as an ornament, pledged as a love token, given as a reward. By the 1590's, according to Salamon, "exchanging these souvenirs was certainly in vogue" (103). So in vogue that casual references to the miniature began to be made on stage. In Marlowe's *Edward II*, the King tells Gaveston:

*Here take my picture, and let me wear thine;  
O might I keep thee here as I do this,  
Happy were I: but now most miserable.*  
(I.iv, 127-29)

The miniature's role as a speaking picture can be traced to its origin in manuscripts, where it first appeared as a large red letter introducing a chapter or passage. ("Miniare" means "to color red.") As it developed more elaborate visual and decorative aspects, it still retained its literary function. As such, it illustrates well the literal "margins" within which later miniaturists worked and suggests how such pictures, what the Elizabethans would call "limnings," could speak. But one English miniaturist, Nicholas Hilliard, spoke for and about the "art of limning" more than any other. Elizabeth had actually granted Hilliard a monopoly on all court miniatures and John Harrington, in his 1580 translation of the *Orlando Furioso*, listed him as fit company for "Michel Angelos" (Hulse, 11). In 1598, Hilliard himself wrote a treatise on limning.

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But while Hilliard and his followers perfected the miniature, they never brought English painting anywhere close to that artistic flowering Marlowe initiated and Shakespeare fulfilled on the English stage. The answer to the question "Why?" may lie in Hilliard's treatise: he feared the dissemblance he thought at the core of perspective art. The great painters of the continental Renaissance had mastered and left behind the art of the miniature.<sup>6</sup> Spurred on by experiments in optical science, the Italian masters especially liberated the visual arts from the tyranny of two-dimensionality, exploring the uses of shadow and perspective not only to enhance the illusion of reality, but also to create a reality quite other than that of mere representationalism. In 1598, Richard Haydocke translated into English and published most of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's treatise on painting, which describes in detail this art of perspective. In that same year, Haydocke appears to have asked Nicholas Hilliard, England's premier miniaturist, to complement that treatise with a study of his own art (Murdoch, 1).

Hilliard wrote the requested tract. Although it was not published in his lifetime (he died in 1599), that manuscript, as well as Haydocke's book, circulated among English artists, a group which could easily have included Shakespeare's business partner and chief tragedian, Richard Burbage. Burbage was known in his own day to be a painter as well as an actor; he collaborated with the playwright on the decoration of at least one noble shield for which Shakespeare had designed a particularly "dark" *impresa*. (Greenwood, 13 and n.; Gurr, 81; Bentley, 63). Hilliard's treatise emphasizes the importance of light and of bright colors, and though his work itself may owe much to the elegance and delicacy of French mannerism, he condemns chiaroscuro and other Italian experiments with darkness.

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<sup>6</sup> Panofsky provides a clear analysis of Continental experiments with "window space" in his *Renaissance and Renascences* (114-61). There he comments on how "marginal and episodic" such experiments were in England (156-57). His chapter on book illuminations in *Early Netherlandish Painting* (121-50) provides an equally thorough discussion of how the miniature evolved from book illustration to independent painting. Here too he observes how "marginal" was England's interest in perspective art, though he notes that the miniaturists of other countries were to be influenced by the great perspective art of Italy.

Only once, and then briefly, does Hilliard explicitly mention perspective art. He gives no instruction on how the student might achieve the effect of perspective, but rather observes that:

*...painting perspēctive, and forshortning of lines, [is] with due shadoing according to the rule of the eye, by falshood to expresse truth in very cunning of line and true observation of shadoing...[it] is an arte taken from, or by, the efect or Jugment of the eye, for a man to express anything in shortned lines, and shadowes, [is] to deseave bothe the understanding and the eye....*  
(*Art of Limning*, 20)

And so Hilliard rejects perspective painting on moral grounds. This is the stance taken by the artist who had long been Elizabethan England's most influential painter, who had corresponded with Sidney and had held a monopoly on official court portraits, who had painted the likeness of his age's great men, including Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton and, if the outrageous Leslie Hotson's instincts if not argument are right, the young Shakespeare himself (*Shakespeare by Hilliard*). Earlier in the decade, Hilliard's miniatures had complemented, paralleled, perhaps even inspired sonnets as love tokens (Salamon, 88-106). Even were he in decline by 1598, as Salamon claims (107), Hilliard could have done much to counteract rising assaults on the "deception" of Italian art, but instead he issues a suspiciously Puritanical warning.

