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Gertrude & Volumnia: Their Influences on Their Sons at the Climaxes of the Plays

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1974

GERTRUDE AND VOLUMNIA: THEIR INFLUENCES ON THEIR
SONS AT THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS

A Thesis

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the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

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Master of Arts

by

Laddawan Bunchoo

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GERTRUDE AND VOLUMNIA: THEIR INFLUENCES ON THEIR
SONS AT THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

I. THE INFLUENCES OF THE TWO MOTHERS ON THEIR SONS
AT THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS. 6

II. MOTHERS AND SONS: THEIR CHARACTERS AND THEIR
RELATIONSHIPS 34

III. THE TRAGIC AFTERMATHS OF THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS. 77

CONCLUSION 83

BIBLIOGRAPHY 86

GERTRUDE AND VOLUMNIA: THEIR INFLUENCES ON THEIR
SONS AT THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS

Laddawan Bunchoo

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The examination of the climaxes of the two plays Hamlet, and Coriolanus, illustrates that the two mothers, Gertrude and Volumnia, have destructive influences on their sons. The closet scene in Hamlet reflects that Gertrude's second marriage and her choice of Claudius shatter Hamlet's idealization of her in the role of the faithful wife and the virtuous mother. Hamlet's inaction and destruction are caused in part by his mother's influence.

Volumnia's influence both shapes and destroys her son. She rears him as the embodiment of her chivalric ideal of nobility. The climactic scene in this play reveals that Coriolanus' calamity is caused by his mother's influence.

The study shows that Hamlet's catastrophe springs from an inability to accept the disparity between the real Gertrude of the play and his idealization of her, and that Coriolanus' catastrophe springs from his inability to conform to the ideal Volumnia has instilled in him, and act in accordance with his concept of filial duty. This thesis examines and reveals some of the inadequacies of a psychoanalytic approach to explain the action of the characters as case studies of the suppression of sexual drives.

INTRODUCTION

An interesting study in comparison and contrast is possible between Hamlet and Coriolanus, two tragic heroes each of whose downfall is caused substantially by the influence of his mother. Coriolanus is a son with a mother-fixation—his life is shaped according to the idealism of his Amazonian mother. Hamlet's life is not doomed simply by his mother's influence, but he is tragically victimized by his love for her and his idealization of her. His mother tends to be feminine and weak—Hamlet designates her as "frailty"—whereas Volumnia apparently represents a sometimes masculine force. Gertrude's frailty, which results in her second hasty and incestuous marriage, disturbs Hamlet's moral sensibility and his ideal image of his mother. He is passive and inactive in part because of his inability to confront his real mother, who is unfaithful to his father and consents to be her brother-in-law's wife, the real mother who he fears has been an accomplice in murdering his father.

Many critics state that Hamlet is an enigmatic character because of his complex mind. Some assume that he is a melancholic type; others classify him as reflective and philosophical. The psychoanalytical critics, whose assumptions are based on the Freudian principle of the Oedipus complex, see Hamlet attached to his mother by his sexual desire for her. These critics avoid accepting the fact that Gertrude is a major destructive force in Hamlet's life, insisting too narrowly that the influence is based mainly on sexuality.

Hamlet's idealization of his mother is revealed in the conversation in the closet scene. At this moment Hamlet is overwhelmed by his love for his mother, shown in his care for her salvation, his attempt to point out her wrongdoing, and his effort to save her from further sinful acts. To some degree, Hamlet's love springs also from his moral idealism. He compels his mother to realize her infidelity toward her late husband; he also reproaches her for selecting Claudius, who is compared to a demon, and for betraying his father, who is seen as Hyperion. When Hamlet praises his father as being high as a god, there is perhaps an implication of his attitude toward his mother: he may have idealized her as something near a goddess.

In the closet scene, Gertrude seems inactive; she is frightened by Hamlet's furious words and actions. Actually, Hamlet himself is being dominated by his love for her, and he is also responding to the ideal image of her. The mother-image motivates him to speak words "like daggers" to her (but of course he has no intention of killing her). His words make Gertrude see her soul as having "grained spots" and feel her heart being divided "in twain," but her words are not an expression of her repentance; such words only show that she is in a dilemma—she knows Claudius to be inferior to her late husband, and she also knows that Hamlet's indignation and distress arise from his disappointment with her selection of Claudius, but now she is Claudius's wife, and her duty as a wife and Queen compels her to be silent and accept Claudius' defects. Gertrude now knows that Hamlet is suffering because of what she has done. She tries to conciliate him, but does not respond verbally to his advice to keep aloof from Claudius.

