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I am but Mad North-North-West: The Influence of Erasmus' Moriae Encomium Upon Reason, Madness, and Mondarchy in Shakespeare's Hamlet

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I AM BUT MAD NORTH-NORTH-WEST:  
THE INFLUENCE OF ERASMUS' *MORIAE ENCOMIUM*  
UPON REASON, MADNESS, AND MONARCHY IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

### I am but Mad North-North-West: The Influence of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* Upon Reason, Madness, and Monarchy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

By Kiyoshi R. Simon

While *Hamlet* presides as one of Shakespeare's most famous, and indeed most analyzed, plays, the authenticity and significance of its melancholic prince's "antic disposition" has long been disputed, itself cloaked in the ambiguity of its bearer. Despite the immensity and diversity of evaluative approaches to Hamlet's impassioned madness, the influence of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* – a text whose praise of folly and discourse upon wisdom and reason was well known in sixteenth and seventeenth century England – upon *Hamlet* and the theme of madness has not been critically acknowledged. In answering this oversight, this essay will contextualize *Hamlet* in respect to the *Moriae Encomium*, arguing that the Shakespearean tragedy operates as an innovative type of masque apparently designed to influence the notoriously intellectual King James I with the Erasmian conceptions of reason and passion. Understanding the influence of these two antithetical dispositions – reason and passion – upon Hamlet's actions and overall trajectory allows us to see that Hamlet ultimately functions as a multistage commentary upon rule. In the light of the *Moriae Encomium*, we see that *Hamlet*, through the triumphs and trials of its tragic prince, conveys the necessity for passion, not the supposed wisdom of rationality, in wise rule.

## Table of Contents

Introduction: A Madness North-North-West.....	1
Part I: Courtly Masques and Principles from Erasmus' <i>Moriae Encomium</i> .....	6
Part II: An (Impassioned) Antic Disposition.....	16
Part III: The Influence of the <i>Moriae Encomium</i> upon Reason and Passion in <i>Hamlet</i> .....	23
Part IV: An Apology for Passion.....	46
Part V: Passion Affirmed: Fortinbras' and the Antimasque's Arrival: .....	50
Conclusion: Passion and Politics .....	55
Works Cited.....	58
Works Consulted.....	60

## INTRODUCTION: A MADNESS NORTH-NORTH-WEST

In explaining his own seemingly irrational madness to Guildenstern, Hamlet's statement that he is "but mad north-north-west. When the / Wind is southerly I know a hawk from a hand-saw" (II.ii.378-379) indicates a profound dimensionality to the prince's madness. Through a metaphor aligning his mental acuteness to a weather vane's orientation, the statement suggests that his madness is but a few degrees off point – it is "north-north-west" – and that in the right context – "when the wind is southerly" – he is in fact quite sharp. Hamlet's identification of his madness is not one of absolutes, it varies by degrees and, given the context, operates as normally as its presumed antithesis, reason; in oscillating between points of reason and madness, Hamlet is a figure who can be neither defined nor understood completely in respect to either.

For while Shakespeare's *Hamlet* presides as one of the most critically examined plays in the literary canon, the prince's famous "antic disposition," and indeed the playwright's reasons for portraying such an ambiguous disposition, yet remain cloaked in ambiguity and critical subjectivity themselves. How are we, as readers and critics, supposed to evaluate the legitimacy of a madness not nearly as overt as Ophelia's and Lear's, if it is but a few degrees off of rational sanity? Hamlet is, after all, a profoundly self-aware character whose speech reflects an acute conscientiousness and growing criticism of himself for his excessive rationalization and prolonged inaction, despite his instinctual drive for revenge. And yet, in his growing awareness that reason is delaying his revenge, does Hamlet not exhibit the irrationality in rationally navigating emotional instances? Is Hamlet's persistent use of reason, despite his awareness that his rationalization is reducing his passionate instincts for revenge into inaction, not the very mark of madness?

In speaking to this perplexing quality of Hamlet's character, Francis Barker in *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* states:

At the centre of Hamlet, in the interior of his mystery, there is, in short, nothing. The promised essence remains beyond the scope of the text's signification: or rather, signals the limit of the signification of this world by marking out the site of an absence it cannot fill. It gestures towards a place for subjectivity, but both are anachronistic and belong to an historical order whose outline has so far only been sketched out. (37)

In attempting to understand the "interiority," the "essence," of Hamlet's "mystery," Barker sets his sights outside the text – for the "promised essence remains *beyond* the scope of the text's signification" – by situating the text in respect to a "historical order," or historical context. Having found our "wind" in the form of a historical text to contextualize Hamlet's madness, how then do we find the "southernly" one, that which puts Hamlet's madness into perspective?

Relevant criticism concerning madness in *Hamlet* typically follows one of three general trends. The first group, including John DeCarlo's "Mother and Son: The Dynamics of Hamlet's Cartesian Madness" and J.H. Dunnell's "Hamlet's Age and Madness," states, rather than argues, Hamlet's sanity or madness as basis for a separate argument. The second group, composed of criticism such as Eric Levy's "*Hamlet* and the Madness in Reason" or Ruth Perry's "Madness in Euripides, Shakespeare, and Kafka: An Examination of the *Bacchae*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *The Castle*," presupposes Hamlet's madness to examine the existential repercussions of madness. Finally, the third, and most relevant to this project's endeavors, is criticism, such as Jerome Mazzaro's *Madness and Memory: Shakespeare's Hamlet and King Lear* and Javid Qazi's "The Madness of Hamlet," which evaluates the authenticity of Hamlet's madness by comparing it to other mad characters in Shakespearean and English Renaissance drama.

However, while critics of this third trend recognize the need to contextualize *Hamlet* using contemporary English texts – reflecting Barker's call for a "historical order" – they fail to

appropriately recognize the influence of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* – translated as *The Praise of Folly* – a text whose discourse upon wisdom, madness, and reason was well known during the sixteenth century. Therefore, in answering this call, this thesis seeks to contextualize *Hamlet* in respect to the *Moriae Encomium* to understand the significance of madness, as well as reason, in Hamlet's character. In recognizing how *Hamlet* reflects Erasmian conceptions of reason and madness, we can theorize why it does so as well.

Integral to this claim that the *Moriae Encomium* influences *Hamlet* is the assumption that Shakespeare was exposed to Erasmus' works, specifically the *Moriae Encomium*. In “*Hamlet and the Moriae Encomium*,” Frank McCombie states that:

The *Moriae Encomium* was a grammar-school text in the 1570s and 1580s, and it is perfectly possible that Shakespeare knew it as early as that, having perhaps been set to translate it himself. (59)

In further support of this conjecture, Jürgen Schäfer argues in “Falstaff's Voice” that:

There have been quite a number of suggestions that Shakespeare knew the writings of Erasmus. In the present instance, fortunately, there is no need to go into the question how Shakespeare read the *Encomium*'s Latin, since *The Praise of Folly* had become available in Elizabethan reading public through the translation of Sir Thomas Chaloner. (135)

Whether he read and translated the original Latin version as a child, or read the translated edition as an adult, the probability that Shakespeare read Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* is high. While McCombie's and Schäfer's works adopt a historical approach to arguing Shakespeare's exposure to Erasmus, other criticism looks for a correspondence of Christian Humanist elements particular to Erasmus in Shakespeare's works. John Velz's *Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition*,



which notes other critics who have argued for Erasmian influence in Shakespeare's work, and Kenneth Muir's "Shakespeare and Erasmus"<sup>1</sup> are two excellent examples.

That said, this thesis seeks to move beyond general criticism that argues for Erasmus' influence upon Shakespeare, such as Muir's and Velz's, and beyond criticism, such as McCombie's and Schäfer's, that, while it does identify a specific Erasmian text – perhaps even the *Moriae Encomium* – it only identifies singular instances of influence and develops its arguments on a point by point basis. In doing so, this form of criticism fails to acknowledge *overall trends* in the text that informed by Erasmus. In progressing beyond these forms of criticism, this thesis seeks to not only identify a specific Erasmian text – the *Moriae Encomium* – and examine its influence upon an overarching thematic trend – the tension of reason and passion – in a specific Shakespearean text – *Hamlet* – but to determine potential authorial intent, why Shakespeare would have integrated such ideology into his work.

In full, this thesis seeks to explicate the significance of the influence of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* upon the tension of reason and passion in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to show how events in the tragedy, as well as Hamlet's own, internal struggle *between* these two antithetical forces, reflect the Erasmian recognition of reason as an impediment to action, and passion as conducive to action. I say "between" because this thesis acknowledges the intellectual limitations of compartmentalizing Hamlet's character, and will reject the allure of any simplifying binary by which Hamlet could be categorized as fatally flawed by passion or reason. Rather, Hamlet's character oscillates between reason and passion as he attempts to mediate the tension he feels

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<sup>1</sup>In arguing for Erasmian influence in *Measure for Measure*, Muir's "Shakespeare and Erasmus" acknowledges that "it has already been suggested that Shakespeare knew several of Erasmus' works" (424).

between them in himself: his impassioned instincts urge him toward swift and bloody action, while his reason prompts for a rational deliberation of his actions before pursuing them.

Hamlet's attainment and renouncement of passion produces three overarching movements that can be correlated to three states of identity – reason, passion, and warning respectively – in Hamlet. In this light, Hamlet functions as a multistage commentary upon wisdom in monarchy, wisdom being, in Erasmian theory, represented in both reason and passion. By understanding these movements in respect to a masque-antimasque structure, we see that the correspondence of the play's tragic ending with Fortinbras' arrival is indicative of the antimasque's return, and is thus suggestive of Shakespeare's approval of impassioned monarchs.

This essay is divided into five parts: Part I will examine the role of the masque in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, as well as outline and explicate key concepts surrounding passion and reason from Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*. Part II will explain how Hamlet's conversation with the ghost represents the inception of passion within him, as well as respond to foreseeable counterarguments to this claim. Part III will apply the concepts of Part II to *Hamlet* in explicating the significance, in respect to passion and reason, of moments throughout the play. Part IV will examine Hamlet's apology to Laertes to argue that it represents Hamlet's renouncement of passion. Finally, Part V will address the significance of Fortinbras' arrival in light of the play's tragic conclusion, arguing that, in the context of the play's masque/antimasque structure, the two events signify Shakespeare's criticism of reason and affirmation of passion. In understanding *Hamlet* in the context of the *Moriae Encomium*, I will propose an answer to the significance of Hamlet's alleged madness, and why Shakespeare was motivated to integrate the theme of madness and reason in his play.

PART I: COURTLY MASQUES AND PRINCIPLES  
FROM ERASMUS' *MORIAE ENCOMIUM*

Let us first begin by delineating the function and significance of courtly masques during the Jacobean era. In *The Illusion of Power*, Stephen Orgel states that, “dramas at court were not entertainments in the simple and dismissive sense [...] they were expressions of the age’s most profound assumptions about monarchy” (8). While presumably entertaining for the entire court, masques were written and performed with a single audience member in mind: the monarch. Within the realm of the masque, the monarch was both a passive spectator and an active player, for it was only through the monarch’s inevitable, planned intervention that the masque’s disorder was resolved. As a result, the masque served to highlight or reaffirm the monarch’s positive features on two levels: first, it implicitly emphasized a particularity in the monarch – say, his compassion, sensitivity to nuance, or knowledge of foreign affairs – key to his decision; secondly, the masque universally reaffirmed the power and role of monarchy, for it was only through the monarch that peace and order were restored.

Furthermore, in being tailored toward a specific monarch, masques have further significance: they have a unique ability to simultaneously espouse and critique the monarch through their fiction. Orgel states: “Masques were essential to the life of the Renaissance court; their allegories gave a higher meaning to the realities of politics and power, their fictions created heroic roles for the leaders of society” (38). While these roles were “heroic” in their positive portrayal of the monarch, they were also “heroic” in the seemingly superhuman perfection they portrayed. Masques not only presented the rulers in their present form, with all their flaws and virtues intact, but in an idealized form. Masques portrayed an ideal of kingship to which the monarch, through theatre, momentarily embodied and to which he or she, in reality, was subtly

motivated to aspire. As Orgel succinctly states, “what the noble spectator watched he ultimately became” (39).