Clark Hulse, who establishes Hilliard as an important figure "at the break" between Medieval and Renaissance humanist aesthetic theories, nevertheless sees Hilliard's tense relation to Lomazzo's theories manifest in the confusion of his own treatise. That confusion, argues Hulse, is "a mechanism for distancing himself from a structure of knowledge he cannot fully inhabit" (141). Hulse persuasively argues that the politically astute Hilliard, gentrified son of a goldsmith, was careful to establish for England a mythological Northern rather than Southern European artistic genealogy. Unlike Harrington, Hilliard himself ignores Michelangelo, establishing instead "a tradition of

Protestant Dutch and German artists into which he as an Englishman can easily fit, artistically, politically, and religiously" (155).

At the crucial break between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, another guildsman's son, William Shakespeare, proved willing not only to tempt accusations of Catholic sympathies but also to abandon the older Hilliard's artistic caution. Shakespeare's late Elizabethan work shows him embracing the techniques of Lomazzo and rejecting the moralistic stance taken by Hilliard. It was the Italian's treatise which, in following Alberti, promised an art capable of not only depicting "actions and gestures," but also "expressing moreover diuers affections and passions of the minde." Like Hilliard, perhaps even aided by the example of Hilliard, Shakespeare had mastered the art of the "picture in little." Unlike Hilliard, in 1598 his best work lay ahead.

We can trace Shakespeare's shifting opinion toward the miniature throughout his Elizabethan career. Before *Hamlet*, his characters make various neutral and / or appreciative references to actual miniatures. He most probably has Hilliard's love token in mind when courtly characters speak glowingly of pictures like that of Belmont's Portia, small enough to fit in one of several caskets. Even as late as *Twelfth Night*, his reference seems appreciative. Olivia asks Cesario to wear a "jewel" because "'tis my picture" (III.iv, 208). Of greater interest, however, is the way in which Shakespeare, early in his career and at the height of the Hilliard vogue, adapts to his drama the very method of the miniaturist.<sup>7</sup> Mercutio's Queen Mab speech serves as a perfect example of Shakespeare's ornamenting his larger play with a verbal miniature. The speech does little to advance the action of the play, but rather revels in a lacework of details: of hazelnut chariots whose spokes are made of spinners' legs, of a queen decked in spider webs and armed with a whip made of a cricket's bone (*Romeo and Juliet*, I.iv, 54-90).

Shakespeare illuminates many of his early plays with verbal miniatures like Mercutio's here or like Titania's speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the "forgeries of jealousy" (II.i, 81-117). But over the course of his development as a playwright, the purpose to

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Contemporary critics have repeatedly felt the need to use artistic terms in describing these episodes. Mark Rose speaks of "triptychs, diptychs, and emblems," W.T. Jewkes calls them "framed narratives," and Francis Berry calls them "insets."

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which he puts these miniatures grows more complex. Increasingly, as Hereward Price and Maynard Mack long ago observed, such scenes begin to mirror the larger play. Often, these miniatures take on comic overtones, as in *1 Henry IV*. There, the Drawer scene (II.ii) foils Hal with the servant Francis who is called between two masters but who finally chooses to serve the crown first (Aldus, 402-06; Rose, 77-79, 142-45). All discussion of such scenes as "mirror scenes," moreover, suggests how much Shakespeare demonstrates rather than explicitly articulates an evolving artistic theory.

