CHAPTER – II

A COMPARATIVE CRITICISM OF HAMLET BARDLEY, STOLL AND W. KNIGHT

Hamlet is that play of Shakespeare that stands apart from all other tragedies, for Hamlet is not like the others. May be he had been projected as an ideal hero one without the tragic flaw. Even today Hamlet is an enigma. A breath taking variety of questions have been asked and also answered. These enigmas concerning Hamlet has become the subject for battles among the literary critics of all genres. Yet no one can deny that we all have a tinge of Hamlet in us.

All great critics even of the stature of Voltaire, Dryden, Pope, Johnson, Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge, Bradley, Stoll, T.S. Eliot, Dover Wilson, Spurgeon and both G.W. Knight and L.C. Knight have contributed to enriching the interpretation of this excellent and exquisite work of art. Hamlets criticism, needless to say, is the quintessence of some of the most accomplished critical writings in the European world.

“The range of this criticism is vast, for almost every viable critical approach or method or school has its major representative in the history of Hamlet criticism.”

Therefore the students, the teachers and intellectuals of English literature, this proposed study of the criticism of Hamlet serves in obtaining a double purpose, not only does it enrich and enhance our enjoyment and comprehension of the play but also accomplishes the deed of keeping the interest in this work of art and its creator, alive and active.
Further, I wish to make it clear from the very beginning that it is not the aim of this dissertation to probe into such controversies and questions that are a matter of discussion and dissention among the men of learning from the late eighteen century till the present time. However, the matters of discord will gradually be disclosed as one proceeds further into the discussion. Some of the controversies are the following:

Is Hamlet a problem play?

Is it a Tragedy?

To indulge in such analysis and calculation shall result in deviating from the path that has been chosen in this particular chapter. And in the words of an anonymous author in the Listener. "Every fresh critic who sets out to define the intentions of the author of Hamlet ends up in his own particular dead-ends in queer-street."^2

A great deal of research and investigation has already been accomplished on this single play of Shakespeare and yet one can never ascertain where the study of Hamlet can lead us because the uncertainties are considerable. Therefore it is not my design to just present a narration or the result of the findings based on the speculation of the plays. In fact my endeavor here shall not even be a clear cut scientific study but rather the focus shall be to present an elucidation of the basic issue that has resulted in a contention. The belief, practice, supposition and the dissent of Bradley, Stoll and G.W. Knight as a new critic shall be highlighted.

Needless to mention that it is necessary to compare and contrast Stoll with Bradley and the New Critics and with many others of his colleagues and
opponents. This evaluative study shall further yield a better grasp of Bradleys, Stolls and Wilson Knights, commitment to their particular doctrine of Shakespeare's study.

As from the very beginning from chapter-I of this work, this fact has been recurrently emphasized by scholars that a work of art no matter to which field it belongs, just cannot exist in a void of nothingness, it has to have a solid basis, this factual point of view cannot be denied. So this present study of the criticism of Hamlet, hopes to place it in the proper perspective rather then just presenting a detailed commentary.

The purpose of this chapter is not to present a survey of the critical appreciation of Hamlet but the focus will be on rather a comparative study of the critics mentioned above i.e. Bradley, Stoll and the New Critics.

If Coleridge's insight is reflected in Bradley then Stoll can be grouped with some other critics who have not wanted Shakespeare to be displaced from his theme and conventions and his surroundings. These critics who have been found to be often grouped together or mentioned as historical critics are L.L. Schuckling and E.E. Stoll, Theodore Spencer and Lily Campbell.

Wilson Knight and L.C. Knight; C. Spurgeon, William Empson, T.s. Eliot and F.R.Leavis are together known as, pioneers and guiding influence of the new criticism in Shakespeare. Their progressive idea, study of image, symbolism would be an evolution in the field of Shakespeare criticism.

Bradley's lectures in his book, 'Shakespearean Tragedy' are mainly based on the Shakespearian heroes and the qualities that make them 'great'. But in the criticism of Hamlet Bradley is most concerned about the delay in
Hamlet’s action which he interprets as defects that have made him appear a weakling.

Besides his penetrating discussion of the character,

“.... He was preoccupied with another inquiry: he wanted to know how the events of the tragedies were controlled, why one ‘force’ prevailed over another. Did Shakespeare make the hero responsible for his own fate, either consciously or unconsciously? Did he contrive a ‘poetic justice’ which distributed rewards appropriate to each deed, both good and evil?”

When we open the page on which Bradley’s Lecture on ‘Hamlet’ is written, the very first few lines are a sure indicator that Bradley has propounded his own hypothesis regarding Shakespeare’s tragic world. So as a critic of Hamlet, one feels he fully intends to prove his hypothesis correct. Hence one feels, Hamlet is just serving as a specimen so that Bradley can prove himself right.

“conception of Hamlet’s character could be, proved true, would be to show That it, and it alone, explains all the relevant facts presented by the text of the drama. To attempt such a demonstration here would obviously be impossible, even if I felt certain of the interpretation of all the facts.”

We proceed a little further and discover Bradley’s conception of Hamlet’s character is indeed the very epitome of 19th century romantic criticism.

As soon as Bradley begins lecturing about ‘Hamlet’ on from, the First Act itself, he surely and deftly comes to the point without beating about the
bush after he has finished propounding his poetics regarding Shakespeare's tragedies.

... when he had just received his charge from the spirit of his father; and his condition was vividly depicted in the fact that, within an hour of receiving this charge, he had relapsed into that weariness of life or longing for death which is the immediate cause of his later inaction.$^5$

The most important problem according to Bradley, that besets Hamlet in the play is the delay. (The delay or 'inaction' of Hamlet in avenging his father's murder has been for the nineteenth and twentieth century, a matter of great concern and even discord). Hence, it becomes a compulsion to take up this theory of postponement with all seriousness. We will also be taking into account what Stoll has to say in defense regarding Hamlet's delay and then how this appeals to the New Critics. Beyond doubt this failure on the part of the Prince was a major dilemma in Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy.

The Professor begins his discussion of Hamlet's tragedy by taking a number of vital points for granted and one very obvious one according to E.E. Stoll is this delay caused by Hamlet. First of all, he presents various theories that could have been responsible for Hamlet's delay. Not only does he study them extensively but also categorizes them into different theories like external difficulties and internal difficulties and later on shrugs all of them away since according to him they fail to satisfy relevant data of the play.

Some external difficulties that have been noted by Bradley are

the following:
"The King was surrounded not merely by courtiers but by a Swiss body-guard: how was Hamlet to get at him?"6

As further revealed by Bradley, Hamlet did not get a chance even once to fulfill his revenge when the king was in deep prayer. But then analyses Bradley, this sort of revenge would have prevented Hamlet from bringing the king to 'Public Justice'. Because also Hamlet may have had the moral scruples of killing a man during prayer.

But no unsophisticated mind, fresh from the reading of Hamlet will accept it,....7

This outburst is because of the failure of these theories based on the external difficulties, that Hamlet may have faced according to Bradley's musings. These external reasons applied to Hamlet's inaction, fail to stand the test of truth, if the text itself is consulted. Bradley also takes into account, that not even once does Hamlet mention these external hurdles, it has always been made clear that Hamlet wants to obey the Ghost in spite of all weakness on Hamlet's part. As one of his soliloquies convey:

"Sith I have cause and will and strength and means to do 't'.(iv, iv,45).

Bradley realizes, after he rigorously examines this factor which dawns upon him much later. Hence his emphatic assertion, regarding this fact that external difficulties did not exist and neither had Hamlet voiced such a hurdle. Thus report further lends support to Stoll's own belief that this prolongation was deftly and effectively managed by the artist himself, in order to make the climax appear meaningful and significant.
When this external theory fades into insignificance before his penetrating analysis he probes deeper and deeper and assumes, “that Hamlet’s main difficulty almost the whole of his difficulty was internal.”