Therefore, because Jacobean court masques function as social and political commentaries upon monarchy, we see that the playwrights who write them then become a type of social critic. We see this concept at play in, for example, Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Queens*, which was written to provide a “martial context for womanly virtues” (61) for Queen Anne and her court. It is in this light that this thesis contends that Shakespeare, taking full advantage of his elevated and influential position as one of the King’s Men, sought to influence King James I through *Hamlet*, which operates as a pseudo-masque. In saying pseudo-masque, what I mean to say is that while *Hamlet* admittedly does not feature certain qualities common within the realm of the masque – namely the monarch’s *direct* role in the performance – it features, perhaps more importantly, what the monarch’s participation is intended to accomplish: the rendition of an idealized “heroic role for the leaders of society” to aspire to. Here Prince Hamlet fills the role of the royal participant, and it is through the successes, *as well as the failures*, of this fictional prince that James himself may grow. This ability to portray failure, not just success, is critical. Traditional masques were not able to overtly portray failure on the royal participant’s part without risk of appearing to negatively portray the monarch and the royal, governing structures they represented. In this light, *Hamlet* may be seen as a theatrical experiment, an attempt to evolve beyond the limits of the masque, yet build upon its inherent ability to offer critique.

An important counterclaim that this thesis must first acknowledge and respond to is the fact that, while I am arguing *Hamlet* functions as a pseudo-masque meant to influence King James I, who reigned from 1603-1625, *Hamlet* was recorded with the Stationers’ Register in 1602, when neither Queen Elizabeth’s death nor her successor, James I, were apparent. While

this thesis does not dispute this fact, it will point out that this registered play is the First Quarto (Q1) of *Hamlet*, a significantly different text – it has, for example, a different sequence of actions and speeches – than the Second Folio (F2) version that this thesis proposes was intended to influence James I. In understanding these textual discrepancies, this thesis proposes that, irrespective of who wrote Q1, Q1 represents a draft, a predecessor, which was later tailored as a masque into the F2 *Hamlet* for James. To then chronologically place F2, we know that the Second Quarto (Q2) was registered in 1604 and that Shakespeare died in 1616, meaning that F2 had to have been written sometime between 1604 and 1616, firmly placing it under James' reign.

Moving onward, this thesis will use the Jonsonian masque structure as a map to the concealed pattern in *Hamlet*. Developed by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones for King James I and Anne of Denmark, the Jonsonian masque is principally composed of two divisions: that of the initial “antimasque” and the ensuing “courtly main masque.” The antimasque presents “a world of disorder or vice,” a world that the main masque is intended “to overcome and supersede” through the involvement and instruction of the monarch (40). *Hamlet* exhibits this structural progression of antimasque to masque. Elements of the antimasque are immediately established in the tragedy's opening scenes: the opening line – “who's there?” (I.i.1) – conveys the general unrest and mystifying disorder of the antimasque, as does the looming threat of Fortinbras' invasion, the king's recent death, and the ominous presence of his ghost in armaments. Gertrude's “o'erhasty marriage” suggests vice and corruption which, in tandem with the deaths of Norway's and Denmark's kings, as well as Fortinbras' charge, suggests issues within royal governance. Cumulatively, these elements of unrest, chaos, and vice are indicative of the antimasque. Hamlet's interaction with the ghost marks the beginning of the courtly masque, for it is here that Hamlet's impassioned revenge, which implicitly serves to answer the problems of

the antimasque,<sup>2</sup> originates and is crystallized. This trend ensues until Hamlet's duel with Laertes, whereupon, in departing from the classical Jonsonian structure of antimasque to masque, the play descends, once again, into the chaos of the antimasque with the concurrent deaths of Hamlet, Gertrude, and Laertes just as Fortinbras arrives, and the threat of foreign invasion is realized.

Hence *Hamlet*, functioning as a pseudo-masque, exhibits an antimasque-masque-antimasque sequence. Yet this inspires the question, what is the significance of all of this? Why do we care? As stated previously, this project argues that these respective stages of antimasque and masque correlate to Hamlet's relationship to reason and passion, with Hamlet's death in tandem with Fortinbras' arrival, and the ensuing regression back into the antimasque as indicative as a warning against the renouncement of passion, consequently indicating Shakespeare's advocacy of impassioned rule.

I will now define wisdom, reason, and passion as I intend to employ them in this project. Contemporary trends tend to recognize wisdom as a sort of comprehensive intelligence: “[A] capacity of *judging* rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of *judgment* in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs: opp. to folly” (Oxford English Dictionary). This definition emphasizes the “soundness of judgment” in wisdom, especially in respect to decisions of “life and conduct” and “means and ends.” In this light, wisdom is an acute, discerning understanding of what to do and when. Of particular note, this definition of wisdom is “opp. to folly,” the contemporary definition of folly being “the quality or state of being foolish or deficient in understanding; want of good sense, weakness or

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<sup>2</sup> Hamlet does, after all, confront the ominous ghost, cease his mother's incest, kill Polonius, kill Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern (Claudius' complicit henchmen) all in his pursuit of revenge against Claudius – the ultimate, rotten source of Denmark's ills and unrest.

derangement of mind; also unwise conduct” (OED). In this context, folly appears to be the antithesis of wisdom; while wisdom suggests sound and rational judgment, folly denotes a distinct, opposing degree of “unwis[dom],” a “deficien[cy] in understanding.” In this contemporary light, wisdom and folly appear to be in conflict.

Wisdom, however, as I will be employing it in this project, will be defined in respect to Erasmus’ *Moriae Encomium*. Erasmian wisdom differs from the modern definition in two key aspects: first, Erasmian wisdom is concerned with altruism, not intelligence; second, wisdom belongs to the wise man, *as well as the fool*. In the *Moriae Encomium*, Erasmus defines wisdom as “a readiness of doing good, and an expedite method of becoming serviceable to the world” (41). Wisdom is the “readiness,” or willingness, to “do good,” but not necessarily the act of good done itself; here intent, rather than action, is the determining factor. But what then determines wise intent? The diction “serviceable to the world,” denoting an assistance or usefulness to others, reflects a sense of altruistic humanitarianism and qualifies Erasmus’ “good,” thereby, Erasmian wisdom is the willingness to positively help the world. While Erasmus’ concept of wisdom does not directly speak to or reflect the aspect of rational judgment that its contemporary version does, it implicitly suggest that, when making decisions in life, the wise choice, which reason should, but does not always lead to, is the altruistic one; Erasmian wisdom emphasizes moral, not rational, intelligence. This concept is pivotal because, in defining wisdom in terms of moral intelligence rather than simply rational, those who may appear foolish, yet help others, are considered wise.

Hence Erasmus asserts that wisdom belongs to “the wise man” and “the fool.”<sup>3</sup> This then provokes the question, if both possess wisdom, what then distinguishes the wise man from the fool? According to Erasmus, “the only distinction betwixt a wise man and a fool, that this latter is govern’d by *passion*, the other guided by *reason*” (45). This sole distinction affiliating the wise man with reason and the fool with passion is fundamental to this thesis; for while both figures possess wisdom, their respective expressions of wisdom, the acts “govern’d” by their dispositions, are quite different.

While the wise man’s reason may appear conducive to wisdom, Erasmus argues against this presumption through Socrates, a predominant figure of reason:

And what made this great man poison himself to prevent the malice of his accusers? What made him the instrument of his own death, but only his excessiveness of wisdom? Whereby, while he was searching into the nature of clouds, while he was plodding and contemplating upon ideas [...] while he was intent upon these fooleries he minded nothing of the world, or its ordinary concerns. (33)

While Erasmus does cite Socrates’ “excessiveness of wisdom” – as opposed to his “excessiveness” of reason – as his “death,” it is important to note that this “excess” of wisdom is simply a byproduct of his “excessive” use of reason: reason, not wisdom, is the problem. In pressing further, the phrase “search into the nature of the clouds” intimates that reason has an isolating effect. Reason removes one from the physical world, that which Socrates “minded nothing of,” and its “ordinary concerns,” to the airiness and non-substantive “nature of the clouds.” Erasmus finds reason problematic for this reason, for if true wisdom asserts a “serviceab[ility] to the world,” then reason, which moves man into the “clouds,” prevents man from actually exercising his wisdom and “do[ing] good.” Hence Erasmus pejoratively terms

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<sup>3</sup> “First then, if wisdom is no more than a readiness of doing good [...] to whom does this v[ir]tue more properly belong? To the wise man [...] or to the fool[?]” (41).



“ideas” that do not bear relevance to “the world” as “fooleries.” The drive in wisdom to do good is wasted in “contemplat[ion].” This Erasmian concept that reason, which removes man from the practicality of the physical world to the speculative “nature of the clouds,” excludes the wise man from employing his wisdom is echoed later:

For who would not hate and avoid such a person as should be deaf to all the dictates of common sense? That should have no more of love or pity than a block or stone, that remains heedless of all dangers? That thinks he can never mistake, but can foresee all contingencies at the greatest distance, and makes provision for the worst presages? That feeds upon himself, and his own thoughts? (46)

Similarly, because reason removes man from genuine interaction with his environment, here reason causes the wise man to be “deaf to all the dictates of common sense.” Akin to the world’s “ordinary concerns,” the diction “common sense” intimates the high degree of removal and effective ignorance in respect to the wise man separate from it; the diction “all,” denoting entirety, further conveys the completeness of the wise man’s isolation from the world. The wise man’s indulgence in the objective rationality of reason is emotionless – “no more of love or pity than a block or stone” – and dangerously arrogant, as well as ignorant in his belief that he can simply “foresee all contingencies at the greatest distance” and plan accordingly. This dispassionate, arrogant, and ignorant personality renders it inconceivable that such a person could reach outside himself, down into the real world from his thoughtful cloud, and appropriately, by listening to the “dictates of *common* sense,” exercise his wisdom. Rather, the wise man remains in the clouds and “feeds upon himself, and his own thoughts,” which implies further isolation, as well as a further emphasis on the role of “thought,” akin to the aforementioned “contemplation,” in isolating and inhibiting the wise man.

Ultimately, Erasmus does not believe that the man of reason, who is so removed from both the ordinary concerns and common sense of the world, can be successful: “How unable is

reason to bear up and withstand every day's experience does abundantly witness [...] yet the passions bear all before them" (23). Reason is "unable," which denotes an inability to do something rather than a conscious choice, to "withstand every day's experience" because, in dwelling in the contemplative clouds, it is so removed from the "ordinary concerns" and "common sense" of the world. Reason cannot adequately function in real life because of its tendency to abstract itself from it. Contrastingly, the "passions" are able to function in the world – to "withstand every day's experience." But why?