Although her response during the closet scene has a profound influence on Hamlet, her major betrayal occurs earlier when she gives

permission for Polonius to eavesdrop on her son. Her decision shows her own weakness. She lacks self-determination. She has to be coached by Claudius and Polonius. She distrusts herself; and she is thus insincere with Hamlet. This thoughtlessness leads to Polonius' being killed by Hamlet, and with this murder, Hamlet is led to the catastrophic end.

Gertrude's actions affect her son's temperament, but Volumnia's personality shapes the character and life of her son, powerfully. Coriolanus, as the result of her idealism, makes his life a pursuit of nobility. She trains him to be a noble warrior. Though the play begins when Coriolanus has become glorious (he wins the battle over the Volscians and is named "Coriolanus" after the city, Corioles) the way he has been brought up and trained since childhood is disclosed by the similarity between his temperament and his mother's. Volumnia's description of her son commanding the army and fighting in the battle is similar to Coriolanus' fury when the Roman soldiers try to flee back to their camp:

VOLUMNIA Indeed you shall not.
 Methinks I hear hither your husband's drum;
 See him pluck Aufidius down by th' hair--
 As children from a bear, the Volscies
 shunning him.
 Methinks I see him stamp thus, and call thus:
 "Come on you cowards, you were got in fear,
 Though you were born in Rome." His bloody
 brow
 With his mailed hand then wiping, forth he goes,
 Like to a harvest-man that's tasked to mow
 Or all or lose hire.¹

Coriolanus condemns his soldiers thus:

 All the contagion of the south light on you,
 You shames of Rome! You herd of--boils and
 plagues
 Plaster you o'er, that you may be abhorred
 Farther than seen, and one infect another

¹William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, in *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, ed. Sylvan Barnet (New York: Harcourt Brace Javonich, Inc., 1972), I.ii.29-37.

Against the wind a mile! You souls of geese
 That bears the shapes of men, how have you run
 From slaves that apes would beat!

Pluto and hell!

All hurt behind, backs red, and faces pale
 With flight and agued fear! Mend and charge home,
 Or, by the fires of heaven, I'll leave the foe
 And make my wars on you. Look to 't.

Come on;

If you'll stand fast, we'll beat to their wives,
 As they us to our trenches. Follow's!

(I.iv.30-42).

From his childhood until the time he becomes the great warrior, he fulfills his mother's desire of seeing him strive to achieve greatness. He is consistently loyal to her, and at the same time Volumnia seems to keep him directed toward nobility by praising him and showing her satisfaction at his valiant actions. Coriolanus, blinded by his mother's praise and his reverence for her, is contented with his valor; she thus encourages him to be inflexible. She dominates Coriolanus all his life--she is the commander of his life.

In the crucial scene, at first Coriolanus intends to avoid his mother and his family. But, finally, he has to yield to his mother. With her persuasive tongue, Volumnia can prevail over her son. She does not successfully appeal to Coriolanus through patriotism, or his love of his wife and his son. He is not moved by the ideal of nobility. At last she brings up the filial bond because of her knowledge that "no one is more bound to his mother" than Coriolanus. With this, Volumnia forces her son to yield.

The crucial scenes of the two plays show culminations of the two mothers' roles and the sons' passive responses. In these scenes the heroes try to resist maternal forces, but finally yield. Gertrude's influence affects Hamlet's actions--his self-image is shaped by his idea of her role. Volumnia's power, from the beginning, destroys Coriolanus'

individuality. Eventually, it takes his life. One mother is too weak, the other too strong, and both precipitate the tragic events.

The study will focus upon the crucial scenes since they illustrate well the effects of the violent maternal forces on the sons; next the study will deal with the analysis of the characters of both mothers and sons, and their relationships, in order to demonstrate how the mothers' powerful roles have destructive effects on their sons' lives; and finally, the study will be concerned with the sons' tragedies which are the result of their mothers' influences. The study will give close readings of the text when this is important, and will examine the critical theories of a number of significant scholars regarding the passages examined, thus demonstrating that the central thesis of the study stands upon a consistent synthesis of ideas regarding the characters and their actions.