Before producing his opinion regarding the problem of delay in Hamlet, Bradley goes through a process of intense reflection and interjections and ultimately reaches a conclusion of his own.

“.... The direct cause was a state of mind quite abnormal and induced by special circumstances—a state of profound melancholy,”

Thus Bradley is utterly and truly convinced that the cause of Hamlet’s inaction is, melancholy, having taken over Hamlet the proof of it is his temperament given to brooding, instability and obsession with the mood of the moment; this tendency or mood was because of the shock that his mothers sudden marriage after his fathers death occurred. Therefore the excuse of the delay, (as Bradley wants us to comprehend) So, Hamlets mind is in a daze and he cannot accomplish the task laid upon him by the ghost.

Proceeding on this argument Bradley relates this hypothesis to the action of the entire plot. Hence from the time, the play opens, Bradley sees Hamlet in the grip of melancholy that becomes a habit with him and therefore Hamlets feeling is “one of disgust at life and everything in it, himself, included..... such a state of feeling is inevitably adverse to any kind of decided action.”

Hamlet’s very doubt regarding the authenticity of the ghost at the end of the second soliloquy culminated due to this ‘Menlancholy Theory’.
Bradley is sure, this is no real doubt but "an unconscious fiction" another excuse so that Hamlet can delay and further postpone the revenge. Even the famous soliloquy:

"To be or not to be" is explained as an utterance of weariness of life and a proof of melancholy. Bradley thinks, the performance of the play scene to test the guilt of the King of Denmark and removal of Hamlet's doubt regarding the apparition that he encounters, Hamlet's sparing of the King at prayers and many of Hamlet's soliloquy. Bradley interprets them as an unconscious excuse for the delay since, Hamlet, he says has no compelling desire to kill the king because of his infected mind and hence the utterance from the Prince:

"Now might I do it, now he is praying: And now I will do it; and so he goes to heaven: and so am I revenged". 

Bradley projects this as a sure excuse and proof of 'symptoms of melancholy' seeping into the very core of Hamlet's mind so much so that not only does he neglect the duty he has to perform but he even forgets to remember the reason for this unreasonable intense sloth.

"Why do I linger?"

This explanation becomes more implicit to Bradley:

"The Hamlet of the Fifth Act shows a kind of sad or indifferent self abandonment, as if he secretly despairs of forcing himself to action, and were ready to leave his duty to some other power than his own."

Bradley has tried his best to explain away every loophole that he thinks are defects or incompatibility on Shakespeare's part. All along his study of this
major tragedy of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, he appears to be forming questions to ready made answers.

Why does Hamlet delay?
Why does he spare the King at prayer?
Does he put on the antic disposition?
Why does he behave as he does?¹³

These questions that often crop up in Bradley’s analysis get reasonable solutions, which are of course based on the experience of the professor study of human behavior. He wishes his readers to view Shakespeare through his very own insight and according to Bradley’s time and situation and comprehension. That is why, Stoll has often accused Bradley of being anachronistic.

Bradley often forgets to remember that Hamlet is not a living human being but only an Elizabethan Jacobean character. Hence for, “Bradley, criticism functions as explanation, where the explanation purports to be true and testable.”¹⁴

Bradley does not stop at this moment, so obsessed he appears with the problems that assail Hamlet that he must probe deeper, because of this task he has set upon himself till now remains incomplete. After having finished defining Hamlet’s delay, he comes forward with his opinion on Ophelia, Gertrude and even the Ghost and so many more questions have now been raised again.

To present a few examples:

‘Is Ophelia honest?’
Is Gertrude an adulterous?

And eventually the description of these minor characters makes it easier for Bradley to reveal that in the play of Hamlet its hero is the only tragic figure.

All the persons in Hamlet except the hero are minor characters, who fail to rise to the tragic level.15

As a critic of Shakespeare, Bradley not only elucidates and rationalizes the characters but also develops 'aesthetic implications' and propounds his own theory of the substance of Shakespearean Tragedy. For Bradley, the most significant here is the central character around whom every other character pales into insignificance. He illuminates Hamlet with the help of the predictions he has formed in his lecture on Shakespearean Tragedy and also deals with the other major tragedies in this same vein. It is a 'clear case of criticism merging with poetics.'

However, the very validity of Bradley's conception of the character, of Hamlet has been questioned and rejected. Critics have examined and reached the decision that Bradley's criticism of Hamlet, studies only one aspect and remains therefore incomplete. Too many questions may have been asked but there are many gaping loopholes that project an incomplete and an unfinished examination and exploration.

After having presented the undaunting outlook of Bradley's writing on Hamlet. It becomes inevitable that Stoll's objective study in reply to Bradley's lecture should also be presented in a befitting manner. To the constant assertion of Bradley that Hamlet delays his action of revenge. Stoll agrees whole heartedly with Bradley but comments that Hamlet has to delay his action, in
order to provide complete entertainment to his audience. Shakespeare postpones the grand finale to the end but keeps on whetting the curiosity of his audience by creating suspense through skill and ‘artifice’ and also through the use of local conventions.

Stoll out rightly rejects Bradley contention that Hamlet’s delay had anything to do with him being a ‘weak hero’ that Shakespeare wanted to project on the stage or some ‘psychological inadequacy’ in him which is Bradley’s words have been termed as ‘tragic flaw’. Stoll further illuminates that Shakespeare, in postponing the main action was just following tradition that came from the Greeks, ‘an epical tradition’. Shakespeare was not only adhering to the popular demands of the theatre goers of his plays but also gratifying the “dramatic-requirements, the ghost by all means must appear at the beginning, and the tragic deed

Be accomplished, as in all good revenge plays, ancient or modern, at the end.”\(^\text{16}\)

Before the deed was executed like all other revenge play of his time the playwright also engaged his revenger:

“...secretly, with intrigue and melancholy meditation....., and publicly with a pretence of madness...”\(^\text{17}\)

Although Stoll illustrates where Hieronimou’s in the Spanish Tragedy pretended madness was concerned it, “was attributed to the King being difficult of access; and the feigned madness was represented as a means to reach him.”
Shakespeare was not in the habit of following minutest detail, observes Stoll, although he did keep to the Seneca tradition. Rather than trying to explain every matter or motive ‘he had recourse to maneuvering’.

Stoll being a very competent, learned scholar of the Elizabethan Jacobean drama, confidently conveys his outlook. Shakespeare, being aware of his spectators’ reaction used this device of phony lunacy or ‘antic disposition’ as Bradley would like it, to be termed. Stoll emphasizes this act as being only a device or trick which also offers a dramatic contrast heightening the effect of melodrama. No matter how impossible the situation was, Shakespeare was aware that his audience was tuned on this very line, hence both the onlookers and Shakespeare being familiar with the situation it was skillfully converted into intrigue. “These being the prevalent conventions maneuvered by Shakespeare and his fellow dramatist.

... the baffling of the spies, the doubting of the ghost and the theatrical performance to satisfy it, the sparing of the King at his devotion, the killing of him (as intended) behind the arras and the reproachful conference with his mother, the trip to England”. 18

The dramatist cunningly and subtly designing all these traditional tools of a revenge play never once forgetting Kyd’s ‘Hamlet’ and he also lets Hamlet, keep his secret of a ‘revengeful purpose’ from the queen, his friend and also to some extent from Horatio, who is the only person in whom he confides eventually. Stoll also explains, in keeping the revenge motive secret, Shakespeare was following the Senecan tradition. This is how, Stoll manifests, that Shakespeare succeeds in expanding “the suspense and mystery, imparted to the hero dignity, delicacy, and pathos, and threw the whole burden of motivation, or explanation, upon his self-reproaches.” 19
Stoll again and again discredits those critics who fail to understand that Shakespeare also had his limitations; he was not writing for the critic or scholars but for his company and audience. And since revenge and heroic plays such as the old Hamlet and The Spanish Tragedy were only a few years old he could not even if he wanted to change the plot of this new Hamlet completely.