*Hamlet*, however, marks Shakespeare's play "of the break." Here he looks back to his use of miniaturist techniques and ahead toward the liberation of mannerist art. He uses the mirror to mock the limitations of miniaturism. He parodies the "picture in little" by turning its dramatic equivalent — the "set speeches" or "plays within the play" — themselves into the small mirrors which, when held up to the larger, allow us to see a much more complex reality. In doing so, he replicates on stage the one kind of perspective painting he most probably had direct experience of, that of the anamorphic painting.

Created with the aid of mirrors — in fact, usually viewed with mirrors — anamorphic paintings are as close to moving pictures as paintings can be. Like the holograms now found on credit cards, anamorphics are in many ways simply gimmicks which demonstrate extremely complex theories. They are pictures which make use of perspective techniques to present a double image, like the famous portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots, painted on a corrugated surface so that from one side of the frame the viewer sees a queen, from the other a death's head. Other anamorphic works, however, are far more elaborate, and in Renaissance England were equally popular with courtier and commoner. Late twentieth century thinkers have found such images particularly apt emblems for the age; commentators ranging from Lacan to Greenblatt have, for example, made Holbein's anamorphic painting, *The French Ambassadors*, a virtual icon for the ambiguities of "renaissance self-fashioning."<sup>8</sup>

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Greenblatt's well-chosen jacket for his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* is the Holbein *Ambassadors*, which he refers to frequently in his text. Marjorie Garber summarizes Lacan's analysis of this painting and his linking of it both to the play *Hamlet* and to

Holbein's painting at first seems a symbolically loaded but technically realistic representation of two men before a table. But when we study this picture through a "glass" (an optical tube which makes use of various mirrors and lenses) we discover a skull on the floor in what had first seemed an inexplicable swirl.<sup>9</sup> R. M. Frye observes that the painting was "a famous attraction, widely commented upon in London"(214). Ernest Gilman speculates that the painting hung for a time in Whitehall (98 and n.3), where William Scrots' anamorphic portrait of Edward VI also drew crowds. Specific reference is made to Scrots' work by visitors writing between 1598 and 1613 (Strong 1:89-90).

For the English, the broad notion of perspective painting collapsed into this one kind of illusionism; by an act of synecdoche, they quickly shifted "perspective" from modifier to noun and began calling all anamorphic pictures "perspectives." Shakespeare refers to such "perspectives" in no fewer than five plays spanning the course of his career from *Richard II* to *Antony and Cleopatra*.<sup>10</sup> In the years he was composing *Hamlet*, however, discussions about Italian works as well as continental theory would have made clear how much more there was to perspective painting than clever anamorphics.

Acknowledging Shakespeare's preference by mid-career neither for miniature nor mirror alone but for the anamorphic art work read with the aid of a small mirror suggests how he achieves coherence in even his most complex texts. His thematic density has long been attributed to experiments in mimesis, but it is miniaturization that allows an audience to survive the experiments. As Levi-Strauss has observed, artistic miniatures induce "a sort of reversal in the process of understanding. To understand a real object in its totality we always tend to work from its parts. The resistance it offers us is overcome by

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the miniatures the Prince apparently refers to in III.iv (*Shakespeare's Ghost Writers*, 134-35). James Calderwood uses the same painting to introduce his discussion of anamorphic aspects in a comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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There remains debate on exactly *how* Holbein's painting should be viewed. See John Pope-Hennessy (n., 324) and Greenblatt (n., 260).

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In addition to Gilman, see especially Virginia M. Vaughan and Claudio Guillen.

dividing it... More exactly, this quantitative transposition extends and diversifies our power over a homologue of the thing, and by means of it the latter can be grasped, assessed and apprehended at a glance" (Levi-Strauss, 23).<sup>11</sup> When Shakespeare mirrors his miniatures themselves, however, he rebels against the restrictions imposed by *The Art of Limning*. He forces his audience to re-engage active modes of understanding and question that which has been apprehended "at a glance." In *Hamlet* he even insists that we learn consciously to allow for both the size of his picture and curvature of his mirrors. Shakespeare here breaks utterly from Hilliard by demonstrating how distortion, not deception, is essential to the truth of his art.