CHAPTER I

THE INFLUENCES OF THE TWO MOTHERS ON THEIR SONS AT THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS

Before the closet scene in Hamlet and the confrontation between Volumnia and the title character of Coriolanus are examined in order to illustrate the influences of Gertrude and Volumnia on Hamlet and Coriolanus, the significant events which have previously happened will be discussed, since these events relate to those of the crucial scenes. In Hamlet, the hero is introduced when many of the incidents which affect his life have already happened: his father died two months ago, and his mother has married his uncle Claudius. Hamlet is seen as a solitary man, sad because of his father's death and his mother's overhasty marriage. Of these two events, his mother's second marriage disturbs him more. Hamlet's moral sensibility and idealism provoke a strong reaction to this marriage, which destroys an idealized image of his mother. Though it is an incestuous marriage, Hamlet cares less about the technical incest than about the fact that Gertrude has married another man. His mother's degradation is an enigma to him; his idealization of her renders him unable to comprehend the reasons for her action.

Hamlet's obsession with his mother's conduct worries Gertrude and the King. Claudius assumes that Hamlet cannot get over his grief for his dead father; Gertrude's conscience tells her that her hasty marriage

disturbs Hamlet. She speaks to Claudius: "I doubt it is no other but the main,/ His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage."¹

When the players come to the court, the King and Queen see a chance to cheer Hamlet up by the entertainment of the players, but Hamlet takes this occasion to test Claudius and the Queen and also to test the truth of the Ghost's accusation. During the performance, Hamlet keeps his eye on his mother and asks Horatio to watch the King. The King's reaction to the play and his hasty withdrawal assure Hamlet that he is guilty. But the Queen does not have a guilty reaction to the play; her naive answer to Hamlet's question "The lady doth protest too much, methinks," does not reinforce Hamlet's suspicion that she has been guilty of a shameful act.

The play fails to prove Gertrude's guilt. In the meantime Hamlet feigns madness. The King, Queen, and Polonius seek the cause of his madness; Polonius is to help the Queen by serving as an eavesdropper—hiding behind the arras in the Queen's closet.

On his way to speak to his mother, Hamlet intends to rebuke her; he wants to speak "daggers" to her, but at the same time he hopes to check his hot temper. At that moment he knows that his resentment is most extreme, and he is afraid that it will compel him to kill his mother. In his fear, the image of Nero flashes in his mind: "let not ever/ The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom" (III.ii.401-402). Hamlet does not intend to murder his mother; he is fighting for self-control. He only wants to use cruel honesty to make her see her own soul.

As the closet scene begins, Polonius is ready to play the eavesdropper's role. Hamlet, who is very resentful, comes in, and asks

¹William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, in The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare, ed. Sylvan Barnet, II.ii.56-57.

Gertrude "Now, Mother, what's the matter?" (III.iii.9). Gertrude directly speaks of what she thinks is the cause of Hamlet's distress. Twice she has spoken to him, but her words provoke an angry retort from her son:

Queen
 Hamlet, thou has thy father much offended.
 Hamlet
 Mother, you have my father much offended.
 Queen
 Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.
 Hamlet
 Go, go, you answer with a wicked tongue.
 (III.iv.10-13).

The first time when she tells him that he is too obsessed by his father's death, Hamlet retorts by using Gertrude's word "offended," but he means that his mother has wronged his father. Then she blames him for speaking foolishly and he accuses her of being wicked. This time Gertrude notices that he is indignant. She is alarmed when she asks him, "Have you forgot me?" (III.iv.14). Previously, Hamlet implies that his dead father is maltreated by Gertrude; this time Hamlet stresses her condition of shameful commitment:

No, by the rood, not so!
 You are the queen, your husband's wife,
 And, would it were not so, you are my mother.
 (III.iv.15-17)

She is the Queen, the status gained by her incestuous marriage, and at the same time, she is still his mother, but deteriorated. The expression "you are my mother" embodies his regret for and disappointment with her sinful act. Hamlet becomes more violent in his intent to prove to her the shameful conduct she has followed. One scholar notes that Gertrude, at first, "is merely indignant and adopts the role of scolding parent."²

²Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 191.

She finds out that he is too difficult to deal with, so she plans to withdraw from this trouble. But Hamlet insists on leading her to repentance. He probably takes her arm in order to make her listen to him:

Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge.
 You go not till I set up a glass
 When you may see the inmost part of you!
 (III.iv.19-21)

Gertrude, shocked by his rage, misunderstands, thinking that he is going to kill her: "What will thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?/ Help, ho!" (III.iv.22). Polonius, hearing the Queen's cries, forgets his role of an eavesdropper and speaks so loudly behind the arras that Hamlet thinks it is the King. He draws his sword and stabs him. Michael Goldman views Polonius's death as the result of the characters' "misinterpretation of their actions."³ In the closet scene, from the very beginning until the moment when Polonius is killed, all the characters "are engaged in a continuing struggle to find out--and interpret--what the others are doing or have done."⁴ In his insistence on making his mother see her soul, Hamlet, according to Goldman, "is trying to make the Queen interpret her own actions."⁵ But she misinterprets his action and thinks that he is going to kill her, so she cries out for help. Polonius also thinks that she is going to be murdered; he cries for help. Hamlet thinks he is the King, so he kills him. The tangle of misinterpretation ends with the death of Polonius.