“And still less do the critics realize that in keeping the story and character fairly intact lay the Elizabethan dramatists advantage. ²⁰

Besides the prolongation, the pretended insanity is another difficulty that has baffled the impressionistic critic and led them to believe, it to be only a case of ‘double consciousness’ or a ‘safety-valve’ perhaps. Stoll vehemently disagrees with such procedures of interpretation employed by today’s critics; in order to understand the writers of sixteenth seventeenth century, according to their own time and conditions rather he feels they are unjust and harsh towards Shakespeare:

The lively lunacy which Hamlet now assumes is indispensable to the plot, not only because of its popularity with the audience, but because scarcely otherwise could the necessarily round about activity be motived. In Kyd, as in Belleforest before him, the hero, till near the end, had, save the contrivances like the mouse trap, nothing else to occupy him as he played his waiting, defensive game. That it is not, any more than the undertaking just mentioned, a subterfuge, a refuge in activity instead of the act itself, appears from the way it is indicated at the close of the scene just discussed, in which the Ghost breaks silence. If it were such the procrastinator should, as Professor Lewis says, only drift into it, fall back upon it. Subterfuges on the stage must look like subterfuges
Stoll again and again discredits those critics who fail to understand that Shakespeare also had his limitations; he was not writing for the critic or scholars but for his company and audience. And since revenge and heroic plays such as the old Hamlet and The Spanish Tragedy were only a few years old he could not even if he wanted to change the plot of this new Hamlet completely.

"And still less do the critics realize that in keeping the story and character fairly intact lay the Elizabethan dramatists advantage."

Besides the prolongation, the pretended insanity is another difficulty that has baffled the impressionistic critic and led them to believe, it to be only a case of 'double consciousness' or a 'safety-valve' perhaps. Stoll vehemently disagrees with such procedures of interpretation employed by today’s critics; in order to understand the writers of sixteenth seventeenth century, according to their own time and conditions rather he feels they are unjust and harsh towards Shakespeare:

The lively lunacy which Hamlet now assumes is indispensable to the plot, not only because of its popularity with the audience, but because scarcely otherwise could the necessarily round about activity be motivated. In Kyd, as in Belleforest before him, the hero, till near the end, had, save the contrivances like the mouse trap, nothing else to occupy him as he played his waiting, defensive game. That it is not, any more than the undertaking just mentioned, a subterfuge, a refuge in activity instead of the act itself, appears from the way it is indicated at the close of the scene just discussed, in which the Ghost breaks silence. If it were such the procrastinator should, as Professor Lewis says, only drift into it, fall back upon it. Subterfuges on the stage must look like subterfuges
pretexts like pretexts to a spectator at the theatre; they must do so more than to a novel-reader.\(^{21}\)

The audience of Shakespeare's time were people who visited the theatre regularly and were very well accustomed to these 'subterfuge' as today's psychological critics call it. Stoll's study of these matters, indeed is amazing, he says, the audience knew the hero was going to put on his 'antic disposition.' Since they were aware of such a scene coming up in the play, they enjoyed the situation even more, since now the avenger had full liberty to express himself. And particularly this 'mad' Hamlet was a great favorite and a well-known figure on the stage.

Even the reproaches that are seen by Bradley and his followers as proof of Hamlet's mental sickness are interpreted by Stoll as an 'artful postponement' of the final catastrophe by Shakespeare;

Therefore, like Kyd and Seneca though more skillfully Shakespeare motives this postponement of the catastrophe by the hero's self-reproaches, not in the sense of grounding it in character, but of explaining it and bridging it over; by these reminders he makes the audience feel that the main business in hand is, though retarded is not lost to view.\(^{22}\)

Not only in 'Hamlet the Man' but Art and Artifice and in his monograph on Hamlet, Stoll vehemently puts forward this same argument and confidently argues that both writer and audience were conscious of the customary happening in a revenge tragedy. Stoll also clarifies, that self reproaches or lamentations did not mean that Hamlet was lowering his prestige as a hero, in fact, Stoll remarks, there is no indication given from the other characters that Hamlet is at fault. In reality only the habitual custom was being followed by
Shakespeare as had been done before him by the ancient and Renaissance characters, exhortations in the form of soliloquy.

The point that our revolutionary critic drives at is so new and revealing that it has often repulsed scholars to accept the very idea, that the greatest of playwright of all nations and all ages to come would thrive at making impression and not only that but even conniving and scheming his plots in order to promote and create an aura of reality around his world of theatre.

Stoll proceeds in this manner with all seriousness to pursue this highly controversial issue. Whether the doubting of the Ghost on the part of Hamlet was honest or just another excuse for hesitation as Bradley sees it. But for Stoll, this delaying tactics, is not because of the avengers desire, not to act but rather the evasion of the dramatist, to postpone it to the end.

Hence Stoll is defending Hamlet regarding the delay. Stoll sees Hamlet’s doubt as a genuine one and does not agree with the romantics who obliterate the existence of the dramatist. If at all there is flaw the fault lies with the plot and the feigning is on the part of the playwright and not at all a blemish on the hero’s side, argues Stoll most strongly and logically:

“To save the story, the dramatist lets the hero heap upon himself reproaches for his inaction; to save the character, he counteracts the effect of these by his own words, those of others, and the whole impression of his conduct.”

The Sparing of the king at prayer and the test to find out whether the Ghost is honest or only a devil, has been examined by Stoll on the basis of the
‘Orthodox Protestant Opinion of the day’. Neither of these actions on the part of the hero seem as defect or weakness to Stoll.

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying, And now I will do’t.

There is no iota of doubt that Hamlet does not kill the King at prayer. Stoll’s critical and perceiving eyes are again put to work. But then this is the only opportunity that Hamlet gets to come so close to the King in the whole of the play and the only instance that he loses as well. And Stoll has put forward this explanation repeatedly in his other works too. That the sparing of the king during prayer is not because of indecision or mental paralysis as the critics of modern age would conveniently interpret.

“He spares the king, indeed, but because he would kill more than the body of him who had ‘taken his father grossly, full of bread, with all his crimes broad blown, as flush as may’: an excellent and appropriate reason, not only in Elizabethan but other Renaissance tragedy, as even in Homer.”

Stoll has been constantly harping on this same subject, because may be he thinks that through repetitions he can convince the Shakespearean scholars, the authenticity of his research on this topic.

In fact it is Stoll’s contention also to prove that all along from the time the Ghost had directed Hamlet in the first Act; Hamlet wanted above all to kill the king but not during prayer as then his spirit might ascend to heaven according to Christian scriptures, he wanted to kill in cold blood, for the purpose of revenge, like Claudius the present King of Denmark had killed his own father. This action was, specifies Stoll, again in line
“with the principles of the vendetta in tragedy and novella at the Renaissance, English and continental, in Senecan tragedy; and even in the Iliad, as Hector Wreaks himself on the body (and thus on the departed spirit) of Patrocles, and Achilles on that of Hector, mutilating it and refusing it burial.\textsuperscript{25}

What Stoll wants us to comprehend is that by doubting the Ghost, Hamlet is only reflecting the Elizabethan faith, that instead of being his spirit, the Ghost could be a devil as well. And when he spares the king during prayer he further strengthens Stoll’s hypothesis that he is the avenger and not an emotional wreck, weak of will and a psychopathic case. He spares the king out of sheer malevolence and cruelty, to fulfill the primitive saying, to quote Stoll ‘an eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth’ etc.

Stoll’s discussion of Hamlet is not only informative but also comparative. He has tried to answer as many critics as possible who he thinks are misinterpreting Shakespeare. Bradley’s natural queries get a lot of explanation from Stoll although never directly. ‘...the man is at prayer only a critic would here cry out for Claudius blood, and a critic, too, who forgets, or a psychologist who does not know the dramatic requirements of repetition.’\textsuperscript{26}

Taking the textual evidence into consideration Stoll questions that if at all Hamlet is eluding the issue why should the dramatist be so secretive about it. And indeed, for two centuries after the play was written, no body raised this problem regarding Hamlet’s incompleteness.