The relation of scale and distortion is insistently linked in *Hamlet*. The Prince's introduction of the term "picture in little" comes in the same scene in which he discusses with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the fate of the actors who have come to Elsinore after being pushed out of fashion by the boy companies, those he calls the "little eyases." He wonders if the children's writers "do them wrong, to make them cry out against their own succession." But when Rosencrantz assures him that "the boys carry it away," the Prince notes, "It is not very strange, for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father liv'd, give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats a-piece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out" (II.ii, 360-68).

This is an odd and angry passage; the complaint against the boy companies seems lodged more by a shareholder in The Globe than by a Danish prince. Yet the threat posed by small boys to the future of English theater is linked by the Prince's logic to growing demand for miniatures of his corrupt uncle — miniatures which presumably do not reveal his vicious nature. Little boys and pictures in little are inadequate to the tasks they must perform. This, Shakespeare's own hidden prologue to the Players' arrival, itself miniaturizes and mirrors all the questions of existence, of growth, of change from child to adult, of

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<sup>11</sup> Susan Stewart observes how much the miniature also "exaggerates interiority," which seems equally true of the miniatures we find within *Hamlet*..

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political and artistic "succession" that will haunt for four acts the somewhat unconscious Prince.

Hamlet's initial understanding is actually that of the reductionist. He is highly conscious of the property "littleness," a word he introduces even as he introduces himself in his first line as "a little more than kin, and less than kind." It is a word he repeats often..."little eyases" and "little pictures" in II.ii, "this little organ" and a "little patch of ground" later. But the initial smallness of Hamlet's own art, the inadequacy of that art to reflect his complex moral dilemma let alone his tortured human nature, differs vastly from the artistry of Shakespeare's play. When the players come to Elsinore, we not only see Hamlet *as* a miniaturist, but *in* a series of miniatures.

The Pyrrhus-Priam speech, which the chief Player delivers in II.ii, constitutes a miniature summoned up by Hamlet from his own memory. The speech thus reflects not only the larger, untitled play from which it has been selected, but like an *impresa*, also the tastes, the memories, the past of the man who has selected it. Coincidentally, it reduces to apprehensibility the even larger play from which *we* select it, the play named for the character. Hamlet remembers a stately, static drama, one noble in theme and most serious in manner; the Prince likes his art that way (but can not quite live his life accordingly). The little speech also reprises Shakespeare's own questions of revenge and delay; set in context, it juxtaposes multiple scenes much as a mannerist masterpiece would.

The soliloquy with which Hamlet ends the same scene ("O what a rogue and peasant slave...") provides yet another little version of the Priam speech. Hamlet's rhythms echo the Player's lines right down to the pause which follows the Player's words when he narrates, rather than acts, the image of a Pyrrhus who stood over Priam "And like a neutral to his will and matter, / Did nothing " (II.ii, 481-82). Hamlet reproduces that line and a half of iambic pentameter when he says of the actor's tears : "And all for nothing, / For Hecuba!"<sup>12</sup> Curiously, yet

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Calderwood's discussion of "absence made present" is especially useful here (53-57, 189-96). Many have commented on the Player's long pause, but I especially like Danson's description of "energy in stasis." Levin early on observed, "It is only during this uncharacteristic standstill that Pyrrhus, the unthinking avenger, shows any likeness

fittingly, Hamlet has chosen the anonymous words and poetic style of a nameless character / narrator in an undramatic play to illustrate, to externalize, his own psychological crisis. A certain smallness of mind and manner still block the Prince from achieving his destiny as tragic hero, larger than life.

