

## THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF DERANGEMENT IN SHAKESPEARE'S PRINCE HAMLET

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Oh, all you host of heaven! Oh earth! what else?  
And shall I couple Hell? Oh fie! Hold, hold my heart,  
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,  
But bear me stiffly up.

(Hamlet I.V.92-95)

How far the hysteria, which underlies this speech and recurs throughout the play in Hamlet's words and conduct, involves true derangement. Hamlet's behaviour throughout the play is partly explicable by the successive shocks he receives. He has lost his reason under the pressure of circumstances. He had already received a paralysing shock from the unnatural death of his beloved father, aggravated by his unrequited love for Ophelia. The impropriety of Gertrude's behaviour, her ingratitude to the memory of her former husband, and the depravity he discovers in her choice of a successor, further afflict his soul, and cast him into utter agony. Waldock, quoted by E.M.W. Tillyard, states. A terrific calamity has befallen Hamlet and his whole nature has upturned. And the particular origin of his trouble is made perfectly plain. It is the recent remarriage - indecently hasty and incestuous remarriage--of his mother. This event has changed the whole of life for him, the realization of all that grieves him deeply, makes life meaningless, infects his very blood and poisons his very soul.<sup>1</sup>

The opening of the second scene shows Hamlet's state of mind.

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

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in  
nature

Possess it merely. That it should come to  
this!  
But two months dead--nay, not so much, not  
two--  
So excellent a king, that was to this  
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother  
That he might not between the winds of  
heaven  
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and  
earth,  
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on  
him  
As if increase of appetite had grown  
By what it fed on; and yet within a month--

Let me not think on't - Frailty, thy name is  
woman--  
A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
With which she follow'd my poor father's  
body,  
Like Niobe, all tears--why, she--  
O God, a beast that wants discourse of  
reason  
Would have mourn'd longer--married with  
my uncle,

My father's brother--but no more like my  
father  
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
She married--O most wicked speed! To post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.  
But break, my heart, for I must hold my  
tongue.  
Hamlet: 1. ii.129 (Tillyard, 1951)

The disillusionment apparent in his speeches and soliloquies are not part of his normal state of mind. The speeches show the Prince profoundly shocked by Gertrude's infidelity to his father and obsessed with the perverse and incomprehensible sexual appetite, which