While we know that, in Erasmian theory, reason's inefficacy stems from its withdrawal from the substance of the world, this does not explain why passion *is* successful. The answer is, once again, found in the *Moriae Encomium*, where Erasmus gives us two key reasons:

And yet these (passions), however decried, are not only our tutors to instruct us toward the attainment of wisdom, but e'en bolden us likewise, and spur us on to a quicker dispatch of all our undertakings. (46)

First, passion "instruct[s]" us toward the "attainment of wisdom," which Erasmus perceives as paramount, yet reason does this too; so Erasmus' second reason is critical, for it is that which differentiates passion and reason. While reason removes man from the "common sense" of the natural world and renders him inert in contemplation, the passions "e'en bolden us" and "spur us on to a quicker dispatch of all our undertakings." The diction "e'en bolden" denotes the imbuelement of courage, and suggests coming activity given the removal of fear's paralytic effect,<sup>4</sup> while the diction "spur" and "quicker" further reinforce this concept of movement *and action*. Passion "spurs" man onward, prompting him to interact with the world around him, to experience the world's "ordinary concerns" and dwell in its "common sense," in an augmented

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<sup>4</sup> Earlier, Erasmus briefly remarks that fear and modesty are the "two greatest lets and impediments to the issue of any performance [...] which make men shrink back, and recede from any proposal" (42).

fashion – for passion removes man’s inhibitions. We see this illustrated multiple times throughout the *Moriae Encomium*:

To the Wise Man, who partly out of modesty, partly out of cowardice, can proceed resolutely in no attempt; or to the Fool, that goes hand over head, leaps before he looks; and so ventures thro’ the most hazardous undertaking without any sense or prospect of danger. (41)

Of particular note, the wise man cannot “proceed resolutely,” or unquestioningly move forward in action, “partly out of cowardice.” The diction “cowardice” denotes a lack of bravery and suggests fear, thereby proving a stark contrast to the passions’ “e’en bolden[ing]” effect. Moreover, the fool, who possess such passion, is here expressed through action: he “leaps” and “goes hand over head,” all without “any sense or prospect of danger,” or without fear. This dichotomy between the wise man’s inability to function due to the stagnating effect of reason and the fool’s decisive action continues:

In the undertaking [of] any enterprise the wise man shall run to consult with his books, and doze himself with po[u]ring upon musty authors, while the dispatchful fool shall rush bluntly on, and have done the business, while the other is thinking of it [...] such a habit of fool-hardiness introduc’d, as mightily contributes to the success of all enterprises. (42)

The diction “doze,” denoting to fall asleep, suggests a lack of movement, or stagnation, here as a result of the wise man’s “consult[ation] with his books,” the objects of reason. Hence the wise man’s desire to use his reason, to “run and consult with his books,” and use the objects of reason, “his books,” has a paralytic effect. Furthermore, as “dust” settles and stays upon object only which have remained still for a long time, the adjective “dusty” in describing these “books” further emphasizes their association to inactivity; not only do these books have an idling effect, but they themselves are stagnate. The choice of words further emphasizes the relationship of “thinking” and thought to reason. Passion spurs the fool onward, granting him “success,” while the wise man, still “thinking of it,” is paralyzed by reason. Therefore passion, as I will be

employing it in this project and based upon my reading of Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium*, is that which, irrespective of reason, *prompts man to action on an intuitive level*. The state of madness, which represents an exaggerated, dynamic form of passion, *yet one still originating from passion*, is to be included under the general umbrella of passion itself.<sup>5</sup>

Now that I have clarified the pertinent concepts and diction to this project – that of the masque-antimasque structure, wisdom, the wise man, the fool, reason, and passion – we will now proceed into Part II, where this project will argue that Hamlet's interaction with the ghost represents the inception of passion, and a fundamental internal change, in Hamlet.

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<sup>5</sup> For more detail and analysis upon this concept, see Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (91) or Michael DePorte's *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses: Swift, Sterne, and Augustan Ideas of Madness* (14).

## PART II: AN (IMPASSIONED) ANTIC DISPOSITION

The inception of passion in Hamlet originates with his interaction with the ghost, whereupon the newfound knowledge of his father's death catalyzes his instinctual pursuit of revenge. Horatio's and the ghost's separate, yet similar, warnings foreshadow the coming internal change in Hamlet, a change that Hamlet's words thereafter affirm. In addressing this first point, we see that Horatio, a figure of reason, cautions Hamlet from following the ghost, a being whose very existence defies logic, for risk of losing his reason:

What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,  
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff [...] ]  
And there assume some other horrible form  
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason,  
And draw you into madness? Think of it.  
The very place puts toys of desperation,  
Without more motive, into every brain  
That looks so many fathoms to the sea. (I.iv.69-77)

Horatio's warning is contingent upon the speculative loss of Hamlet's "sovereignty of reason" to the ghost, the very embodiment of unreason. The diction "sovereignty of reason" may be read in three ways. First, it may be read as Horatio's worry that Hamlet, to whom Horatio speaks and could formally address as "your sovereignty," will be deprived of reason. Second, "sovereignty" may be read as indicative of Horatio's elevation of reason as something exceptional, peerless, and, as such, something not to be "deprived" of. Third, that Hamlet's pursuit of the ghost jeopardizes the "sovereignty," or authority, of Hamlet's "reason" over his other faculties, namely his passions. Regardless, Horatio's core worry is that the ghost, in tandem with the "summit" – itself a place of madness which puts "toys of desperation," denoting vertigo as well as suicidal instincts, into men – will render a change in Hamlet. Horatio's derogatory choice of words, specifically the adjective "dreadful" in reference to the "summit" and the referencing of the ghost as "it," indicates his own reasonable opposition and innate fear of these satellites of irrationality

and madness. Moreover, Horatio's warning reflects Erasmus' criticism of the wise man, who is stagnated by his compulsion to reason. Here Horatio, in dwelling upon the uncertainty of the ghost's intent – "what *if* it [...] *or* to the [...] which *might* [...]" – retreats into inaction due to speculation, or his use of reason. Horatio's fear is entirely speculative, and it hinges upon the foundational worry that the ghost "might deprive" Hamlet of his reason, leading him to "madness." Even the speculative loss of reason stagnates the wise man. Hence, Horatio instructs Hamlet to "think of it," to use that which renders him reasonable to avoid that – the ghost – which may render him irrational, or impassioned. Implicit in Horatio's warning is a foreshadowing of Hamlet's coming internal change from sovereign reason to madness, as well as an implicit critique, reflecting Erasmus' same criticism, of the man of reason.

The second instance suggesting that Hamlet's interaction with the ghost will catalyze an internal change in Hamlet toward passion arises with the ghost himself. While the ghost's warning specifically refers to the forbidden knowledge of Purgatory, the warning may be read as a general warning of the consequences of forbidden knowledge, such as the true circumstances of King Hamlet's death. Such knowledge has irrevocable, internal consequences: "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres" (I.v.15-17). The diction "harrow" is key, and though the ghost uses the word as a verb – "to draw a harrow over; to break up, crush, or pulverize with a harrow" (OED) – we may better understand the ghost's intent by examining the word as a noun – "a heavy frame of timber set with iron teeth or tines, which is dragged over ploughed land to break clods, pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds" (OED). The term functions simultaneously on two levels: first, that the ghost's information would "harrow" Hamlet's "soul" suggests that it has a cleansing effect. Knowing that his father was in fact maliciously

murdered “break[s]” and “pulverize[s]” Claudius’ lies surrounding his father’s death. Secondly, the diction “harrow” conjures up imagery of violent internal change, a literal ripping up from the inside out, that, by association, implies that the ghost’s knowledge will cause violent internal change in Hamlet. In this same light, the ghost will later urge Hamlet to “taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught” (I.i.85-86), again suggesting an internal, negative change in Hamlet’s character from reason to passion, or madness, due to the ghost’s information. While Horatio’s and the ghost’s warnings foreshadow Hamlet’s shift to passion, it is ultimately Hamlet’s response after hearing the ghost’s story that affirms this change.

Hamlet’s reaction to the ghost’s information about his father confirms that his passion had indeed been ignited. Hamlet’s diction reflects the rapidity of the impassioned fool: “Haste me to know’t, that I with wings as swift / As meditation, or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge” (I.v.29-31). Here we see elements of passion begin to bud in Hamlet; Hamlet wishes to “know’t,” to apprehend, but only when it is qualified with “haste,” denoting an expedience to the knowledge contrary to the wise man’s slow and deliberate. This “hast[y]” form of knowledge is not necessarily rational; its connotations of speed speak to the intuitive knowledge of the fool who, in his hurry, understands his world on a superficial and exterior basis. This “haste[ned]” understanding translates itself into “swift” action. While Hamlet does qualify this “swift[ness]” as akin to that of “thoughts of love,” – where the diction “thoughts” may remind the reader of the contemplative wise man – this is to be taken as further indication of the need for expedience. “Thoughts of love,” given the context of Gertrude’s “o’erhasty marriage” and Hamlet’s coming denouncement of Ophelia, indicates swiftness, “thoughts of love” are temporary at best, not prolonged. Hence Hamlet, operating as the impassioned fool, desires to quickly apprehend and understand knowledge on an intuitive level, without prolonged

contemplation so that he can, in turn, act quickly; all of which indicates the ignition of passion, and madness within him.

At this point this thesis must briefly pause to acknowledge opposing criticism in respect to the alleged authenticity of Hamlet's madness, his "antic disposition." Jerome Mazzaro's *Madness and Memory: Shakespeare's Hamlet and King Lear* recognizes madness as corresponding to an inability to produce meaning, or value, from language; specifically, Mazzaro argues that madness disrupts the individual's memory, preventing him from accessing meaning in language and adequately functioning in society (97). In adopting a distinctly structuralist approach, Mazzaro understands Shakespearean madness through Ophelia and King Lear.<sup>6</sup> He identifies Ophelia's madness as originating from her inability to express herself through speech – "Her speech is nothing, / Yet the unshaped use of it doth move / The hearers to collection; they yawn at it, / And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts" (IV.v.7-10). Ophelia's language is, to adopt Mazzaro's term, "centripetal" in that it her "words move from seemingly random allusions to toward meaning or centrality" (105). Mazzaro identifies the same "centripetal" lingual trend in Lear as further evidence of this structure of madness based upon language and memory. Mazzaro evaluates the authenticity of Hamlet's alleged madness by comparing it to his criterion structure of Shakespearean madness as established by Ophelia and Lear. In doing so, Mazzaro concludes that Hamlet's language, rather than being "centripetal," is "centrifugal" – "it appears to move away from meaning so that repeatedly one hears it called 'wild' and 'unframed'" (105). Mazzaro reasons that Hamlet is, in fact, not mad; when compared, Hamlet's

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<sup>6</sup> Respectively: "The description of Ophelia's mad state establishes the terms of madness in *Hamlet*" (100) and "the passing of thoughts [...] conveys in Lear's speech the same centripetal movement that Ophelia's mad conversations do" (108).



madness is so different it falls outside the umbrella structure of Shakespearean madness constructed by Ophelia and Lear.

However, Mazzaro's conclusion seems arise from the innate blind spots of his evaluative, structuralist approach. By evaluating Hamlet's madness in respect to the precedent, *particularized* structure of madness determined by Ophelia and Lear, Mazzaro is assuming a single Shakespearean structure of madness. Indeed, Mazzaro's evaluation also fails to recognize the vast spectrum and varying degrees of madness – other evaluative structures – recognized during and after Shakespeare's time.<sup>7</sup> Since, in Shakespeare's time as in today, madness has been perceived as variable in form and causality, Hamlet's particular madness should be a coexisting structure of madness to Ophelia and Lear's "centripetal" structure. These two structures should then, in turn, be encapsulated by a larger, closed structure of perceived madness in the early seventeenth century. Mazzaro's analysis, in failing to acknowledge the ranges of madness perceived in Shakespeare's time, fails to recognize the possibility that Hamlet's madness is, in fact, madness – merely a different kind.

This thesis is able to avoid this dilemma in that it does not assert absolute statements on the authenticity of Hamlet's madness. Rather, this thesis acknowledges the tension in Hamlet's character between passion – which in excess translates to madness – and reason, a tension reflected acutely in Hamlet's soliloquies. However, it does so without absolutely diagnosing Hamlet's character as impassioned or rational outside of rare, singular instances.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Erasmus: "There is certainly a great difference in the nature as well as in the degrees of them (follies)" (62) or "For a token of their vassalage do wear my (Folly) livery in so many older shapes, and more newly invented modes of folly" (86), or Foucault: "There is no madness but that which is in very man, since it is man who constitutes madness in the attachment he bears for himself and by the illusions he entertains" (26). Foucault also recognizes four general forms of madness: romantic identification, vain presumption, just punishment, and desperate passion.

In building off of this last point, I will now proceed to acknowledge and respond to a foreseeable objection, from within the text, to the assertion that Hamlet cannot be mad and thus impassioned. After having seen his father's ghost when confronting Gertrude, Hamlet instructs Gertrude not to disclose that, "I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft" (III.iv.187-188). In addressing this seemingly problematic point, I will proceed by contextualizing the statement in respect to the *Moriae Encomium* to suggest that this seemingly paradoxical statement further supports the argument of Hamlet's embodiment of the Erasmian fool.

In applying the Erasmian lens to Hamlet's statement "that I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft" (III.iv.187-188) we see two key elements at play. First, we see Hamlet's continued struggle between reason and passion, his refusal to operate singularly, to essentialize himself, in respect to an ideological pole – for while he realizes his reason stagnates him, he cannot ignore the particularity of reason in man, or his compulsion to use it. The diction "essential," denoting "in essence; with respect to essence; as an essential attribute or constituent" or "on the grounds of one's actual nature" (OED), supports this idea; Hamlet "essentially [is] not" mad in respect to the "grounds of (his) actual character." The diction "essentially" also implies that, while Hamlet is not wholly mad, he is, conversely, not wholly rational, only "essentially," or in "essen[ce]." This then alludes to, as this thesis argues, not a definitive determination of Hamlet as rational or impassioned, but Hamlet as a fluctuating, intermediary figure between these two ideological forces. Coincidentally, Hamlet *may* be impassioned without being mad. As previously discussed, madness represents an extreme, dynamic form of passion; madness implies passion, but passion does not imply madness. Therefore, Hamlet may be "essentially not in madness," yet remain impassioned as the context of the scene, where Hamlet violently confronts his mother and again sees the ghost, would suggest.