Later (in III.iii), Hamlet will even look like Pyrrhus when he stands over the kneeling Claudius and pauses with his own sword uplifted. Shakespeare thus frames a series of mirror / miniatures which capture the varied images of man in thought, man in action. That complex relation of words and action, thought and experience, is enacted in the scenes between the Player's first speech and Claudius's performance. "The Mousetrap" commissioned in II.ii comes to life in III.ii — twice. Another Prince (Lucianus) first in "dumb" show, then while matching words to actions, hovers above a King and contemplates murder. Mirror after miniature exaggerates by reducing various aspects of Hamlet's own dilemma. The similarities are marked, but either the words are missing, or the action is missing, or the substance is altered or the style has been simplified. And so the process of small mirror reflecting and correcting small miniature carries us along, into the future that contains the past.

The Priam speech, the "peasant slave" soliloquy, the dumbshow, "the Mousetrap," help us apprehend the "future" of III.iii.<sup>13</sup> Hamlet stands unseen above a kneeling King Claudius. But we see Pyrrhus. When Hamlet speaks, ("Now might I do it pat...") we hear Lucianus: "Thoughts black, hands apt...." Though Hamlet does not yet do as Lucianus does, does not yet act, that villain's unsophisticated rhythms and blunt terms re-emerge in Hamlet's most uncharacteristic soliloquy,

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to his polar opposite, Hamlet"(151). But here I think Levin's preference for a consistently noble, rather than evolving Prince may have blinded him and many who followed to what Prosser sees: the parallel between Pyrrhus and Hamlet is clearly intended and should allow us to see "exactly what Hamlet might become if he pursues the course upon which he has embarked" (155).

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In his chapter on "The Insets of Hamlet," Francis Berry discusses the way in which Shakespeare's perspective technique allows the audience to see "The future is to be darkened by the past. Meanwhile the present, the *now*, is to be stretched, perplexed, nearly annihilated between the strain exerted — between the past ('Remember') and the future ('Revenge')" (117).

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twenty-one end-stopped lines that place on display the absolute nature of his hatred, while Claudius' initial lines display the mixed nature of his love and rapacity. The silent image of him at prayer even suggests a potential for virtue in his nature.

Hamlet's uncharacteristic verbal incapacities hint at something untrue about the Lucianus role he plays, just as Claudius' subsequent words dismissing penance, eloquent as ever, make quite evident how deceptive the wordless or "unshadowed" image of him at prayer was. Hamlet, with his primitive, old-style Mousetrap, has summoned into being a reality that may be more satisfyingly comprehensible than true: Claudius is evil incarnate and must be destroyed. But in simplifying the world, in holding up to nature only a morality play "steel glass" which presumes "to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image" Hamlet has also reduced himself to the image of a murderer — or worse, a usurper.

Since Morality plays function according to analogous relations, Hamlet's own advice to the Players, that they hold a mirror "up to nature," leads us, as Jewkes suggests (35-39), to complete the set of equations Shakespeare has established. If Lucianus is like Hamlet in style and in degree (Lucianus, as Calderwood reminds us [95], is the King's nephew, not his brother), then in addition to resembling the Player King and Queen, are not Claudius and Gertrude in some ways like Priam and Hecuba? If so, they are all more complex humans than Hamlet can afford to consider with his old-fashioned art or in light of his even older yearning for revenge. By the end of Act III, Hamlet has lost all perspective, designating himself God's Avenging Angel, a role which seriously jeopardizes his humanity and threatens his own damnation. Shakespeare, meanwhile, has quietly suggested the origins of the revenge drama in the older morality play. Like the morality play, the revenge play popularized by Kyd is too small for Shakespeare's vision. And the manner of Hilliard's miniature has been established as inadequate to Shakespeare's dramatic task.

Each "kind" of play-within-play miniaturizes human actions and human motives in a way that makes clear just how very spacious Shakespeare's full representation of reality is. Hamlet's art is simply not modern enough to make apprehensible the shadows which so trouble him. We, however, who are allowed, unlike Hamlet, to see the whole

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picture, may also be held more accountable for establishing a proper balance between thoughts and their external manifestation — words; between words and their realized potential — actions. By mid-play, Hamlet, like Hilliard, has done the best he can to comprehend life by using the art available to him in his isolated native land. But Shakespeare's is the more "honest" method, insofar as it is the more inclusive and provocative. In this most perplexing play, he continues to use the easily apprehensible miniature which had served him well in earlier, lighter dramas, but now he forces us to see the miniature as such, to free that older art from its limitations, to make it new by naming it, by accepting it for what it is — in the words of Lear, "no less, no more."