“On the stage, even more than in life, pretences and excuses should look like evasions, as indeed, for two centuries Hamlet’s (if such they be) did not and if the supreme dramatists are in this
A Comparative Criticism of Hamlet
Barley, Stoll And W. Knight

matter is, with our critics, a success, with his audience, of which alone he was thinking, it was a failure!"  

Hamlet’s going off to England is seen by Hamlet’s fault finders as the hero having no effective desire to kill the king and hence running away from the scene where he could carry out the wishes of his father’s spirit. Stoll, at this juncture in his Art and Artifice, gets disgusted with the bluntness or rather lack of these critics vision. Hamlet’s expedition was with a purpose, if we read the text carefully. Most Romantic and psychological critic will have us believe that Hamlet was suffering from illusion and this journey only took place in his mind and therefore it was a kind of spiritual journey that Hamlet’s melancholy exposes him to, they include this as a further confirmation of his infirmity. Stoll is extremely disgruntled with such critics because it is very episode which leads Hamlet to discover the treachery of the plan to end his life and he is able to replace the King’s letter that would have otherwise ended his life and now instead the King’s agents are to be killed, the daring sea fight, his presence of mind and his clever release from captivity. Through this valid argument Stoll fairly succeeds in convincing that this young man neither lacked courage nor the will to act.

In a similar vein Stoll asserts,

“...all this serves no purpose whatever but that of exhibiting the instant and almost unscrupulous resolution of Hamlets character in time of practical need. But for all that he has got by it Shakespeare might too evidently have spared his pains; and for all this voice as of one crying in the wilderness, etc.”

In full authority of his subject, Stoll is quite definite that all these episodes, the doubt regarding the Ghost, the sparing of the king at Prayer
and even the trip to England were being knowingly masterminded by Shakespeare on the Elizabethan stage, the purpose was nothing else but,

‘...an artful postponement of the catastrophe’ that even Homer had practiced on the stage. In this context Stoll sees a similarity with not only the Greeks but even the ancient epics. Just to make the principal character appear more interesting and full of life, their reputation is kept free of all damages and remains taintless to the end in the Iliad. Hence similar devices were also practiced by other dramatists and have been put to still better use by Shakespeare.

It is indeed amazing that Stoll as a critic of Shakespeare, not only delights in discussing, confronting, relating, describing, testing, discerning and disputing but he gradually arrives at a stage of discovering the meaningful rhythm pattern used in Shakespeare. This detection set the stage for a new kind of Shakespeare criticism and ushered it into a era of poetic interpretation. In fact, Stoll’s greatest contribution towards Shakespeare’s criticism is how conventions work together with the poetry as a harmonious whole.

Thus Stoll as a critic of Shakespeare does not think it appropriate to merely depend on speculation and conjectures, but also on reason and the knowledge of conventions and an ear for poetry. In one soliloquy, early in the play Hamlet utters “O what a rogue” most critic grasp the literal meaning of these words and think Hamlet is reproaching himself. But Stoll contradicts such an interpretation and rather depends on the tone, which does not at all express ‘irresolution or shiftiness, apathy or frailty.’ There is a similarity of purpose that appeals to him in both these utterances:
"O what a rogue"

"I will tent him to the quick if he but blench."

"I know my course."

Hence rather than shirk the task laid before him, Hamlet looks forward towards its accomplishment and is not scared of such hurdles as the mousetrap. Stoll simply cannot agree with the psychological interpreters, whether they are Swinburne or Coleridge. Kind of rhythm pattern used by these critics to express the mood of Hamlet, fails to convince Stoll that the character of the Danish Prince is full of uncertainty or infirmity. Further, rationalizes Stoll, even Othello cannot be blamed of being jealous or unreasonable by nature before his mind is deliberately poisoned by Iago. Then it is not as if this languor or lethargy of Hamlet remained stagnant throughout the play. He did make an attempt to kill the king when he thought he was spying upon him behind the curtain, only it turned out to be Polonius instead. According to Stoll how can Hamlet be blamed of passivity, since he did make an attempt to avenge the murder of his father. Bradley's theory fails here since if Hamlet was so sick and melancholic, how could the lethargy vanish so suddenly.

Picking up the sequel of the argument, Stoll continues in the same temper, and comments that if the deed was to be executed at the end of the play, it was hardly Hamlet's fault even the audience knew this and did not see anything unnatural in his action, nor did they expect him to act otherwise. He was like any other hero of the revenge tragedy including Achilles.

"It is both the traditional form and the natural procedure; obviously, the deed done, the tragedy is over."\(^{29}\)
Regarding the Melancholy problem that appears very important to Bradley, Stoll clearly answers him:

“In him self the hero is not melancholy in the technical Elizabethan sense, whether by nature or (before the second Act) in the play.”

I have of late— but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth,…

Because of this pensive remark made by Hamlet, the critics of even Dover Wilson’s repute and stature are utterly and completely confused and confounded and are ready to vouch that these self-reproaches are exculpation’s and nothing else and a further proof of Hamlet’s.

“sense of frustration, of infirmity of purpose of character inhibited from meeting the demands of destiny of the futility of life in general and action in particular…..”

They simply fail to distinguish this feigned role of madness from the real self of the Prince. Stoll really wonders how Hamlet can be suffering from—‘a state of profound melancholy’ in the extreme form described by Bradley, even if the audience knew about this particular variety of the disease, it would have been a strong dramatic method to have let Hamlet speculate each time he saw a Ghost that whether his weakness was being taken for a ride by the devil or not, further this would probably compel him to declare he ‘does not know’ when it comes to his procrastination. Something that is most strange in the entire play is that Hamlet while so badly infected by this disease, not even a single character in the play is aware of it, except for Horatio his close friend, and that also quite
at a late stage, neither his mother nor even the agents who have been posted by
the king to spy upon him.

The only flaw that has been attributed to Hamlet as an ideal hero is in
the part when he delays. Critics of all genre cling to this part in detail. But some
like Stoll thinks Hamlet has no flaw because he is a typical hero of the
Elizabethan tragedy of revenge. By the definition of tragedy, there should exist
a flaw in the character of the main hero, who is a great personality and is
involved in a strife or combat that ends catastrophically. Shakespeare
surpassing the tradition in this play particularly making his hero, appear infirm
and impotent and yet being so secretive about it. Because this was not
Elizabethan concept of tragedies. Really this is something beyond Stoll’s
comprehension and analysis. His understanding of such problems, his keenness
and his logical arguments are so overwhelming that you just cannot help
agreeing with him and the deeper you move into these analysis a growing
awareness, towards the authenticity of his finding gives an insight into the
entire problem that assails Hamlet.

Stoll’s analysis further, illuminates that if Shakespeare was enlarging
and enriching the conventions of prevaricated madness as prevalent in Kyd’s
lunacy, this does not indicate that it was due to the involvement of psychology
but rather because it was the latest craze for the revenger to pretend madness.
His experience of a successful playwright convinced him to bank upon such a
situation, since it was popular. There, was no mystery regarding this character
as today’s critic want to romanticize. Shakespeare was plainly projecting
Hamlet both as the madman and the revenger or malcontent, fused into one.
Further Shakespeare did not enhance this cover of pretended madness for his
hero till the IIIrd and IVth Acts since after some time it would cease to appeal as an intrigue to the audience and also because repetition in the scene may bore the audience.