In proceeding to the second point, the diction “craft,” denoting a type of activity or procedure, alludes to the Erasmian definition of madness, which is defined in respect to action; here Hamlet is saying that, while he is not wholly “mad” – madness again being an extreme form of passion – he is identifying himself with the performed actions, the “craft,” of the impassioned. As the difference between the wise man and the fool is not internal so much as external – for both bear wisdom yet one acts while the other does not – Hamlet distinguishes himself based upon physical expression, his “craft.” Hence Hamlet’s seemingly problematic statement is, in fact, not so problematic; by contextualizing Hamlet’s statements in respect to the *Moria Encomium*, Hamlet’s statement emerges as his refusal to essentialize himself as mad – both because, as a human, his essence is in reason and because he cannot wholly identify himself in either respect – as well his subsequent identification, not necessarily with the ideology of the fool, but with his ability to enact action.

Now that we have established that Hamlet’s passion, leading to madness, originates with his interaction with his father’s ghost, we will proceed to examine the rest of the tragedy in respect to the Erasmian concepts of reason and passion. Because this thesis contends that *Hamlet* was written as a masque to influence King James I and his court, this thesis will analyze relevant moments in the play chronologically, as an audience watching the theatrical performance would have been exposed to them.

PART III: THE INFLUENCE OF THE *MORIAE ENCOMIUM*  
UPON REASON AND PASSION IN *HAMLET*

As we begin our analysis of the play, we see an early critique of reason's limits, what reason is and is not able to rationalize and apprehend. Claudius' first lines to Hamlet foreground the developing tension between reason and passion in the play, while also implicitly exhibiting a Shakespearean critique of reason's capacity to rationalize. Claudius champions reason against the perceived lack of reason in Hamlet's melancholic distemper:

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,  
A heart unfortified, or mind impatient,  
An understanding simple and unschool'd:  
For what we know must be, and is as common  
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,  
Why should we in our peevish opposition  
Take it to heart? (I.ii. 95-101)

The "most incorrect" "will," or disposition, that Claudius declaims is that of passion. Claudius' statement that the "heart," the site of passion, is "unfortified," meaning it is unprotected as well as unrestrained, implies that an excess of emotionality is distorting Hamlet's "sense," or reason. This speaks to Horatio's earlier concern, that Hamlet's reason will lose its "sovereignty," its supremacy, to the passion ignited by the ghost. While the diction "mind" is affiliated with reason, here it is qualified as "impatient," denoting haste and imprudence, reflecting the concept of Erasmian passion as hurrying. Given these textual clues, it is evident that Hamlet's "most incorrect" temperament is passion. Juxtaposed to Claudius' criticism of the "most incorrect" passion is his praise of reason – what he here terms "sense" – which innately expresses the limits of reason. Claudius' conception of reason renders what reason "know[s]" as what "must be," or exist, in the world; in doing so, Claudius limits what reason can apprehend or understand to that which exists. In this light, that which reason cannot actually perceive – the abstract that it cannot rationalize – it cannot understand.

While Claudius declaims Hamlet's passion, a "most incorrect" "will," we see that, contrastingly, there is no better course of action for Hamlet. Hamlet cannot simply rationalize his father's death, death is mysterious and abstract, it cannot be "known," and so he must, logically, turn to that which "know[s]" beyond what is, and turn to passion. In seeking knowledge with a "mind impatient," a mind that is not limited to understanding only what is, Hamlet is able to begin to process death, to imagine and apprehend that which cannot be rationalized.<sup>8</sup> This concept is further developed as Claudius reductively asserts that Hamlet should not grieve so excessively because reason, his "sense," dictates that fathers die, subtly reflecting the distinction between what is acknowledged and what is understood:

Fie, 'tis a fault to heaven,  
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,  
To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,  
From the first corse till he that died to-day,  
"This must be so." (I.ii. 101-106)

Here Claudius designates Hamlet's continued distemper due to his father's death "to reason most absurd," it defies rationality both in its impassioned disposition – with the "heart unfortified" and "mind impatient" – as well as its irrational longevity – for the "common theme" of reason is the "death of fathers," and so the King's death should not be so shocking to Hamlet. However, in declaiming Hamlet's impassioned temperament as irrational, Claudius actually further reflects the irrationality of reason in suggesting that "death" can be reasonably understood. There is a distinction between the "death of fathers" being a "common theme," something to be expected, in reason, and the idea that it is actually *understood* through reason. What is "absurd" is not

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<sup>8</sup>A similar critique arises later in the text as Hamlet critiques Horatio for, in depending upon reason, only being able to understand that which he can rationalize: "And therefore as a stranger give it welcome. / There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (II.i.165-167).

Hamlet's impassioned disposition to process his father's death, but the idea that, in a decidedly irrational situation, death could be reasonably discerned and apprehended.

Of course, this moment of unreason in Hamlet's temperament occurs *before* his interaction with the ghost, which may suggest that passion does not begin with Hamlet's conversation with the ghost, as this thesis argues, so much as with his father's death. However, this earlier distemper foreshadows and predisposes Hamlet for the coming surge of passions catalyzed by the ghost, whose tale heightens and focuses Hamlet's passionate energies toward a goal, specifically killing Claudius. Hamlet's melancholic disposition arises as a coping mechanism to his father's death and, while it has elements of unreason and passion in it, these elements are not enough to bypass the supremacy of his cautious reason and prompt him toward revenge as the passion, ignited by the ghost, does.

In addition to implicitly praising the passion that shields Hamlet, Shakespeare offers a critique of reason in the characters Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius, for though all three use reason, they are unable to concordantly or accurately diagnose Hamlet. Claudius perceives and reasons that Hamlet's madness stems from his father's untimely death:

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. (II.ii.7-10)

The diction "dream" implies imagination and abstract thought, thereby Claudius' inability to "dream" other potential causes to Hamlet's temperament implies that what Claudius can rationally conceive is limited to a concrete level. The concept echoes the one we saw prior, rational apprehension is limited to understanding what simply exists, and when confronted with the abstract, that which it cannot rationalize, is nullified. In this limited scope of understanding rendered by his reason, Claudius determines that "his father's death" must be the cause, he

“cannot dream of” an alternative. This then leads into a second critique of reason, for Claudius, despite his certainty, is wrong. We see a similar flaw in Gertrude’s reasoning as well: “I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father’s death and our o’erhasty marriage” (II.ii.56-57). Similar to Claudius, Gertrude’s reason leaves her with little “doubt” that the cause of Hamlet’s distemper is “his father’s death.” However, Gertrude’s reasoning progresses, leading her to also decide that their “o’erhasty marriage,” or swift marriage, was also a contributing factor. Herein arises another critique of reason, for if reason is as objective and logical as it is perceived to be, then why is that when Claudius and Gertrude are privy to the same information, Claudius “cannot dream of,” or reason, another solution while Gertrude can? Moreover, despite their certainties – one “cannot dream” of other possibilities, while the other “doubts it is none other but the main” – their conclusions differ by degrees. In this light, reason is neither accurate, for both parties are ultimately wrong, nor is it consistent among itself. Ultimately what we see here is subjective projection through supposedly objective rationale; Claudius’ own concerns of being suspected in the death of the late King Hamlet are projected onto Hamlet, while Gertrude’s own awareness of her swift marriage after her husband’s recent death is similarly reflected in Hamlet’s madness.

This lack of accuracy and internal consistency in reason is further exhibited in Polonius’ different, yet just as insistently certain, reasoning. In rationalizing Hamlet’s madness, Polonius’ subjectivity pervades his supposedly objective rationale: “I would fain prove so. But what might you think, / When I had seen this hot love on the wing – / As I perceiv’d it [...]” (II.ii. 131-133). Polonius’ diction “prove” and his prompt to “think” indicate his argument’s logical roots. This logical rationale – similar to Claudius’ condemnation of Hamlet’s “absurd” temperament – is based upon the immediate, the “perceiv[able],” of Polonius’ world. Polonius uses reason in the

limited scope of his perception, and is thus unable to consider that which lies outside himself, such as the ghost or the effects of Claudius and Gertrude's marriage upon Hamlet.

Rather than rationalize Hamlet's madness as symptomatic of grief stemming from his father's death or his mother's swift marriage, Polonius recognizes himself, represented in his daughter Ophelia, as causal:

And then I prescripts gave her,  
That she should lock herself from his resort, [...]  
And he, repell'd, a short tale to make,  
Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,  
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,  
Thence to a lightness, and by this declension  
Into the madness wherein now he raves. (II.ii.142-150)

The logical progression of cause and effect, beginning with Polonius' "prescripts," or commands, and concluding with Hamlet's "madness wherein now he raves," conveys a high degree of reasoning. An additional, implicit critique of reason arises, however, because Polonius' reasoning is not only incorrect – Hamlet's madness, after all, has little if anything to do with Polonius' interdiction – but, in justifying its rational, it projects false dispositions upon Hamlet. Polonius' reason mandates that Ophelia's "repelle[nce]" produces a certain chain of effects – a "sadness," "fast," "watch," which denotes sleeplessness, a "weakness," and a "lightness," or lightheadedness – all of which is completely false. Polonius is, in essence, using reason to forcibly justify his cause to result in Hamlet's distemper. While Polonius' false reasoning does then demonstrate a degree of abstract thought, this abstract reasoning does abstract violence in that it projects maladies and activities upon Hamlet that never actually occurred; it attempts to make abstract falsehood real falsehood.

Ultimately, the differences between Claudius', Gertrude's, and Polonius' reasoned conclusions indicate a critique of reason as not only inaccurate, for they are all incorrect, but



internally inconsistent, for they cannot even agree upon a cause within themselves. Here reason is not objective, so much as subjective, for each individual's subjectivity inevitably pervades their reasoning: Claudius projects his unease with the circumstances of his brother's death upon Hamlet, Gertrude her awareness of the swiftness of her marriage in light of Hamlet's recent demise, and Polonius his preoccupation with his daughter. Each has rationally, but incorrectly, reasoned emphasis upon a particularity within their lives as causal to Hamlet's madness; Hamlet's ensuing statement that, "there is / Nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (II.ii. 249-250) seems to acknowledge this radical subjectivity within contemplative reasoning. In attempting to understand what they cannot – madness is, after all, an abstract psychological state – Claudius, Gertrude, and Polonius project false reasoning upon Hamlet. Hence, Claudius', Gertrude's, and Polonius' attempts to rationalize Hamlet's madness indicate a Shakespearean critique of reason as inaccurate and inconsistent, as well as limited in what it can know.

Hamlet's first, clear instance of his awareness of the tension between reason and passion, wherein he acknowledges reason's stagnating effects and passion's prompts toward action, occurs after witnessing the player's impassioned speech. Having just witnessed the player's passionate recitation of Pyrrhus' slaughter of Priam, Hamlet is acutely self-conscious of his distinct lack of passionate action in respect to his father's murder:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,  
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit  
 That from her working all the visage wann'd,  
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,  
 A broken voice, an' his whole function suiting  
 With forms to use his conceit? (II.ii.551-557)

Despite his "fictiti[ous]" reasons, the player is able to "force his soul" to cohere to his "conceit" and so give his performance an appearance, a "form," of authenticity. The words "fiction,"

“dream,” and “conceit” reinforce the performance’s notion of artificiality. As G.R. Hibbard states in “The Chronology of Three Substantive Texts of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*,” the player “bring[s] his innermost being into such consonance with his conception of the part” (79-89). Hibbard’s lens of reading the player’s emotional production in terms of “consonance,” and by extension dissonance, between the emotion and its physical expression proves helpful in examining Hamlet’s frustrations with himself which, in turn, serves as a commentary upon reason and passion.