As is often the case with Shakespeare and older art forms, he ultimately "conserves" Hilliard by parodying him, for parody is the literary artist's equivalent of visual distortion. The presence of parody grows more evident as the play progresses. In the closing scenes of Act III, Hamlet is shadowed with the sallets Hamlet himself would delete from serious drama and in doing so foretells the source of his redemption: the realm of comedy. When he drags his morality play mirror into his mother's bedchamber, Shakespeare's own ironic treatment of the Prince reduces him, caricatures him in and as a miniature.

The Prince who condemned stage bombast "out-Herods Herod" in his verbal assault on his mother, mirror in hand; the man unwilling to kill the King at prayer a few minutes ago blindly strikes out at the figure behind an arras and stumbles into a manic couplet: "A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother!" And then the Prince asks mother to see the nature of virtue and vice reflected in two apparent pictures in little: "Look here upon this picture, and on this, / The counterfeit presentment of two brothers. / See what a grace was seated on this brow...." Which counterfeit is the true counterfeit? Is beauty only in the eye of the beholder? Were those who paid up to a hundred ducats for Claudius' miniature so deceived that they saw virtue where there was none, or did the artist follow Hilliard's precepts and avoid the shadows? Hamlet's ghostly father puts a stop to this investigation, though only Hamlet can hear that voice.

Whall : *Hamlet*

Throughout *Hamlet*, Shakespeare leads us to observe, as Howard Felperin has phrased it, that it is Hamlet himself "who is unable to impose successfully the model of an old play upon the intractable material of his present life, and Shakespeare who dramatizes with unflinching control the tragic conflict between his heroic effort to do so and his ironic consciousness that it cannot be done..." (56). The closet scene provides yet another miniature of the larger play, one which pushes Shakespeare's irony toward the daring edge of absurdist comedy. The scene re-runs the play's earlier scenes and themes — of taking action, of feigning madness, of purging corruption, threatening kings, holding up mirrors, talking of pictures, assaulting women, listening to ghosts — but at a nightmarishly farcical pace. As a result, this scene, more than any other, distances us from Hamlet. We will need that distance to regain our own perspective.

In the next scene, Shakespeare and Claudius pack the Prince off to sea, making "real" the principle of distance. Despite all the debate on whether III.ii, iii, or iv marks the turning point in this play, nothing has changed. And yet everything has changed. The very way in which each scene becomes the next shows us — is for us — not the product of change, but the process of change itself, which has no beginning or middle or end, only effects. We finally realize that change is and has been occurring only after a time-lapse; absence makes present our sense, as Calderwood has argued (53-58), of both past and future. Exit Hamlet. But with consummate irony and wit, Shakespeare takes his hero away from us by sending him to us. Hamlet heads towards England — the England of Shakespeare's original audience. England, a "sceptered isle," an exquisite miniature too long denied the mind expanding art of the Continent. All agree, Hamlet returns from his sea adventure a "changed man."

Hamlet's rebirth as a man aligned with the forces of life rather than death is performed for us in V.i, where, fittingly, we watch Hamlet come to terms in his world with non-metaphoric death in a literal graveyard, though Shakespeare warns us that in *our* world, despite all the concrete physicality of the graveyard scene, we must remember that this is a stage illusion of reality, a metaphor after all, a final, broadly comic miniature which reflects the entire play in its curved glass. Placed

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in context, this final miniature challenges the viewer exactly as does the mirror we hold up to an anamorphic painting; it asks us to look twice and, as Jewkes notes, "has the effect of leading us to an ultimate vanishing point, as creation and doomsday come together" (41). As in those most popular English "perspective paintings," the emblem this mirror reveals is a skull — the skull of a Fool, our common mortal identity.