Hence this introduction after the example of Marston, with only a stage version of the Elizabethan ‘humour’ of melancholy. Shakespeare saw in this sort of a projection for his hero a wider scope, for his revenger disguised both as a madman and a malcontent could express himself with full liberty.\(^\text{33}\)

"...merged in one, there was for the Cruder Elizabethan theatre, a sufficient, though external, motivation not only craft to match craft, and murder to match murder, but feigned madness or melancholy to, warrant, picturesque audacity and impudence.\(^\text{34}\)

Stoll views Shakespeare as not only following tradition but as a creator, breathing life into these wooden characters, besides raising their emotional and moral level. To create his characters this origination does not need the help of psychology or even science, according to his perception the master strokesman, like other great dramatists, epic poets and novelists, makes use of his skill and art with fine touches of strokes and expressions.

"Motives logical or even psychological consistency, are not pre-requisites to characterization."\(^\text{35}\)

Although he did bestow a dual personality or rather role to his hero, taking immense care with the original plot and the actual happenings in the story---he could not alter the actual plot since he could neither annoy the audience, nor take for granted the companies expectations. And as known by all, Shakespeare was the best of all imitater, he was an expert at borrowing and
transforming old plays and stories and yet preserving their originality. The most essential thing in the presentation of Hamlet, according to Stoll is the Prince's individuality that Shakespeare makes more 'superior to his conduct'. If we are to study the Drama of Hamlet carefully this is what we can glean about Hamlet from the mouth of the other characters also.

Thus he is active and reflective, merry and melancholy, indecent and noble, impudent and courteous cruel and tender, both suspicious and crafty and also (as Claudius himself has noted 'most generous and free from all contriving'.

This is surely the making of great drama. Drawing a comparison between Othello and Hamlet, Stoll implies that both these heroes although they are in strife can be plainly recognized for their unique individuality and not personality. Stoll feels strongly that Shakespeare in the form of Hamlet was merely presenting a character with a personality and not a structure to operate upon and present a clinical study, that gave an accurate, systematic reading of its inner feelings. Hence, it is unfair on the part of interpreters to search for a 'scientific consistency' in the character of Hamlet when the author's purpose in presenting the drama was external, poetic and traumatic.

Yet, there is not an iota of doubt that the highly charged yet sensitive young man, the leading figure of Shakespeare's play (if we are for a moment to extract him away from the story,) is the most popular among Shakespeare's other heroes even Lear, Othello, Macbeth and Antony. Because that tinge of Hamlet is there in all of us.

No matter how scathing and unjust the present day critics are in judging Stoll, they cannot deny that Stoll accepts Shakespeare's superiority where
character drawing is concerned, the article on 'Hamlet the Man' is a sure evidence of such a belief.

He accepts regarding Hamlet, 'what makes him more popular than Shakespeare's other heroes is partly his mere story that of both pathos and heroism, of the world against him and him against the world—but mostly his personal charm his flexibility and familiarity his complexity of nature and simplicity of manner, his sincerity of feeling if not always of demeanor, his humor and his wit.'

This is where lies the originality and the greatness of Shakespeare in not just imitating life but developing and enlarging the custom and tradition and transforming it into a fascinating work of art, and that's how the 'germ in Kyd and Marston comes to full flower in Shakespeare.'

Having dispensed with psychology, Stoll takes into consideration Hamlet's eccentricities with words: his questions and repetitions. He gives full credit to Professor Bradley for having been the first Shakespearian critic to have noticed this idiosyncrasy.

Here are some very obvious examples:

Thrift, thrift, Horatio.

Indeed, indeed, Sir's, but this troubles me.

Come deal justly with me: come, come.

Worm wood, worm wood!
Although Bradley finds these repetition ‘...intensely characteristic’ of Hamlet, but sadly enough he does not read much significance into this habit. Stoll is also able to glean the matter with his critical eyes, about why Hamlet is so depressed all the time. After his dear father’s funeral, the late King of Denmark, naturally a kind of gloom had descended upon Hamlet. His mother’s hasty marriage to Claudious also must have ashamed him but the information conveyed to him from Horatio and his friends about the apparition that resembled the dead king, transforms his very speech, over powering him with excitement, thrill and eager expectation. And according to Stoll’s judgment, ‘The Prince’s questions and repetitions are signs of his restless mental activity’. Further informs Stoll, apparently from an attentive study of Shakespeare’s characters as different as Rosalind; Cleopatra, Falstaff, and Shallow, Othello and Brabantio, Lear and Kent and even Gloster, that they were all in the habit of uttering repetitions. Even the other dramatists have often used this sort of rhetorical device. Hence, Hamlet’s questions, and his repetitions of words have definite reason, according to Stoll’s understanding, they express the concealed emotions of curiosity, excitement even wonder and breathlessness. The scholars who are obsessed with projecting Hamlet as a psychological study and are constantly in the habit of making a point of everything and anything, seem to wear out Stoll’s patience. For he wonders how they cannot afford to at least concede to a son’s excitement at the news of his father’s return from the grave and stop interpreting every action of Hamlet as his mental or psychological malady.

Stoll emphasizes the importance of relying on the stress and rhythm pattern of Shakespeare’s verses as well, because if we listen carefully it tells half the tale. Here are some instances:
Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked meats

Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables

Indeed, indeed, Sirs but this troubles me-

Very like, very like. Slay'd it long?

As is customary of the impressionistic critic, perusal of these verses shall surely result in their hasty conclusion that all these repetitions are because Hamlet is a neurotic, with an unbalanced nervous system, or that he is surely and definitely afflicted with the intense disease of melancholy and hence these stammering and stuttering on his part and even the two sides to his moods, now happy now sad, add further reflection on their speculations.

In order to retort correctly to the musings of such critics, Stoll presents textual evidences, for example, the Queens Speech about Hamlet's outbreak of emotion at the funeral scene:

'This is mere madness'.

Hence to analyze Hamlet's assumed madness as a disease is a grave mistake and in contradiction to the Queen's remark.

"Shakespeare's romantic tragedy, like all other great popular tragedy, presents human nature not a doctrine of human nature; heroes, not weaklings, or psychopathic case; and, above all, men as we know them, not curiosities of the contemporary or even the Elizabethan psychology or physiology. In himself Hamlet is no more a prey to melancholy than he is (as though by other recent scholars) to the deadly sin of
sloth; or than Lear, to that of wrath; or Othello, to jealousy."

Any way, observes Stoll, those characters that were victims of these humors during Elizabethan age were presented as characters in comedy and not in tragedies like we find in many of Jonson's comedies for example, Episome and others.

Particular speeches of Hamlet have been under constant investigation which has contaminated the air of criticism with its bad breath of discord, dispute and disagreement. Stoll has discussed some of these important lines in detail and explained whether they are self-reproaches, interrogations, reflections or just dramatic exhortation.

Stoll introduces us to 'the unmistakable, unforgettable voice of Hamlet,' from the second scene itself; his first speech which carries a lot of emphasis or resolved to perform his duty towards his father the King and hence the Kingdom Denmark.

'A little more than kin and less than kind,'

The sarcasm, irony and bitterness in his tone cannot be denied and then when he is alone once more, he gives full vent to, 'his outburst of grief disillusionment, and disgust:

'O that this too, too solid flesh would melt....'

Stoll tirelessly defends these utterances of Hamlet as being characteristic of his personality for example he says:
Whether in manner or matter, the whole speech is characteristic. His melancholy, reaches beyond the death of his father and the frailty of his mother, and embraces life itself. But there is no languor or paralysis, no weakness or indifference; such as most critics have discovered. There are, instead, exclamations and execrations, impatient interruptions and parentheses; and the reiteration is energetic and insistent.40

‘Fie on’t! Oh fie, fie! Tis an unweeded garden.’

The same pronouncement of bitter energy and resolution is found in these famous lines by the American Stagerite, confounding the supposition of critics; Hamlet admonishing his mother is proof enough of his alert mind.

Let me not thing on’t---

Frailty, they name is women!---

A litte month, or e’er those Shoe’s were old,

With which she followed my poor fathers body,

Like Niobe, all tears—why she, even she—

O God, a beast, that wants discourse of reason, would have mourn’d longer—married with mine uncle.