Gertrude is alarmed by Hamlet's bloody and impetuous deed; she exclaims, "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this?" (III.iv.28). Hamlet

³Michael Goldman, Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 83.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

quickly takes his chance to test whether she has been an accomplice in the murder of his father. Hamlet attacks her with these words of accusation: "A bloody deed--almost as bad, good mother,/ As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (III.iv.29-30). The Queen reacts to these accusing words with her question, "As kill a king?" (III.iv.31). With this naive question, Hamlet learns that his mother has never been an accomplice in the crime of Claudius. The Queen's innocence will be fully examined in the following chapter which will examine her character, her temperament, her action and its motivation, which become so influential in her son's life.

The Queen is not able to understand why Hamlet's words and actions are so violent. She never realizes that her actions have a significant influence on her son. Twice she questions Hamlet as to what she has done that he considers so wrong. She asks, "What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tounge/ In noise so rude against me?" (III.iv.40-41). Hamlet answers her with the language of analogies. The metaphor he uses in comparing his father's love for her with her infidelity shows that he has idealized his parents' married life, and especially his father's innocent love for his mother. The analogies used in his speech also show his high regard for moral standards. His moral sensibility arouses his disgust for his mother's actions. The flowery language used is an indication of how Gertrude's act offends his father's love and Hamlet's moral standards:

Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love,
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' oaths. O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes

A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face does glow
 O'er this solidity and compound mass
 With heated visage, as against the doom
 Is thoughtsick at the act. (III.iv.41-51)

In this description, Hamlet points out to his mother that her act affronts goodness: grace, modesty, and virtue; it is the opposite of what is "good." This act kills the beauty and virtue of his father's "innocent love," insults his sincerity, and breaks "marriage vows." This first part of Hamlet's description indicates that he is identifying himself with his father. He is feeling the way his father would feel if he were learning of his wife's unfaithfulness. In his idealization of his father's love, he seems concerned with its aesthetic aspect; he refers to a rose when he speaks of its beauty and virtue. Hamlet always imagines only the beautiful aspect of his parents' marriage; then when his mother remarries, this second marriage shatters that image. The second part of his description deals with his disgust for his mother arising from a consideration that her conduct does not follow the moral standards he has always had. Gertrude is not behaving as a wife should. In Hamlet's view, a wife should be faithful to her husband forever. Her fidelity is most important; it shows her virtue. But Gertrude is unfaithful. Her betrayal of her husband is cruel and breaks those moral rules under which Hamlet has been brought up.

No matter how much his speech embodies his feelings for Gertrude's sinful conduct, the language of analogies conceals his melancholy in the images he uses. Hamlet's speech lacks a direct indication of Gertrude's wrongdoings; therefore, she is incapable of seeing into his mind and recognizing her own wicked act. Gertrude, then, asks Hamlet for the second time:

Ay me, what act,
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?
(III.iv.50-51)

Hamlet, at this moment, tends to make his explanation concrete by using pictures of both kings to point out "what act" Gertrude has done. Hamlet does not mention his father's sincere and innocent love, or the way his mother insults that love and hurts his father by breaking the marriage promise. Hamlet is motivated by his love for his mother and his concern over her immoral actions. He is pointing out how his mother is lowering herself in betraying a god and choosing a "thing" instead, and in allowing lust to lead her actions. Hamlet compares the two husbands' appearances. He sees his father as more attractive than his uncle. His father has Hyperion's curls, Jove's forehead, Mars's eyes, and a bearing like "the herald Mercury." He concludes that his father possesses every god-like part, but his uncle, "like a mildewed ear," has nothing handsome to compare with his father. Then he points out to his mother that since Gertrude cannot see the god-like qualities in his father, but can appreciate the ugliness of Claudius, she must be blinded with the lust which she, in her old age, should not have. Hamlet condemns Gertrude as a sensuous woman who has "Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight/ Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all" (III.iv.79-80). He considers Gertrude as incapable of seeing her choice of Claudius as a shameful act. It is notable that Hamlet's speech deals mainly with Gertrude's lust and choice of Claudius. His speech should be seen in full for the examination of his intent to stress his mother's lust and her selection of Claudius:

Look here upon this picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
See what a grace was seated on this brow:
Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,

An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
 A station like the herald Mercury
 New lighted on a heaven--kissing hill--
 A combination and a form indeed
 Where every god did seem to set his seal
 To give the world assurance of a man.
 This was your husband. Look you now what follows
 Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear
 Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
 Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
 And batten on this moor? Ha! Have you eyes?
 You cannot call it love, for at your age
 The heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble,
 And waits upon the judgment, and what judgment
 Would step from this to this? Since sure you have,
 Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense
 Is apoplex'd, for madness would not err,
 Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd
 But it reserved some quantity of choice
 To serve in such a difference. What devil was't
 That thus hath cozened you at hoodman--blind?
 Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
 Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
 Or but sickly part of one true sense
 Could not so mope.
 O shame, where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,
 If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
 To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
 And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame
 When the compulsive ardor gives the charge,
 Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
 And reason panders will. (III.iv.54-89)

There is no indication of Gertrude's incestuous marriage. A. L. French states that the emphasis in Hamlet's speech is not on "the unnaturalness of the union, but its lustfulness; even in his most brutally hysterical moments he does not bring up incest to add to the force of his indictment."⁶ Kurt R. Eissler also notices that "In the closet scene, Hamlet's only reproach with regard to maternal misconduct has to do with Gertrude's choice of an unworthy object for her second marriage; his discourse there

⁶A.L. French, Shakespeare and the Critics (London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1972), p. 46.

contains no reference to incest."⁷ Rebecca West describes Hamlet's speech as follows: "He simply tells her that she is behaving reprehensibly in living with her present husband, not because he had murdered her dead husband and his own brother, but because he was not so good looking as her dead husband."⁸ These three critics' statements agree and are based on the evidence in Hamlet's speech. Hamlet does not really pay attention to incest; rather he stresses his mother's misconduct in betraying her late husband and in choosing Claudius. Hamlet, certainly, is motivated by his idealization of Gertrude as a perfect mother. He does not see Gertrude as an ordinary woman who can be fallible, for he, before her second marriage, always conceived of her as being innocent, noble, and extremely good. In his ideal, she should love only his father, and keep the "marriage vows;" her second marriage is impossible. Then when the real Gertrude is not true to his ideal, Hamlet suffers. Reality is unbearable, and causes restlessness to him. From the first till he leaves his mother's chamber, Hamlet never even tries to contemplate his mother as an ordinary and weak woman. He has always been dominated by his idealization of her; and thus he is frustrated because he cannot understand why his mother is capable of committing those inappropriate actions. Meanwhile, he tries to restore saintliness to Gertrude; when he has a chance to make her awareness of the role of the real mother, he drives her to see that she has strayed far from being his idealized mother because of her sensuous actions. Choice and lust are

⁷Kurt R. Eissler, Discourse on Hamlet and Hamlet: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry (New York: International Universities Press Inc., 1971), p. 273.

⁸Rebecca West, "The Nature of Will," in Hamlet: An Authoritative Text, Intellectual Backgrounds, Extracts from the Sources, Essays in Criticism, ed. Cyrus Hoy (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 256.

brought into his speech because the choice of Claudius shows her degradation, and lust motivates her to act reprehensibly. Hamlet, in his reproach to his mother, has a strong desire to stop her misconduct. He asks her to leave her wrongdoing and start to act virtuously again:

Confess yourself to heaven,
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker. (III.iv.150-153)

And according to his homile, Gertrude's virtue also lies in staying away from Claudius; the good part of her heart must not include Claudius:

O, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
Good night—but go not to my uncle's bed.
Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
(III.iv.158-160)

During Hamlet's attack, Gertrude interrupts his speech three times. These expressions of alarm are her reaction to his condemnation of her mistake in selecting Claudius. At first she sees her sould covered with "black and grained spots." She stops Hamlet:

O Hamlet, speak no more
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct. (III.iv.89-92)

When Hamlet continues blaming her and her carnal and sensuous actions, Gertrude, again, asks him to stop:

O speak to me no more.
Those words like daggers enter in my ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet. (III.iv.95-97)

When Hamlet asks her to repent, and confess her sin, Gertrude says to Hamlet, "O Hamlet, thou has cleft my heart in twain" (III.iv.156). Gertrude's interruptions of Hamlet's words do not at all show her repentance. Miss Agnes Mackenzie is right in assuming that Gertrude's exclamation is a mere result of Hamlet's speech and that Hamlet has succeeded in convincing her of Claudius' ugliness, and or her low taste.