It is Hamlet who has been in exile, not the clowns he would have banished and who open Act V alone on stage. The "first Clown" is clearly in charge of this Renaissance vaudeville team.<sup>14</sup> He and his assistant discuss such abstractions as suicide and its consequences, earthly and divine. He is, as Harry Levin observed, "an accomplished dialectician" whose argument follows the rules of logic, howsoever redundantly (79). While the two conclude their patter routine on Adam's profession as a grave digger, Hamlet and Horatio enter and observe them. Briefly, the protagonist and his confidant stand on stage looking at the grave digger and his companion. The two Wittenberg logicians, it would seem, are being tweaked by their creator when their funhouse doppelgangers debate the very questions of life, death, and morality that had so occupied them both here in Elsinore and, one assumes, in Wittenberg.

As Walter Foreman has written, now "Hamlet gets a taste of what it must have been like for Polonius" (85). Shakespeare has prepared us to relate the grave maker and Hamlet when in Act IV the Prince indulges in his own graveyard humor over the dead body of Polonius. He clinches the analogy for us in Act V with a verbal gesture that addresses many issues of kinship at the same time. Hamlet asks the Clown how long he has been grave maker:

*Clo. Of all the days i' th' year, I  
came to't that day our last King  
Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.  
Ham. How long is that since?*

<sup>14</sup>

For other interpretations of the graveyard scene as comic, see especially Foreman (73-94) and Snyder (91-136).

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*Clo. Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was that very day that young Hamlet was born — he that is mad and sent into England.*

*(V.i, 143-49)*

The past and present do and do not resemble each other; the last Hamlet conquered Fortinbras on the day the present Hamlet — who will be succeeded by a Fortinbras — was born, the day the Clown took on his identity as a grave maker. Not only name replication but temporal and psychic associations as well suggest that Hamlet has within him not just something of his father and something of each Fortinbras but something of the Clown as well.

Here in the graveyard, we watch Hamlet finally discover a better likeness. He rejects the Clown's (and his own) foolishly "absolute" answers. But he reclaims the spirit of true comedy. When the Clown throws up Yorick's skull, the thirty-year-old Hamlet remembers with affection both that Fool and the little seven-year-old Prince who rode upon his back into the age of reason. Inspired now more by the spirit of his Jester-Father than his serious Kingly one, the adult Hamlet is able to reject death as the absolute answer he once sought (his "gorge rises" at it), while accepting the fact of mortality. Sounding very much like the Allowed Fool, he traces Alexander's progress from Prince to bungalow stopper. He is ready to proclaim himself as himself ("This is I / Hamlet, the Dane") and accept his role in life, unafraid of death. In staging such a transformation for us, Shakespeare demonstrates his own indebtedness to the miniaturists he learned from in his youth but whom he mocks, reclaims, and transcends in his maturity. Hilliard and Michelangelo meet after all, but on the Renaissance stage.

Having become The Dane, Hamlet goes on to talk of sparrows and providence and destiny, to act nobly and boldly, to die thinking like a king, concerned mostly for the well-being of his nation. This is the "sweet Prince" we want to remember, and directors have sometimes pandered to our yearnings for the absolute by ending the play at Horatio's poignant words. But while it is tempting to forget the past and freeze the image of a character we may have found most

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exasperating during the process of his coming into being, Shakespeare has given us ample warning not to do so.

The Hamlet we last see dead on stage is but a reduction of the Hamlet we watched during the life of the play. And the Prince whom Horatio lives on to make a legend of may prove larger than life, but will be less than Hamlet. For clearly Horatio is about to tell a story, and the narrative mode will limit his perspective. Shakespeare's anamorphic drama, on the other hand, shows us a Hamlet who is simultaneously the "beauty of the world" and a "quintessence of dust." That is the man who more truly haunts us than the Prince who, "had he been put on," would have proved "most royal." And with *Hamlet* Shakespeare proclaims himself as one visual artist ready to synthesize Native and Continental aesthetic traditions.

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