And in alike manner in all of Hamlet’s soliloquies Stoll indicates, ‘this pointed or jagged, though deep and quivering, energy of style and rhythm’ prevails throughout.

In the soliloquy at the end of the second Act, Hamlet does mention ‘his weakness and melancholy’ and before that he scolds himself for being so naïve
where plans for taking vengeance are concerned, he runs through all the insults which provoked a resolute man to mortal combat:

"...... the spirit that I have seen may be the Devil, and the Devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape. Yea and perhaps out of my weakness and my melancholy, as he is very potent with such spirits, abuses me to damn me..."

Stoll remains firm in determining that such passing casual remarks cannot determine Hamlet's character, nor can the literal sense of the words be exploited in order to justify Hamlet's misgivings. Even if it would have been true that Hamlet is a victim of Elizabethan melancholy or even a specimen of some 'humour', even then it would have been insufficient to pronounce 'humour' as the centre and motive of his character.' As it is we eventually find for ourselves as the play commences, that in fact the Ghost has nothing to do with the hero's melancholy. This is the natural course in all Elizabethan drama (e.g. in The White Devil, III iii,) and Stoll is sure that Burton's doctrine has a hand in this speculation of whether the Ghost is the devil's work or not.41

To Stoll the critics appear to be bent upon seeing Hamlet as a feeble, weak hero and hence giving undue importance to every minor conjecture of Hamlet, even when he draws a comparison between his father and uncle and says they are as different as he from 'Hercules', these critics are ready to quote this instance as Hamlet's confession of physical weakness.

Really Stoll is utterly disgusted and asks; who expects 'young Hamlet to be like Hercules?' Garnering up the theories of a former argument Stoll continues with the same alacrity quoting numerous samples of examples from the text itself particularly from Hamlet's words and action. He wonders how
Hamlet can still appeal to these scholars as 'a hesitant weakling'. It seems these critics deny and forget Hamlet's jocularity in the face of danger.

What drugs, what charms, what conjurations and what mighty magic—

I do not set my life at a pin's fee

Unhand me, gentlemen;

By heaven, I'll make a Ghost of him that lets me (Stops me).

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.

I say away!..... go on, I'll follow thee---

Do all these speeches appear to come from a mentally sick person, physically inept. And what about his presence of mind, as reflected in the following lines:

“When he kills the man behind the arras, boards the pirate wrestles with Laertes in the grave, fights him, kills the King himself in presence of them all, and though mortally wounded, wrests the cup from out of Horatio's hand.42

Stoll now wonders, what explanation would the impressionistic critic provide for these events. Do all of these events also occur in Hamlet's mind only?

During his discussion of Hamlet's use of colloquial language another vital information that Stoll imparts is that, when Hamlet uses such expletives after the play within the play or rather after the theatrical experiment a change of definitely marked that shows his intention to hurry to test the King's guilt.
The modern reader may think that Hamlet has changed in some ways. But for the Elizabethan-Jacobean playgoers nothing unusual has happened, he remains the same man since these audiences have the advantage of not only seeing the play performed, but were more knowledgeable where comprehension and grasp over the verse was concerned. S. Vishwanathan has enlightened us during his analysis of the original audience of Shakespeare how critics like William Archer, I.A. Richards and L.C. Knight's have put a lot of emphasis on:

"... The keenness of the Elizabethan ear and sensibility, due to age-long habits of listening to stories and sermons, and so attesting the persistence of the tradition of oral communication,"

Stoll sees no defect in Hamlet's speeches, 'Hamlet's expressions is perfectly consistent.' And the above study by vis. adds further strength to Stoll's assertions.

Such utterances as the following:-

'O Villain, Villain, smiling, damn'd villain", or the soliloquy at the end of Act II 'O, What a rogue' are utterances in utter frustration and disgust because as it is obvious he cannot carry out his plan in spite of his determination. These expletives are nothing else but bitter execrations, all this delay is making him wring his hands with impatience and caged energy, he remains the most misunderstood man as far as Stoll is concerned. These extreme form of expression often used by the Prince can also be 'the fantastic and extravagant style of thought' often employed by Shakespeare that produced Dryden's displeasure, resulting, in his calling Shakespeare's style 'bombastic,' Giving full vent to his affirmation Stoll insists that the only,
“psychology that is offered by Shakespeare and was expected—speech fitted to mood and occasion.”

The soliloquy, ‘O what a rogue’, is taken as sure proof of Hamlet’s inadequacy, and ‘self-deception’ he calls him self ‘villain’ even ‘rogue’ and rascal and ‘ass’ even Richard and Iago have called themselves the same, but Stoll declares, these title do not fit Hamlet nor do they suit him. Hence it should be brushed aside as has been done by the hero himself. According to Stoll all this nothing but helpless rage because of the long constraint and hence all this accumulated energy explodes in self-abuse. More over, Stoll is satisfied with Hamlets ‘clear-seeing judgment. Although the deed has still not been accomplished by Hamlet the soliloquy,

“To be or not to be” which is followed by:

T’ is now the very witching time of might, and

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying,

And now I’ll do’t....”.

These are no more reproaches but only anxiety for the task that must be finished. There is a touch of sadness, even meditation and reflectiveness in ‘To be or not to be’ and not weakness of will or design to escape from problems or his set task.

In the last soliloquy, ‘How all occasions do inform against me,’ is after he kills the man behind the arras, who unfortunately turns out to be not the king whom he suspects but Polonious. He even carefully selects the occasion and
kills him, ‘at the proper unholy moment’ only to find that the trouble he had taken was in vein and he is at a loss no doubt

but only for a while and then he strengthens his resolve once more:

“O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth.

Hamlet does not appear as ‘indecisive or slow’—to even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They guard Hamlet on his trip to England and when he returns he leaves no stone unturned to keep his resolution, there is no hesitation or even expressions of regret. As Stoll reminds us no opportunity is lost by Hamlet except one in the entire play and for that he had sufficient reason for not killing the man at prayer. Not merely the reasons of the vendetta but as Stoll observes that even ‘Mr Bradley notices a reason, un-mentioned though potent with the audience—that the man is at prayer’. A man being killed when he is praying to God this would have been too much for any to accept. And then Stoll in utter desperation cries out “only a critic would here cry out for Claudius’s blood; and a critic too, who forgets, or a psychologist who does not know, the dramatic requirement of repetition.” (Ibid. p.18)

Now that multiple arguments and counter arguments, discussions and disagreement have been covered, a clear concept about different principles emerges before us, when this soliloquy, ‘O what a rogue, if examined in this light accordingly it dawns before us startlingly how little this has to do with Hamlet as a character, procrastinating and instead fulfils the ‘dramatic requirement’ of the situation.
Hamlet after seeing the Ghost and doubting its honesty is ready to test the guilt of the king through staging the play within the play; Murder of Gonzago. Shakespeare effectively uses this opportunity to unravel what lies in Hamlet’s thoughts and thus is able to enlighten the audience. Stoll bitterly continues to assail the understanding of these critics who are deliberately distorting the real Shakespeare.

But Alas! What a lapse on Shakespeare’s part. While thinking about informing his audience; did not also fit in these critics and psychologists into his scheme of plans and by not doing thence he put himself for even at their disposal;


‘O good Horatio, I’ll take the Ghosts word for a thousand, pound. Did’st perceive?

No doubt, Hamlet does not believe the Ghost in the beginning but if it was the doubt of a cynic, or a sceptic only; according to the allegation of Coleridge and Schlegel, why did he take the trouble of providing proof whether the Ghost was just and illusion of his troubled mind and he may not have shared his secret with his friend Horatio either and yet remain ‘unabashed’. Even if the words of the Ghost were proved to be true he should have not believed it if he was a sceptic, he could have provided some other excuse. But no instead ‘he cries, in solid, rough and ready, fashion, not a doubters or a dreamers,...”