What Hamlet appreciates in the player is his ability to, “in a dream of passion,” render a consonance between his interior, artificial “conceit” and his physical expression, his “visage wann’d.” While the player has no rational reason to feel distraught, he is able to “force,” intimating control, “his soul” into action, to make it express the “forms” of sadness – here a “visage wann’d,” “tears,” and a “broken voice” – through passion. The player’s passion surpasses his rationality, which would prompt him against such physical expressions due to their irrationality – there are, after all, no actual reasons prompting the player’s sadness – thereby allowing him to enact impassionate, physical action. The player serves as an evident counterpoint to Hamlet, who does have legitimate cause for impassioned expression, revenge, yet expresses nothing; Hamlet’s dissonance is between his instinctual drive for bloody revenge, and, by virtue of his rationality, his distinct lack of vengeful action. Hamlet criticizes reason, which prompts careful consideration and delays action:

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,  
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,  
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,  
    [...] Fie upon’t, foh!  
About, my brains! (II.ii.582-588)

Here Hamlet's "brains," a metonymy for reason,<sup>9</sup> prompts him to "unpack [his] heart with words." This phrase indicates two things: first, the statement acknowledges the relationship between reason and "words," itself a synecdoche for language; second, the statement suggests that, in "unpack[ing]," or removing, his "heart," the site of emotionality and passion, with "words," reason is able to reduce the passion's natural force. Hamlet pejoratively criticizes this reduction of "heart[felt]" emotional force into language, into mere "words," by labeling such an act as that of a "whore" and, in recognizing himself doing it, an "ass." For Hamlet understands that if he were to abandon "words" and prevent reason from reducing his impassioned actions into dull words, then he would have "a' fatted all the region kites / With this slave's offal" (II.ii.579-580). Here passion, unrestrained by reason, presents itself as swift and violent action; this innately reflects the conception of reason, that which Hamlet has used in contemplation, as stagnating and passion, the instinctual push he feels toward violent revenge, as active. While Hamlet's soliloquy acknowledges the power of passion in rendering physical action – the production of apparent grief in the player and revenge in Hamlet – and acknowledges that reason delays action, this recognition does *not* lead to impassioned action in Hamlet.

Following Hamlet's soliloquy acknowledging the correlation of passion to action and reason to inaction, Hamlet, in what is ultimately an excuse to delay action, ignores his gut instinct prompting him to revenge in favor of rationally evaluating Claudius. In observing a need to exercise reason over passion, Hamlet becomes conscientious of the ghost's intentions and decides that he needs to first assess Claudius:

I'll have these players  
Play something like the murder of my father

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<sup>9</sup> Erasmus reflects this recognition as well: "Reason he (God) confined within the narrow Cells of the *Brain*, whereas he left Passions the whole Body to range in" (22).

Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,  
 I'll tent him to the quick. If 'a do blench,  
 I know my course. The spirit that I have seen  
 May be a dev'l, and the dev'l hath power  
 T' assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps,  
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,  
 [...] abuses to damn me. (II.ii.594-603)

Hamlet's caution arises from his newfound suspicion that the ghost "may be a dev'l" conspiring to damn him, capitalizing upon his current "weakness" and "melancholy" over his father's death by consequently "assum[ing] a pleasing shape"; Hamlet now, in distrust of his initial instincts during the encounter,<sup>10</sup> turns to reason. In adopting reason, Hamlet creates a logical, yet laborious, process with which to ostensibly ascertain Claudius' guilt or innocence. We see aspects of the objective rational surface in this camouflaged theatrical experiment, where Hamlet, in having the players "play something like the murder of my father," is creating an experimental context to evaluate Claudius. The scientific diction "tent to him," denoting a search or study for information, and "observe" reinforce the logical nuances of Hamlet's plan. However, the conclusion of this logical process hinges upon whether Claudius "do[es] blench," or flinch, indicating that Hamlet is reducing the evaluation of Claudius' guilt into a simple, definitive sign. Here we again see the absurdity and subjectivity of reason. It is subjective in that the "blench" determinant of guilt is essentially arbitrary and does not necessarily signify guilt, so much as it could be indicative of any number of other things – perhaps Claudius flinches because the play, so soon after the king's death, is inappropriate. The specificity of the sign to Claudius is also arbitrary and unjustified: why is it that "blench[ing]" damns Claudius when, if Gertrude or Horatio were to also "blench," it does not? Can "blench[ing]" be indicative of their guilt as

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<sup>10</sup> Hamlet's intuitive suspicion of Claudius – "O my prophetic soul!" (I.v.40) – and acceptance of the ghost's terms of revenge – "I'll wipe away all trivial records, / [...] And thy commandment (for revenge) all alone shall live" – suggests that Hamlet trusts the ghost, whose tale confirms Hamlet's instincts about Claudius.

well? The radical subjectivity of the sign, the “blench,” is ignored and treated as objective in Hamlet’s rational discourse, thereby demonstrating the subjectivity and absurdity in reason. While this particular instance reflects the general theme of the play – the tension between passion and reason – here Hamlet’s reflections upon the player and himself both convey a similar criticism of reason’s supposed objectivity.

In examining Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” speech in respect to the *Moriae Encomium*, we see that the soliloquy further reflects this Erasmian tension between reason and passion in its recognition of reason as stagnating and passion as conducive to action.<sup>11</sup> The soliloquy’s opening lines herald the coming, repetitious conflict Hamlet will have in mediating the influences of passion and reason within himself:

To be, or nor to be, that is the question:  
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing, end them. (III.i. 55-59)

Hamlet’s question, and indeed the primary focus of his contemplative soliloquy, is that of “be[ing].” Is he to function – and perhaps even in functioning not actually function at all – as a “be[ing]” of reason or passion? I make this point as, implicitly, we see two different constructions of “be[ing]” and resulting actions associated to reason and passion. The state of “be[ing]” in reason is associated with the “mind,” the site of thought and, as such, abstractions; contrastingly, the passions are associated with the “uptake of arms,” denoting the wielding of weaponry, and thus a “be[ing]” who is active and physical in nature.<sup>12</sup> These associations indicate different manners of action – to “suffer in the mind” suggests a form of endurance, and

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<sup>11</sup> The Erasmian recognition of reason and passion is discussed on pg. 11 of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> These associations were commonly recognized in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; for examples, see Erasmus’ *Moriae Encomium* (22) or Campbell’s *Shakespeare’s Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion* (66-68).

thus inactivity and passivity to external actions, while “to take arms against” implies physical activity and movement “against” something – as well as a different acting relationship to their surroundings. Reason endures, it “suffer[s],” and is thus subject to its context, the “sea of troubles,” in which it acts; contrastingly, passion, in “tak[ing] arms *against* a sea of troubles, / And by *opposing*, end them,” exerts a counterforce upon its context: it fights back. While reason is static and acted upon, passion *acts*. These different forms of action and types of relationships to their respective environments – enduring or opposing – reflect the Erasmian concept of the wise man of reason as inactive and subject to his surroundings, and the impassioned fool as an active agent within his context.

And yet why is this? What causes the rational “be[ing]” to remain inert and, in doing so, submit to the prolonged suffering of life, while the passionate fool is able to act? Pressing further, the soliloquy reflects the Erasmian conception that the wise man’s reason, which prompts him to consider non-substantive matters, renders man stagnant when he is confronted with that he cannot rationalize, causing him to abstain from action rather than act in uncertainty:

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, [...]
   
But that the dread of something after death,
   
The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn
   
No traveler returns, puzzles the will. (III.i.69-79)

It is not “death,” but the fear of “something after death,” the unknown that “puzzles the will,” that causes Hamlet to delay action; reason, in creating uncertainty when confronted with that it cannot rationalize – here the “dread something” after death – is “puzzle[d],” and, because he is in a state of unknowing, the wise man, Hamlet, is stagnated. The diction “something,” which denotes “some unspecified or indeterminate thing (material or immaterial)” (OED), conveys uncertainty and ambiguity in its generality, and serves to reinforce the sense of unknown of the state after death which is so “dread[ed].” In turn, “dread[ed],” in the context of Hamlet’s rational

contemplation, serves to indicate the intense fear the wise man holds to that which he cannot rationalize. Moreover, Hamlet's specificity that this "dread something" acts upon "the will," man's rationality, further emphasizes the association between uncertain knowledge and reason that results in inaction. Man suffers in life because his reason compels him to rationalize everything and, when confronted with the "something" that cannot be rationally understood, man is paralyzed, choosing to suffer in certainty rather than proceed in uncertainty. Hamlet echoes this idea later in stating that this ignorance of that which cannot be rationalized, "makes us rather bear those ills we have, / Than fly to others that we not of" (III.i.80-81). This concept acutely reflects Erasmus's criticism of reason in two respects: first, the wise man's preoccupation with reason stagnates him<sup>13</sup>; second, that man is paralyzed by fear, which is banished by passion, yet left and here produced by reason.<sup>14</sup> As Hamlet's contemplative soliloquy upon reason and passion continues, we see his direct criticism of reason as obstructive to action:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,  
 And thus the native hue of resolution  
 Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
 And enterprises of great pitch and moment  
 With this regard their currents turn awry,  
 And lose the name of action. (III.i.82-87)

The diction "conscience," denoting a self-awareness of oneself in respect to morals, naturally implicates reason, which causes man to be conscious of himself and evaluate, through rational consideration, his actions. Hamlet's condemnation of "thought" stemming from "conscience" and "reason" arises through imagery of the skin. "Resolution," the commitment to action, is affiliated with a "native hue," or a natural skin color, that is then "sicklied o'er" and made

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<sup>13</sup> See pages 11, 13, and 14 of this thesis for the specific quotes from Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* with analysis.

<sup>14</sup> According to Erasmus, the "two greatest lets and impediments to the issue of any performance are modesty [...] and *fear* which make men shrink back, and recede from any proposal" (42).

“pale,” intimating illness and connoting feebleness, by “thought.” Of note, here “native” suggests the naturalness of “resolution,” implicitly reminding us of passion, the natural, instinctual state of man’s mind that is associated to impulsive action. The diction “o’er” indicates that – through imagery of the “pale cast” moving “o’er” the original “native hue” – that “thought” overtakes “resolution.” This idea echoes the one we saw earlier in Hamlet’s admiration of the player, for here reason, represented by the “pale cast of thought,” supersedes passion. We see further support of this trend that reason, through thought, inhibits action: “And enterprises of great pitch and moment / In this regard their currents turn awry, / And lose the name of action. (III.i.82-87). Similarly, the diction “enterprises of great pitch and *moment*” speaks to instances of passion whereupon one feels instinctually compelled to act, yet “their currents,” or their aims, are “turn[ed] awry,” or sidetracked, by “thought,” causing them to “lose the name of action.” The reverse implication of this statement is then that passion is inherent and conducive to action. In this light, Hamlet’s soliloquy functions as a critical commentary upon reason and passion that reveals two key points: first, that passion is of the moment and natural to man, yet is superseded and rendered inert by reason; second, that reason is obstructive to action and “enterprises of great pitch and moment,” for, in prompting man to thoughtfully reflect and consider his surroundings, man is removed from acting in or upon them, thereby stagnating him. Once again we see this concept of reason nullifying passion’s spur to action, yet, instead of Hamlet thoughtfully recognizing this trend, we see the trend play out again as Hamlet proceeds to reason himself out of killing Claudius.

The prayer scene serves to demonstrate, on a visual level, how reason diffuses passion of its gusto and translates spontaneous, intuitive action into inert consideration. Hamlet, upon finding Claudius deep in prayer, recognizes the significant opportunity for revenge the moment



represents: “Now might I do it pat, now ’a is a-praying; / And now I’ll do’t – and so ’a goes to heaven, / And so am I reveng’d” (III.iii.73-75). The diction “might” implies potentiality and uncertainty, yet an uncertainty that, as Hamlet dwells in the moment, evolves into conviction: “now *I’ll* do’t.” The diction “I’ll,” or “I [wi]ll” rather than “might,” conveys Hamlet’s assuredness. We see corresponding signifiers on a visual level as well; skipping ahead to *after* Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius, the declaration “up, sword,” signifying Hamlet’s sheathing of his sword, implies that, in this moment *preceding* the sheathing, that Hamlet’s sword is drawn, further conveying Hamlet’s certainty in killing Claudius in an instinctual, spontaneous act of passion. Hamlet, in following his passions incited by the moment, is expressing signs, on a linguistic and visual level, that he is going to kill Claudius.