Stoll stands firm in his belief that if resolution was given a voice it would speak in the same tone that Hamlet did; (Ibid; P.25).

It will be short; the interim is mine.
If he but blench, I know my course.

O from this time forth my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.

Thus Stoll, after presenting multiple illustrations from the text confirms that, there is no significance in Hamlet's self-reproaches nor is there any failure on Hamlet's part to carry out his resolution. Hamlet should be understood with sympathy and not doubt. He has perfect faith in himself not once does he say 'do you not believe me?' His tone and accent is clear in the line he has to speak in the drama, and very firmly too. Its only the circumstances and the 'dramatic requirements' that slow down his resolution, emphasizes our tireless interpreter from the university of Minnesota.

As soon as the last Act comes to a closure, Stoll notices that even critics like Bradley in spite of all their differences with Shakespeare's art, reconcile here and are found to be 'happily abandoning psychology' and willing to concede to Hamlet in his last hour 'all the glorious power and all the nobility and sweetness of his nature.'

However Stoll, with his probing eyes and clear understanding fathoms much more. It is his contribution that today we have a Hamlet in the form of a hero, otherwise the Romantics in their eagerness and enthusiasm had transformed the very nature of Hamlet and made of him a sick and neurotic man. Stoll's version of Hamlet is not only reflective but also cool and collected that a man weak of will cannot be. And now we realize this man is not only full of reckless valour but he is able to satisfy the audiences dreams of a hero full of magnanimity and free of the 'homicidal calculation and Scheming', he has no plan to carry out his revenge for his fathers murder. Because, Stoll says, he is
free of guile and craftiness and this is how Shakespeare is able to focus the attention and sympathy of the audience towards Hamlet.

Stoll further analyses that may be this lack of planning on the hero’s part, who is about to accomplish a great deed, may seem to the readers of Shakespeare’s play, that Hamlet is not serious about avenging his father’s murder and that he is taking too much time, because they have all the time to wonder and ponder while they are reading. But the audience, before whom this play is being staged, will differ they will not notice such a lapse, here as they are watching the play being performed before their eyes, they are not given the chance by the dramatist, as one after the other action keeps changing, it seems like suspense or thrill that is even created in today’s movies, and thus the lapse, goes unnoticed even if it is there.

Actually the playwright himself is cautious about making a revenge story materialize into a cold blooded murder, where the villain will become the ‘victim’ and the hero will loose all sympathy. “For is it not a sorry business to scheme to catch a man and kill him? Setting traps, and by deceit and cajolery luring your victim into them, is not a hero’s role”\(^5\)

Hence, except for minor harmless plans like the ‘feigned madness’ and preventing the king from sending him to England Hamlet never seriously discussed his plans regarding what he is going to do. Not even when he kills the man behind the arras it is on the spur of the moment. We find him heedlessly going to the fencing match. Although he has had a premonition yet he brushes that aside gallantly. And since he is so scheming, critics even of Bradley’s repute and position think him to be irresolute and waiting to die when his duty is still undone. Giving a final touch to all of his former arguments Stoll affirms,
to the readers and to the playgoers Hamlet has a different appeal since there is a difference between art and reality.

Shakespeare here again at the end has not been portraying the impotence of Hamlet's character, but has been handling a dramatic material, hedged about with difficulties, with consummate tact. He is presenting not so much-in all its consistency-a character as a highly emotional situation.\(^52\)

Stoll admits that this kind of story of blood and murder and a son avenging his father's murder, does not reflect the life of Shakespeare's time but only their taste in the drama. Hence Shakespeare was compelled to take this defensive attitude towards his hero, since he was not presenting a psychological study of Hamlet's character but only a highly charged emotional situation. Presentation of old story in a new environment was not an easy task for the dramatist, he took the help of supernatural power and cunningly employed this delaying device and built it up into a mystery so that his hero did not have to take the blame of all that takes place upon himself. As Stoll points out many times, this delay that occurs due to the manipulations of the playwright, Hamlet had to bear the blame for inactivity from the modern critic, whereas the seventeenth century and eighteenth century critics became one with Hamlet when he spared the king during prayer but killed him 'when he is fit and seasoned for his passage.' Hence for these playgoers Hamlet remained

"that piece which appears to have affected English hearts, and has perhaps been oftenest acted of, any which have come upon our stage."\(^53\)

Lastly, Stoll stands his ground firmly, and convincingly speaks out' why should Shakespeare let the trumpet sound for a man who is afflicted with a
disease and who is a near coward when he has not done so even 'for Macbeth or Othello, who were warriors, not for Lear, who was a king.' What was the need for Shakespeare to go out of his way to:

‘Let the trumpets blare, the drums rattle, and the cannon thunder’ and for this ‘energetic’ command of Fortinbras, Go bid the soldiers Shoot,”

Stoll questions all those critics, who see Hamlet as a ‘frail and shrinking spirit’, as to what was the need for the writer of so many great plays to indulge in hypocrisy. Stoll advocates this point in his Art and Artifice:

As a stage-manager and (of all things) as a meterist, Shakespeare misses the point of his own play still more than as a dramatist, or than his ill instructed raisonneur, Horatio! But the line—the salute—like the very Hamlet it was meant for, have long since quitted the stage!”

Stoll is right in insisting that great comedy is rooted in farce and great tragedy is rooted in melodrama. Stoll’s greatness lies in the fact that he emphasizes the element of ‘artifice’ that is the element of clever designing in Hamlet and other great Shakespearean tragedies. Another important contribution made by Stoll to the criticism of Hamlet and to Shakespeare criticism in general is that he de-emphasizes the element of psychological coherence in characterization of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare’s characters are not psychologically coherent because Shakespeare was not writing the ordinary naturalistic prose drama of the late 19th century.
Hamlet is a great poetic play where the element of verisimilitude is deliberately neglected for the sake of the effects peculiar to great heroic tragedy.

Besides Bradley’s and Stoll’s criticism of Hamlet, there is a contemporary approach, which provides this survey with a new outlook of decoding Hamlet and thus ushering it into the modern era. This contemporary method concerns itself with the imagery and the symbols used by Shakespeare in his plays. There are other very important essays on this issue of Hamlet’s but due to the unending range only the significant have been selected that of G.W. Knight. Knight has an exceptional interest and understanding of the imagery at play in Hamlet. His method and range is very different from Bradley and Stoll. He begins his book, ‘The Wheel of Fire’ (1930) by introducing, the readers to the ‘Principles of Shakespeare’s Interpretation’. He also emphasises his preference to mark ‘criticism’ and ‘interpretation’ as two different process of defining Shakespeare’s work. Knight’s poetics has been discussed at length in the V chapter of this thesis. The study of his poetics is essential since he has definitely applied it to the interpretation of Hamlet.

As a critic of Hamlet, W. Knight’s is mostly engrossed in the apt explanation of the play’, like Bradley he does not probe Hamlet’s flaws. Nor does he bother himself with Shakespeare’s background of an Elizabethan playwright. His scope is entirely different from Stoll’s, he engages himself with the ‘nature of Hamlet’s suffering’. And according to his statement:

My purpose will therefore be first limited strictly to a discussion, not of the play as a whole, nor even of Hamlet’s mind as a whole, but of this central reality of pain, which, though it be necessarily related, either as
effect or cause, to the events of the plot and to the other characters, is itself ultimate, and should be the primary object of our search.

Knight’s makes it very explicit that we cannot reach a understanding of Hamlet without a proper insight into the exact theory of the nature of Shakespearean drama. Knight has delivered a particular poetics of Shakespearean drama that agrees very well with his interpretation of Hamlet. The study of ‘Character’ and ‘plot’ is erroneous in Knight’s poetics because it leads one to the serious disregard of ‘Shakespeare’s poetic symbolism’. In his discussion of the Principles in his very first chapters, he views each play as:

"a set of correspondences which relate to each other independently of the time-sequence which is the story; (e.g.)...the death-theme in Hamlet...This I have sometimes called the play’s atmosphere".59

The main theme of the play as observed by G. Wilson Knight is the clash between good and evil, health and disease, life and death.60 But however prime importance is paid to the theme of death, which (claims, Knights) occurs repeatedly and determines all the aspect of the play, characters and plot: “Death is indeed the theme of this play, for Hamlet’s disease is mental and spiritual death.”

If at all Knight takes interest in the background, it is, not in the Elizabethan context but he projects a ‘pale’ faced Hamlet conscious of decay in his palace. He is placed against a scenery:

“of healthy and robust life, good-nature, humour, romantic strength, and welfare:...He is the ambassador of death walking amid life.”62
Hamlet is presented as a disturbing element in an otherwise peaceful universe of the play. The only hurdle is Hamlet himself to a healthy, wealthy and prosperous condition of the Kingdom, "... a living death in the midst of life".

Claudius is presented with a clean image by Knight's, he is not drawn as wholly evil—far from it. In fact he symbolizes life and health for this interpreter of images. He runs his government efficiently. Deals with his courtiers very diplomatically and tactfully, shows concern for his wife and even sometimes towards Hamlet. Knight blames the chain of causality that links him with his crime. Hamlet is projected as the cause of all that goes wrong in Claudius's life. There is a complete reversal of Hamlet's character in G.W. Knight's interpretation. Hamlet becomes a blood thirsty person, seeking murder while Claudius is 'the fine flower of a human soul in anguish', Knight even bestows greatness upon him after the prayer scene in the play when Hamlet hesitates to avenge his father's murderer because the murder was praying.

If one turn back to the analysis of Bradley on this same scene one finds his interpretation more plausible. Where as Knight appears to have been dwarfed by Bradley's vision:

"When he (Claudius) is praying for pardon, he is all the while perfectly determined to keep his crown; and he knows it.

....when the King is praying for pardon for his first murder he has just made his final arrangements for a second, the murder of Hamlet. But he does not allude to that fact in his prayer. If Hamlet had really wished to kill him at a moment that had no relish of salvation in it, he had no need to wait."
A Comparative Criticism of Hamlet
Barclley, Stoll And W. Knight

Hamlet is compared to Claudius and the stigma of inhuman is attached to him:

He is a superman among men. And he is a superman because he has walked and held converse with death, and his consciousness works in terms of death and the negation of cynicism. He has seen the truth, not alone of Denmark, but of inhumanity, of the universe: and the truth is evil. Thus Hamlet is an element of evil in the state of Denmark.  

Thus Hamlet in the pages of Knight's is assailed by "the poison of negation, nothingness, threatening a world of positive assertion".

The main theme, according to Knight's is that of death, this image of death engulfs the play throughout. Exactly like Bradley's Hamlet was assailed by the disease of melancholy, Knights Hamlets is sick in the soul. From the very beginning of the play, Hmalet has no resolve, we exhibit a spiritual degeneration in Knights Hamlet and are reminded of T.S. Eliots poem Gerontion, where the old man has lost all sense of purpose, like a patient etherized on the operation table.

Knights the progenitor of modern time attitude, does give a reason for this total loss of Hamlet, the death of his father and his mother's re-marriage.

"His hope of recovery to the normal state of healthy mental life depended largely on his ability to forget his father, to forgive his mother. Claudius advised him well."  

Always this extra kind gesture towards Claudius is indicated in Knights interpretation. In contrast to his sick soul is presented the demand of the ghost for action and revenge. Hamlets inaction and condemnation is complete whenever Ophelia, his lady love fails him, the hero becomes the incarnation of
cynicism and bitterness. His rebuking of the frivolous queen is interpreted as cruelty to his mother and the play within the play to make the culprit King guilty of his crime viewed as exultation and torment and the sparing of the King during prayer is portrayed again as further proof of Hamlet's "demonic pleasure" in the thought of preserving his life for a more damning death. Knight is terribly against any sympathy that is extended towards Hamlet. He is compared with logic due to the pleasure he finds inflicting cruelty on others. "Horrible" 'demon' 'devilish' these are the words that becomes the fate of this ideal hero, as viewed by Knights.

Knights further proceeds that Hamlet's vacillation is only in regard to the idea of revenge but the final request, the execution is swiftly carried out, Knights interprets that Hamlet does obey the ghost, 'not wisely but only too well'. In Knights 'Wheel of Fire' Hamlet symbolizes the principle of the negation of life pitted against the world of affirmation.

Knights in his 'Wheel of Fire' has first expostulated his doctrine and in his interpretation of Hamlet evidently he tries to evidently utilized what he has proposed. How can one accept this reading of a play is a kind of antithesis itself. His very picture of the Hamlet universe is projected as healthy and strong except for Hamlet, who is a sick man even his mind neurotic, on the verge of madness. When Francis Ferguson has presents a reverse picture, in his book, The Idea of the Theater (1949). As per his elucidation Hamlet is a "myth and ritual" drama, his analysis is also faced on a new outlook which does not agree with T.S. Eliot's interpretation of Hamlet too.

Knight is able to convert the Tragedy of Hamlet into a farce because in Shakespeare's play it is Claudius who is the villain and Hamlet the victim. But
there is total anarchy in the Universe of Hamlet as shown by Knight’s. When compared to Knight’s, Bradley’s Hamlet is much more acceptable. Hamlet representing not negative attitude to life but the vastness and enigma of a soul as great as Hamlets, in struggle against evil.

Knights in his eagerness to convert all that is traditional in the analysis of Hamlets does not concentrate on the vital point of the play that also requires interpretation and it appears that deliberately Knight wants to maintain his impression of a new critic, hence to the prove his hypothesis correct he approves the thematic spiritual reality of this play as more important rather than the character or plot.
References:


4. Ibid. p.4.

5. Ibid, p.103.


7. Ibid, p.75.

8. Ibid, p.76.


10. Ibid, p. 10.

11. Ibid, p.11.


13. See *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 70-86.


15. Ibid, p. 159.


17. Ibid.


19. Ibid, p.94.


22. Ibid, p.3.


27. Art and Artifice, p. 102.
29. Ibid, p. 106.
33. Stoll also sees a similarity between both Malevole and Hamlet 'as Cynical meditations and satirical mocker’s in his rejoinders of his ’Review of English studies January 1935 he amplifies this point of view.
34. 34. *Hamlet the Man*, Ibid, p. 4.
35. Ibid, p. 5.
38. Stoll in his writings has also mentioned that he is sure that the broading melancholy that is a part of Hamnlet’s Character has nothing to do what ever with the ‘Elizabethan humour’ but was instead developed along the line of Marston and a detailed comparison between Hamlet and the Malcontent has been drawn with illustration in many of Stoll’s article especially (Modern Philosofy Jan. 1906, pp. 289-301).
41. See *Hamlet the Man*, p. 13.
45. The quotations from the Tragedy of Hamlet have all been extracted from Stolls, Hamlet the Man, pp. 15-20. Hamlet (1919), pp. 52-4; Art and Artifice Chapter-V.

46. Hamlet the Man Ibid, p. 18 both the quotation in the passage are from here.


49. Ibid, p. 25.

50. Ibid, p.27.


52. Hamlet Ibid, pp. 41-42.


54. Ibid, p. 115.


57. Ibid. p. 17.

58. This Lecture of Knights:'Tolsloy's Attack on Shakespeare' (1934) has been included in The Wheel of fire, pp. 270-297.

59. Ibid, p. 3.

60. This theme is discussed by Knights in his essay, "The rose of Mary", The Imperial Theme (London,1931) His analysis of Hamlet is only an extension from what he perceives in The Wheel of fire.


62. Ibid, p. 32.

63. Ibid, p. 40.

64. Ibid, p. 33.

65. Ibid, p. 35.

66. Ibid, p. 36.