However, despite the passion of the moment fueling his conviction, Hamlet checks himself, choosing to quickly reflect upon his intended act:

And so am I reveng’d. That would be scann’d:  
A villain kills my father, and for that  
I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
To heaven.  
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge. (III.iii.75-79)

The crucial word here is “scann’d,” meaning “to examine, consider, or discuss minutely” (OED), which is indicative of Hamlet’s rational consideration of his situation – in short, his use of reason. Again we see passion diffused by reason, for it is upon “scann[ing],” or applying reason, to the impassioned act of revenge that Hamlet contrastingly identifies his “revenge” as “hire and salary.” The diction “hire and salary” references a financial exchange which, in this context, suggests that Hamlet feels cheated in simply exchanging the murder of his father, whose soul burns in Purgatory, for Claudius’ murder, when he is “fit and season’d for his passage” to “heaven.” Through reason, Hamlet has managed to convince himself that to kill Claudius at this

moment is mere “hire and salary,” unemotional mercantilism, not “revenge,” a term which intimates a degree of emotion. Hamlet’s conviction of revenge, spontaneously ignited by a moment of passion from finding his father’s killer unarmed and unaware, is dissipated upon being rationally “scann’d.” In fact, the remainder of Hamlet’s speech (III.iii.75-96) reads as Hamlet reasoning himself further and further from action, either by creating unknowable variables as excuse to his inaction,<sup>15</sup> or by continuing to use rationale to legitimize his inaction. This change in disposition, from impassioned action to rational delay, manifests on a visual level as Hamlet immediately sheaths his previously drawn sword after reasoning himself from action – “No! / Up, sword.” The application of reason diffuses Hamlet’s initial gusto and conviction to kill Claudius; Hamlet has rationally reconfigured what was initially “reveng[e]” into “hire and salary,” an excuse for inaction. In allowing reason to render him inert during what should be a moment of passion, Hamlet again reflects the Erasmian criticism regarding the wise man’s inability to act for need to rationalize what the impassioned fool does intuitively.

While we have previously witnessed reason delaying Hamlet from action, as well as Hamlet’s own acute self-awareness of reason’s debilitating effect, the arras scene exhibits a rare instance where Hamlet acts intuitively, and allows passion, not reason, to guide his decisions. Hamlet, without pause for thoughtful consideration, follows his instincts and unhesitatingly kills the man, who he believes is Claudius,<sup>16</sup> behind the arras:

Polonius: [Behind.] What ho, help!  
 Hamlet: [Drawing.] How now? A rat? Dead, for a  
           ducat, dead! [Kills Polonius through the arras.]  
 Pol. : [Behind.] O, I am slain.  
 Queen: O me, what hast thou done?  
 Ham. : Nay, I know not, is it the King?

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<sup>15</sup> “And how his audit stands *who knows save heaven?*” (III.iii.82).

<sup>16</sup> An assertion supported by Hamlet’s ensuing statement to the dead Polonius: “I took thee for thy better” (III.iv.32).

Queen: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this! (III.iv.23-27)

While Hamlet does not actually kill Claudius, merely Polonius, this detail is irrelevant because the moment's significance lies in the fact that Hamlet, following his instincts, was willing to and could have killed Claudius. While reason as so far depreciated Hamlet's conviction, disallowing him the chance for revenge, here passion *could have* granted Hamlet his revenge. Passionate, instinctual action is rampant; Polonius' cry – "what ho, help!" – is immediately met with sharp rebuke from Hamlet who unhesitatingly stabs blindly into the arras. On a structural level, the immediate juxtaposition of the lines conveying Polonius' cry and Hamlet's lethal reaction serves to further emphasize the swiftness with which Hamlet reacts; there is no thoughtful deliberation concerning the act, no contemplative words to delay the action. While Hamlet's swift actions reflect those of the fool, so too does his distinct lack of reason; while Hamlet has previously rationalized himself out of action, this moment is bereft of consideration. Even if Hamlet's brief questioning – "How now? A rat?" – is considered contemplative questioning – though, in this context, it seems more like surprise than actual contemplation – the musing is brief and swiftly followed by prompt action. Moreover, while the unknown has previously prompted Hamlet into consideration and subsequent inaction, here Hamlet stabs blindly into the arras without certainty who lies behind it, hence Hamlet's ensuing "is it the King?" indicating his ignorance. Hamlet acts without reason restraining him, indicating the dominant influence of passion upon him. Gertrude's diction, specifically her use of "rash," denoting passion, and "bloody," in respect to Polonius' spilled blood, not only acknowledges Hamlet's guiding passion, but reinforces the notional relationship of passion and vengeful action: the "deed" was "rash" and thus "bloody." In allowing his instinctual passions to guide him, and ignoring his compulsion to rationalize his actions, Hamlet here demonstrates that he is able to act in a vengeful capacity.

In telling Horatio of his experience with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern aboard the passenger ship, Hamlet's tangential discourse praising rashness for instinctually motivating him to action, despite a logical reason to do so, implies an accompanying praise of passion. Hamlet's praise of rashness echoes Erasmus' praise of the passionate fool<sup>17</sup> for, despite clear or logical reason to do so, instinctual action:

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. Rashly –  
And prais'd be rashness for it – let us know  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well  
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us  
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will – [...]  
Up from my cabin,  
My sea-grown scarf'd about me, in the dark  
Grop'd I to find out them. (V.ii. 4-14)

Hamlet is *not* prompted to action – specifically to move “up from (his) cabin” and “grop[e],” or search, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – by any logical cues or ideas distilled through thought; the act, as intimated by the diction “prais'd be rashness,” is intuitive. Hamlet's own specification that this “kind of fighting,” which prevented him from sleeping, originated from his “heart,” the site of passion, reinforces the point that, within the context of Hamlet's praise, passion is the motivating force behind his actions. Moreover, this act of “rashness,” or passion, is “prais'd” specifically because it supports Hamlet when his “deep plots do pall,” or when reason and forethought fails. In the phrase “when our deep plots do pall,” the diction “deep” references complex premeditated thought, while the diction “plots,” which connotes preplanning, further supports this idea of forethought *and thus reason*. This premeditated “plot” most likely refers to

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<sup>17</sup> For two chief instances exhibiting Erasmus' recognition of the fool's indiscretion, see Erasmus' *Moriae Encomium* (42 and 46) or pages 13 and 14 of this thesis.

a plan to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Hamlet briefly mentions earlier,<sup>18</sup> a plan that fails to occur as Hamlet planned. This “plot,” as well as other “deep plots,” “pall[s],” or loses its efficacy, because there are inevitably other external variables that cannot be accounted for, such as Claudius’ letter or Ophelia’s suicide, and it is thus contingent upon a general consistency of variables in what is ultimately an evolving social context. Hamlet may “plot” to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but he does so depending upon this general consistency of variables in a present and future context. Ultimately, here reason cannot rationalize the abstract and unknown nature of the future – just as Hamlet is merely able to approximate death through sleep, so to is he here only able to rationally approximate the future with the present. When these “plots pall” due to variant factors, that which reason could not rationally anticipate, Hamlet is forced to spontaneously act in the immediacy of his situation. Consequently, Hamlet cites “indiscretion” as “serv[ing] us well” when these “plots pall,” for “indiscretion,” or what Hamlet is really referring to, rashness, allows him to “rough[ly],” for one is acting spontaneously and likely not doing everything perfectly, “shape our ends.” It is this aspect of “rashness,” one which allows Hamlet to “rough[ly]” shape, but shape nonetheless, his goals to adapt to a given situation that chiefly distinguishes passion from reason in Erasmian theory. It is rashness, that aspect of passion, not reason, that prevents Hamlet from sleeping and leads him from his room, and it is passion, not reason, which spontaneously prompts Hamlet to indiscriminately search for and find

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<sup>18</sup> Earlier, Hamlet’s quickly refers to a plan to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: “But I will delve one yard below their mines, / And blow them at the moon. O, ’tis most sweet / when in one line two crafts directly meet” (III.iv.208-210). While the diction “one line in two crafts meet” – the proverbial two birds with one stone – does seem to speak to Hamlet’s singular act of escaping Claudius’ murderous letter while simultaneously killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, one has to remember that, at this point in the play, Hamlet does not know that he is being shipped to England, nor does he have reason to suspect his execution there. The plan Hamlet refers to here is therefore *different* than the one he spontaneously originates on the boat and tells Horatio of in his praise of rashness.

Claudius' letter when a previous plot, which was rationally planned, fails; rationally, there are no legitimate reasons for Hamlet to warrant leaving his room or suspecting and searching Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hence Hamlet's association of "divinity," which, in this context, seems to allude strongly to chance circumstance, to "rashness" speaks to the elevated position with which Hamlet now perceives rashness. Therefore, through his tangential praise of rashness when speaking to Horatio, Hamlet exhibits two critiques of reason: the first for being unable to effectively plan and foresee certain situations and thus fail in them (Hamlet, after all, would have perished had he stuck to his premeditated plan or correctly rationalized that he had no reason to wake up and search Rosencrantz and Guildenstern); the second praising passion in the form of rashness for allowing Hamlet to act by intuition when reason fails.

This tension between reason and passion ultimately culminates in Hamlet's soliloquy in Act IV, scene iv, wherein he attempts to rationalize his excess use of reason to himself and, upon witnessing Fortinbras' soldiers unreasonably, and yet unabashedly, go to their deaths, finally realizes how devitalizing reason has been to his revenge. Hamlet begins his soliloquy by comparing man and beast in an attempt to justify his rationalization, and resulting lack of action. Hamlet speculates that if God gave man intellect to distinguish him from beast, then man was meant to utilize it:

What is man,  
 If his chief good and market of his time  
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.  
 Sure He that made us with such large discourse,  
 Looking before and after, gave us not  
 That capability and godlike reason  
 To fust in us unus'd. Now whether it be  
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
 Of thinking too precisely on th' event [...] (IV.iv.33-41)

The conditional word “if” following Hamlet’s utterance of “what is man[?]” indicates his struggle to rationalize why “man” was given “that capability and godlike reason,” or capacity for intelligence and higher thinking, if it was not meant to be used; Hamlet is trying to justify his prolonged contemplation. Hamlet theorizes that “if” his “godlike reason” was not to be used, then man’s “chief good,” his principal accomplishment, and “market,” his exchange and interest in the world, would then be to “sleep and feed,” simplistic actions associated with animals. Hamlet concludes his speculation by concluding that man would then be “a beast, no more,” insinuating that, without intellect, man is no “more,” or better, than an animal; the enjambment of the preceding lines, which creates urgency, contrasts to the definitive end-stop created by the period serves to emphasize this conclusion. Hamlet then attempts to further justify himself by arguing for intelligent design, claiming that “sure[ly] He,” God, did not “ma[ke] us” with “godlike reason” to be “unus’d.” The qualifications of “looking before and after,” which insinuate omniscience, and “such large discourse,” where the diction “discourse” denotes a “process or faculty of reasoning” (OED), emphasize Hamlet’s argument that man’s intellect is a product of divine intent.

Hamlet uses this concept of intelligent design to rationalize his own excessive use of reasoning, as not to use it would be a waste of that which distinguishes man from beast. The choice of the word “fust” denotes “a musty sort of smell among hay, straw, grain, and other farm products” (OED), and has animalistic connotations; ergo if “man” does not use his “reason” it “fust[s],” signifying a regression from “godlike” to the “beast[ial].” Hamlet is attempting to justify his use of reasoning by arguing that an all-knowing, omniscient God gave man intellect for a reason, and that to not use his intellect would be regressive, rendering him no better than an animal, or arrogant, in implying God is wrong. However, Hamlet realizes that “whether it be

bestial oblivion,” referencing the “oblivio[usness]” of an incognizant animal, or “thinking too precisely on th’ event,” referencing his excessive reasoning, he is reduced to perpetual inaction. Essentially, Hamlet is suggesting a similarity between an unintelligent animal who does nothing out of ignorance, and himself, who, in so excessively contemplating what he should do, does nothing; in this context, an extreme lack or excess of reasoning renders the same, inactive result. Moreover, the word “scruple,” which denotes “a thought or circumstance that troubles the mind or conscience; a doubt, uncertainty or hesitation in regard to right and wrong, duty, propriety, etc.; [...] which causes a person to hesitate where others would be bolder to act” (OED), is qualified by “craven,” denoting a defeat or overthrowing, thereby insinuating that this “scruple,” or mental vexation which reason attempts to rationalize but cannot, overpowers Hamlet who is “thinking too precisely” upon it. This problem in rationality echoes the same issues we have witnessed prior; when confronted with “scruples,” *or that which cannot be rationalized*, such as the ambiguous “dreaded something after death,” the wise man’s contemplation renders him inert in his need to rationalize that which cannot be rationally apprehended, thereby preventing him from committing to action for fear of choosing the incorrect choice amid such ambiguity. To surpass this, Hamlet must acknowledge the inherent limits of what reason can apprehend, and that he must operate intuitively, in respect to his passion, if he is to actively proceed onward into uncertainty.

In comparing himself to Fortinbras’ soldiers, Hamlet soliloquizes upon his shameful stagnancy due to his preoccupation with reason, finally realizing that, amid his uncertainties, he must commit to passion to realize his revenge. While the soldiers honorably die for a cause not their own, Hamlet shamefully does nothing, despite cause for vengeful action:

How stand I then,  
That have a father kill’d, a mother stain’d,



Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
 And let all sleep, while to my shame I see  
 The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
 That for a fantasy and trick of fame  
 Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
 Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause  
 [...] O, from this time forth,  
 My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (IV.iv. 56-66)

Hamlet's utterance of "how stand I then[?]" indicates his attempt to rationalize his own inaction as "twenty thousand men" commit to action and "go to their graves," or die, for "a fantasy and trick of fame." The statement that the "numbers cannot try the cause" indicates that, logistically, the amount of soldiers does not correlate to the event; though it also signifies Hamlet's further attempts to rationally justify his inaction. "Trick of fame," denoting an illusion of grandeur, and "fantasy," denoting a something unreal, connotes false authenticity; thus implying that the soldier's reasons for dying are false, or illegitimate. This contrasts with Hamlet's reasons for fighting, that of a "father kill'd, a mother stain'd," as well as the "excitements of [his] reason and [his] blood," indicating that, in respect to both reason and passion, Hamlet acknowledges he has reason to act. These "excitements," or incentives, ranging from Hamlet's "reason" to his "blood," or passion, encourage him to action; a full spectrum, from the rational to the irrational is established, yet Hamlet "let[s] all sleep." The word "let" signifies choice, thus emphasizing that it is Hamlet's conscious decision to not take action; Hamlet is allowing Claudius' transgressions against his family's honor, that of a murdered father and soiled mother, which are his reasons for action, to "sleep," or rest. "Sleep" connotes inactivity; ergo, Hamlet's preoccupation with reason has not only stagnated himself, but his reasons for acting as well. This inactivity contrasts with Fortinbras' soldiers who "go to their graves like beds," implying that these soldiers die with the same ease and familiarity they would going to "sleep," despite the irrational reasons for them to do so, thereby indicating that they are motivated by passion to act. Therefore, a strong

dichotomy arises as Fortinbras, guided by his passion, lets his soldiers “sleep” in death, while Hamlet – who here, in soliloquizing, is yet governed by reason – allows his reasons for revenge to “sleep” in inactivity.

Ultimately, Hamlet’s shame spurs him to revenge. It is to Hamlet’s “shame” that he witnesses Fortinbras’ brazen revenge, represented in the “imminent death of twenty thousand men.” It is to Hamlet’s “shame” that these nameless soldiers perish, without hesitation, for the irrational, a “fantasy and trick of fame,” while he waits in contemplation with a soiled mother and murdered father. This “shame,” a tainting of personal honor, finally culminates to incite Hamlet to action and make his “thoughts be bloody,” implying an impassioning of his thoughts and reason. Here, “thoughts” synecdochically represent the mind, while “bloody” either refers to “bloody” revenge, Hamlet’s family – his “blood” – or passion. Thereby, “thoughts be bloody” would be Hamlet saying that his mind will remain fixated on his family, and subsequently Claudius’ sins against his family, and their revenge, else his mind “be nothing worth!” Hence, in comparing himself to the soldiers, who honorably die for a hollow cause, Hamlet, who has legitimate reasons to war and murder, is shamed into renouncing complete rationality in his thoughts in favor for “bloody,” or impassioned, thoughts which will presumably spur him to revenge.

## PART IV: AN APOLOGY FOR PASSION

In adopting a formalist analysis of Hamlet's apology to Laertes, we see that Hamlet's use of certain literary devices – specifically personification, the third person singular, and third person possessive pronoun – allows him to defer blame for Ophelia's death from himself onto an abstract rendition of himself. Hamlet's apology begins by localizing blame upon himself and acknowledging his own personal responsibility in the matter:

Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong,  
[...] What I have done  
That might your nature, honor, and exception  
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness. (V.ii.226-232)

The presence of *only* the first person pronouns “me” and “I” indicates that, in respect to the context of the apology, Hamlet is acknowledging his sole responsibility in Ophelia's madness – that which “might your nature, honor, and exception roughly awake.” However, Hamlet's apology progresses, and in it we see that Hamlet begins to shift this blame. While Hamlet's phrase “what *I* have done” suggests that he is still aware of his role, and thus responsibility, in Ophelia's death, this responsibility is immediately shifted as Hamlet says that what he might have done to “roughly awake[n],” or anger, Laertes, he “here proclaim[s] was madness.” In correlating the infraction to “madness,” the statement shifts the blame that Hamlet previously recognized as his own onto “madness,” an abstract state, rather than himself, the subject. The notable absence of a possessive pronoun in reference to Hamlet's “madness,” or rather *the* “madness,” suggest that Hamlet is neither in possession of, nor responsible for, the madness or its actions. By simultaneously correlating blame to “madness” and avoiding linguistic possession of the “madness,” Hamlet presents madness as a distinctly separate entity from himself, an entity he bears no responsibility for.

As Hamlet's apology continues, we see Hamlet further disassociate himself from blame as he – through rhetorical questioning and reflexive use of the third person – creates an abstract, second Hamlet upon whom the personified and culpable madness acts. Hamlet further distances himself by personifying madness as an independent entity bearing responsibility:

Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet!  
 If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,  
 And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,  
 Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it. (V.ii.233-236)

By referring to himself in the third person – “Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet!” – while speaking to Laertes, Hamlet creates a fine distinction between the “Hamlet” being spoken of and the “Hamlet” speaking. The “Hamlet” spoken of is *a* past Prince Hamlet, yet a Hamlet not to be confused with *the* speaking Hamlet and *his* past, else Hamlet speaking would use the personal pronoun “I” rather than discriminate between subjects through the third person. In using the third person device, Hamlet speaking renders the Hamlet spoken of an abstract identity; he does not live in actuality, but exists as a conceptual entity in Hamlet's apology. It is this abstract Hamlet which speaking Hamlet initially absolves of blame through rhetorical questioning: “Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet!” (V.ii. 233). Hamlet's use of the absolute diction “never,” rather than a simple “no,” to his own rhetorical question functions to convey the impossible nature of Hamlet's ability to “wrong Laertes.” However, while Hamlet is momentarily removing blame from the abstract Hamlet, he simultaneously places further blame upon madness. In personifying madness as having “ta'en away” Hamlet “from himself,” Hamlet, on a linguistic level, reinforces the notion of identity and agency in madness. In doing so, Hamlet is then able to further displace blame from himself onto madness. Here “madness,” operating as an entity which has “ta'en away” Hamlet, bears guilt. The diction “ta'en away” is key: first it imbues “madness” with an identity through personification; second it connotes force,

suggesting that this abstract Hamlet did not consent in being possessed by “madness” and, subsequently, is opposed to and not responsible for its actions.

While Hamlet has managed to shift guilt from himself onto this personified “madness,” he ultimately shifts blame a degree further by associating the abstract Hamlet with blame. Hamlet begins his last conjecture declaiming madness: “Who does it then? His madness. If’t be so, / Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged, / His madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy” (V.ii.237-239). While Hamlet continues to cite fault with “madness,” the key point is that this “madness” is “*his* madness”: it belongs to the abstract Hamlet spoken of as indicated by the possessive pronoun “his,” which denotes ownership and implies responsibility. The quick repetition of the phrase “his madness” serves to reinforce this concept of the abstract Hamlet’s ownership. Hamlet therefore, through language and literary devices, displaces blame from himself onto madness by rendering an abstract Hamlet who possesses the culpable madness. Furthermore, Hamlet’s statement that, “his madness is poor Hamlet’s enemy” proves important for two reasons. First, it establishes a set relationship, albeit an oppositional one, between this abstracted Hamlet and madness, to which the blame belongs. Second, the statement, in the context of Hamlet’s displacement of responsibility for madness, represents the speaking Hamlet’s renouncement of madness, and by extension passion. In renouncing responsibility for madness – an extreme of passion but passion nonetheless – Hamlet’s apology to Laertes signifies the second key transitional point in Hamlet’s character.

In addressing the first point, while the relationship between the abstract Hamlet and “his” madness is oppositional, as indicates by “enemy,” it is yet a form of association. While the diction “ta’en away,” with its connotations of force, suggests that the abstract Hamlet spoken of is a faultless, non-consenting victim of a personified madness, the possessive pronoun “his,”

denoting ownership, centers blame upon the abstract Hamlet for he is accountable and as a result culpable for “his madness.” The second point builds upon the former, for in relocating blame upon the abstract Hamlet, Hamlet speaking is renouncing madness. Through his intricately structured apology, which functions less as an apology and more as a verbal displacement of guilt, Hamlet has migrated blame from himself to madness, then to an entity of madness and, finally, to this abstract Hamlet that exists purely in language; all of these abstract entities function as degrees of separation between the Hamlet speaking, and the personal responsibility for his actions which he has cleverly relocated upon an abstract personage of himself that is simultaneously distinct from himself.

This disassociation indicates that Hamlet is, in full, renouncing responsibility for and affiliation with madness, and by extension passion. Hamlet’s ensuing use of the first-person personal pronoun “I” and its singular objective form “me” over the use of third person reference suggests that Hamlet speaking is now fully himself; this Hamlet, represented by the “I” and “me,” is “disclaiming from a purpos’d evil” so as to be “free” (V.ii.241-242). While Hamlet here specifically renounces madness, because madness stems from passion, this renouncement of madness and its influences also reads as Hamlet’s apology for passion. Consequently, this act then represents a character transition in Hamlet from a figure of passion to a cautionary figure; this thesis interprets Hamlet as a cautionary figure, not simply for the act of renouncing or apologizing for passion, but for the repercussions he soon faces because of it.

PART V: PASSION AFFIRMED:  
FORTINBRAS' AND THE ANTIMASQUE'S ARRIVAL

Having witnessed Hamlet's renouncement of passion we now see, in respect to the Jonsonian masque model, a regression back into the chaos and disorder of the antimasque, ultimately implying a Shakespearean endorsement of impassioned rule. This Shakespearean commentary is indicated in two ways: first, by presenting the negative consequences of Hamlet's renouncement of passion; second, through Fortinbras' appearance and success due to passion.

In respect to the first point, Hamlet's apology is swiftly followed by his, Claudius', Gertrude's, and Laertes' deaths. On an individual level, the proximity of Hamlet's disaffiliation with passion, in the form of madness, and his death renders him a cautionary figure, from whom we, as his audience, learn of and witness the hazards of renouncing passion – not just delayed or stagnant action, but death. Established figures of reason also die: Claudius, a rational ruler,<sup>19</sup> dies, along with Laertes, his co-conspirator, and Gertrude, who, while not a distinct rational figure in the play, dies due to the scheming of those she affiliates with – Claudius and Laertes. On a broader level, the deaths of these characters indicate the death of the institution they represent, the royal monarchy, and the order and peace it signifies. However, with the royal family slaughtered, and any other figures who might have inherited the throne, namely Hamlet or Laertes,<sup>20</sup> dead, the peace and order the royal family represents and protects is gone; the

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<sup>19</sup> This is evident in instances such as Claudius' declamation of Hamlet's melancholic temperament as "to reason most absurd" (I.ii.103), his rationalization of the origins of Hamlet's temperament (II.ii.7-10), or his clear use of reason in scheming – planning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's visit, sending Hamlet to England, poisoning Laertes' sword, envenoming Hamlet's cup, and ostensibly even killing King Hamlet.

<sup>20</sup> Earlier, Shakespeare alludes to the possibility of Laertes ruling: "The rabble call him lord, / [...] They cry, 'Choose we, Laertes shall be king!'" (IV.v.103-1-7).

kingdom is ultimately left leaderless and defenseless to Fortinbras.<sup>21</sup> Reason or, more specifically rational rule, has all but dismantled the authority of the Danish royal family, preventing them from protecting themselves against outside interests. Fortinbras, the ominous threat of foreign invasion heralded since the beginning of the play, acknowledges this fact in laying claim to Denmark:

Let us haste to hear it,  
And call the noblest to the audience.  
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune.  
I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom,  
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me. (V.ii.387-390)

Fortinbras' "embrace," or seizure, of his "fortune" denotes either his "fortune," or luck, in coming to Denmark at such a point of internal dissonance, or the "fortune," or wealth, in the form of the Danish throne he is laying claim to. Irrespective, the statement functions to simultaneously critique reason in rule while affirming passion in rule. First, reason in rule has so dismantled and weakened the governing structure of Denmark they are unable to resist Fortinbras' "claim" to "this kingdom." Second, Shakespeare clearly renders Fortinbras a figure of passion, and so his success for Norway indicates a general affirmation of passion and passion in rule. Fortinbras' passionate, instinctual nature is evident from his very introduction in the play – "Now, sir, young Fortinbras, / Of unimproved mettle *hot* and *full*" – to Hamlet's final soliloquy – the "tender prince, / whose spirit *with divine ambition puff'd*" – or even localized to this instance with his insistence to "let us *haste* to hear it." Fortinbras is an impassioned character who, through his instinctual and spontaneous, or "hot," actions distinctly rebels against reason; his very motivation to reach Denmark is founded upon his irrational, emotional reaction to his

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<sup>21</sup> Fortinbras, upon entering the Danish court, remarks precisely upon this: "O proud death, / What feast is toward in thine eternal cell, / That thou so many princes at a shot / So bloodily hast strook?" (V.ii.364-367).



father's *legal* loss of land to King Hamlet. Fortinbras is the avenging, passionate prince Hamlet seeks to be. As an audience, the distinct return of the antimasque we witness, signified by the royal family's slaughter and foreign invasion, as consequence to Hamlet's renouncement of passion, coupled with the impassioned Fortinbras' success – retaking his father's lost land as well as the Danish throne – indicates a Shakespearean endorsement of passion in rulers. Reason in rule has systematically weakened Denmark, while passion in rule, embodied in Fortinbras, gains Norway not only their lost land, but the Danish throne itself. This then provokes the question: what is the purpose of conveying this critical theme of reason and passion in rule in *Hamlet*?

In seeking an answer to this question, we must again return to the *Moriae Encomium* to contextualize the motivations behind *Hamlet*. In arguing then that *Hamlet* was meant to encourage rulers to preside with passion, we must look at what Erasmus has to say about monarchs and their social responsibility:

Subjects move in a darker sphere, and so their wanderings and failings are less discernable; whereas princes, being fix'd in a more exalted orb, and encompassed with a brighter daz[z]ling lustre, their spots are more apparently visible, and their eclipses, or other defects, influential on all that is inferior to them. (124-125)

While the idea that royal figures – here the “Princes” – are subject to more scrutiny than those beneath them – the “subjects” – is common, Erasmus' idea is significant in that it suggests that rulers also bear a sphere of influence. The “wanderings and failings,” or actions, of the “subjects” are relatively inconsequential, they effect primarily themselves and generally have no serious consequences; contrastingly, because of royalty's sphere of influence, these same “spots” are “more apparently visible” because they effect all those “inferior” to them, which, in respect to a ruling monarch, essentially encompasses everyone. There is a trickle-down effect to the

sphere of influence, a concept that Shakespeare, through Rosencrantz's brief speech about monarchs, appears cognizant of:

The cress of majesty  
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw  
What's near it with it. Or it is a massy wheel  
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,  
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things  
Are mortis'd and adjoin'd, which when it falls,  
Each small annexment, petty consequence,  
Attends the boist'rous ruin. Never alone  
Did the King sigh, but with a general groan. (III.iii.15-23)

Similarly, the “King” operates as an individual who, by virtue of his elevated position, influences all of those around him. The images of the “gulf,” a natural site of unification, or of a rolling “massy wheel,” which gathers “ten thousand lesser things” as it rolls, serve to suggest the singular, potent influence of the ruler's actions upon the lesser entities around him. The particularity of the “massy wheel” as adjoining specifically “lesser” things serves to further reinforce this notion. Even the king's insignificant acts, such as “sigh[ing],” are translated, instantaneously, into a collective action – here the “general groan.” The actions of royalty heavily influence, as well as determine and represent, the actions of those below them. It is due to this pervasive sphere of influence that rulers naturally bear a distinct social responsibility to those around them; hence how they rule, how they choose to act, has dire significance.<sup>22</sup>

In this light, the importance of Erasmus' wisdom – what is, in essence, enlightened altruism – becomes clear. A corrupt ruler's sphere of influence similarly corrupts those he governs, Claudius serves as a clear example of this. Contrastingly, altruistic actions benefiting

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<sup>22</sup> For further examples, see the ghost's statement that, “the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forged process of my death / Rankly abus'd” (I.v.36-38), Marcellus's understanding of the ghost's presence as significant to the state, hence “something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (I.iv.89), or Claudius' understanding that “madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go” (III.i.189) because of their trickle-down influence.

public good would reverberate throughout the trick-down system of influence, leading to a better state.<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps due to this that Erasmus states: “To be a god is no other than to be a benefactor to mankind” (10). “Benef[iting]” “mankind” is elevated to the divine, to “god[hood],” signifying its importance. And what is it Erasmus speaks of if not wisdom, the capacity to “do good” and “benefit mankind.” Conscientious of the monarch’s influence, power, and subsequent social responsibility, Erasmus asserts the monarch be committed, fully, to the public he governs: “He that sits at the helm of government acts in a public capacity, and so must sacrifice all private interest to the attainment of the common good” (124). The man of reason cannot function in this respect; while he also possesses wisdom, he is removed and numb to his surrounding world due to reason.<sup>24</sup> The man of reason can neither understand nor properly answer the needs of the “common good.” The altruistic virtue of his wisdom is nullified by his need to rationalize before acting. How can such a ruler react to sensitive or immediate events, such as the coming threat of foreign invasion or empathizing with a son’s loss? They cannot, and in the arrogance of their reasoning they do further damage. What rule needs is a ruler of action whose decisions are governed by wisdom, by his people’s good, at heart. By virtue of the sphere of influence, this altruism reverberates throughout the governed, ultimately producing a better state. As Erasmus argues and *Hamlet* reflects, a ruler’s wisdom, his ability to do good, is lost in the rationalization of uncertainties, whereupon the rational ruler’s reason chooses delayed action over uncertain action, while passion prompts impassioned ruler to act, *and thus act and rule wisely*, despite the uncertainties natural to life.

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<sup>23</sup> Two clear examples of this: Fortinbras’ passion extending down to his soldiers, and Laertes’ rage over Ophelia’s death causing public riots.

<sup>24</sup> See earlier pg. 11 of this thesis for a quotation and explication.

## CONCLUSION: PASSION AND POLITICS

The significance of Hamlet's madness has long been disputed; viewing Hamlet in the context of the *Moriae Encomium*'s ideas of reason and passion reveals a multistage commentary upon reason and passion in rule in *Hamlet*. In witnessing the prince's troubling trajectory, we are confronted with the distinct irrationality in reason. In its desire to rationalize its surroundings, reason ultimately removes itself from the world it seeks to understand; the wise man, lost in contemplation, cannot proceed to act when confronted with the uncertainty of that which he cannot rationalize, ultimately choosing inaction over uncertain action. There is an innate folly to remaining in contemplative inaction, for it implies that reason can eventually understand the rationally abstract – the death of fathers, an antic disposition, or the unknown state after death – if it simply tries long enough. On the contrary, these abstractions can only be understood on an irrational, instinctual, and emotional level; passion is not an extreme, *but a mediating counterbalance to reason*. Passion prompts man forward, despite uncertainty, when rationality fails him, and helps him understand the irrational on an intuitive level.

Life is, after all, distinctly irrational; it is a subjectively rendered and subjectively received experience upon which we apply our rationality to render understanding. To argue that reason can rationalize the irrational is to reductively simplify both, for they function as ideological, antithetical poles in equilibrium. Reason may serve us well enough, but when our “deep plots do pall” due to the evolving circumstances we live in, is not the belief reason may yet serve us, in a distinctly unknown and uncertain context, irrational? Do situations such as these not require, if not demand, impassioned, intuitive navigation? This is not to say that one needs passion, and passion alone; as Hamlet acutely notes we were not given that “godlike reason / To fust in us unus'd.”

*Hamlet* does not espouse unalloyed passion so much as a tempering of reason with passion; each needs to balance and counterbalance one another. To fetishize one over the other is to misunderstand each ideological disposition's innate flaws. Passion, in spurring us onward, can be brash and fallacious; consider, for example, the arras scene where, if Hamlet had tempered his passion with reason, he would have realized that, having just seen Claudius in prayer, the man behind the arras could not be the king. There needs to be balance, for each disposition, in their extremes, represents an explicit danger: reason is inert and stoically numb, while passion devolves into a senseless and bestial madness, leading to senseless violence.

In understanding this theme of passion and reason in the context of Hamlet's status as a prince dealing with issues of rule, as well as the horrific repercussions Denmark suffers as consequence, we are able to understand *Hamlet* as a play – an innovative Shakespearean masque of sorts – on passion and reason in rule; a theme arguably meant to influence the astutely intellectual King James I and Anne of Denmark. While *Hamlet* does not feature the traditional masque's defining characteristic – the ruler's *direct* role in the performance – it innovates upon this convention by displaying the actions of another ruler, Hamlet, and the consequences he reaps because of them. In being able to portray the monarch in both the positive and negative light of his impassioned and rational decisions, respectively, Shakespeare is able to add a new dimension to his critique of rule. Hence we see an endorsement of passion in rule, not through Hamlet's ultimate triumph, but through his failure to rule with a reason adequately tempered by passion and the ensuing fall of Denmark.

Ultimately, Fortinbras' entreaty to, "Let us haste to hear it, / And call the noblest to the audience" (V.ii.387-388), represents a direct appeal for impassioned rule to the notoriously intellectual James and his courtly audience. Knowledge is to be given with "haste," indicating

the message's importance while also alluding to the play's theme of passion, to let the "noblest" of the "audience" "hear it." Fortinbras counsels these "nobles" to "hear it," where the diction "it" denotes Horatio's story of Hamlet's adventure, and thus, on a meta-theatrical level, rendering a parallel between Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and Horatio's tale of Hamlet. Shakespeare, through Fortinbras – the prince whose passion is ultimately endorsed through success – is appealing to and counseling this "noble" audience composed of James and his royal court to understand Hamlet's story. For, ultimately, *Hamlet*, in reflecting the ideology of passion, reason, and rule from the *Moriae Encomium*, is to be understood as a commentary upon the tension of passion and reason, so that we, the play's audience, may, in tempering reason with passion, understand and avoid the prince's tragic ending.

In returning to Hamlet's recognition of his madness as "north-north-west," we may now understand the significance of his identification. In lying north-north-west, the weather vane's apparent north, the point Hamlet identifies his madness with, is but a few degrees off of true north. True north, the point of reason, is fixed and certain; to lie at any other point other than true north renders the vane irrational. Eventually, however, the wind will blow and this fixed point of rationality will inevitably move: it will fluctuate as its context changes and it fails to adapt. And yet, when the wind again blows, it is this degree of irrationality in the vane that allows it to acclimate, to move with the pushing wind, until it again finds itself resting due north. The irrational, the passionate, is not the antithesis of reason, rather it is the counterbalance to reason's fixation; it is that which allows us, when the wind howls and our contexts change, to move without reason and, in doing so, reclaim our center.

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