Miss Mackenzie views Gertrude's cries as the result of Hamlet's speech. Hamlet "has brought her back to the temporary mood of self-abasement. . . but it is characteristic that she sees her penitence as the result of his speech rather than as the consequence of her own action."⁹ Gertrude still cannot perceive of her sin as being infidelity, and of her marriage as incestuous. The infidelity is brought up earlier in Hamlet's speech, but it cannot be understood by Gertrude; then, at the most critical moment, Hamlet drops that case, and points out the degradation of her taste instead. The incestuous marriage is also forgotten, and he never has a chance to inform Gertrude of Claudius' crime since he is interrupted by the appearance of the Ghost.

The second appearance of the Ghost is an important incident in this closet scene. The Ghost appears at the moment when Hamlet is informing his mother of Claudius' crime. The Ghost's purpose in appearing to Hamlet is to stop him from informing the Queen of her present husband's crime. The Ghost wants to let her continue to struggle with her conscience and come to a sense of repentance without Hamlet's aid. The Ghost also wants to remind Hamlet of his duty to take revenge on his uncle. Miss West misinterprets the purpose of the Ghost's appearance, and she also overlooks Hamlet's informative speech--that Claudius is a "murderer and a villain"--at the moment when the Ghost comes. Miss West states that Hamlet, in this scene, only compares the two kings' personalities; he only uses three lines of his speech to mention the fact that Claudius kills his father, then, Miss West continues, "when she [Gertrude] shows that she did not know that any such crime had been committed, he

⁹Agnes M. Mackenzie, The Women in Shakespeare's Plays: A Critical Study from the Dramatic and the Psychological Points of View and in Relation to the Development of Shakespeare's Art (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1924), p. 222.

does not take the opportunity of enlightening her. . . . It is not surprising, though it is always comic, that the Ghost should then appear in order to ask Hamlet to stick to the point."¹⁰ The Ghost comes to warn Hamlet not to forget this "blunted purpose," Hamlet's duty of taking revenge on Claudius. The Ghost may have been listening to the son and mother's conversation; he is certainly satisfied with Hamlet's mordant speech which makes Gertrude have a "fighting soul." Hamlet is trying to make Gertrude feel that she humiliates herself by insulting his father's love, breaking the marriage promise, and declining "upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor/ To these of mine [Old Hamlet]" (I.v.48,51-52). If Gertrude perceives of her wrongdoing, Hamlet (if he follows the Ghost's words) should "leave her to heaven." Gertrude has already seen Claudius' inferiority to her late husband, so she should be left with her tortured soul, which brings about her salvation later. But Hamlet is urging her to the knowledge of her present husband's crime--the knowledge which the Ghost does not want her to learn; therefore the Ghost appears to tell Hamlet that he "is doing something the Ghost believes he should not be doing."¹¹ J. Dover Wilson also sees that the Ghost appears to recall Hamlet to the duty of revenge. Wilson paraphrases the two purposive lines of the Ghost's speech, "Do not forget! This visitation/ Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (III.iv.111-112), as "I [the Ghost] am here to recall you to your duty, which is in danger of being altogether forgotten."¹² The Ghost's speech, according to Wilson, has an

¹⁰Rebecca West, "The Nature of Will," p. 256.

¹¹Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge, p. 195.

¹²J. Dover Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet (London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1951), p. 249.

implication that Hamlet should not be with his mother at this critical moment; he should do his duty with the King. Hamlet "is not only wasting precious seconds, but wasting them in shouting at his mother, in doing just what the Ghost had at the first enjoined him not to do."¹³ A.C. Bradley, though he mentions that the charge of the Ghost reminds Hamlet of his duty of revenge, sees that a sufficient reason for the Ghost's appearance is to spare the Queen. Bradley explains further that, at that moment, Hamlet has succeeded in leading his mother to see her shameful act, but he is now yielding to his passionate desire to rebuke her more, and in doing this Hamlet "is agonizing his mother to no purpose."¹⁴ Bradley conclusively states that the Ghost, in manifestating himself only to Hamlet, should not be viewed as Hamlet's hallucination. He shows his "tender regard for his weak unfaithful wife"¹⁵ by warning Hamlet to stop torturing her. According to the text, the Ghost comes to "whet thy [Hamlet's] almost blunted purpose" (III.iv.112), and then he says:

But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
O, stop between her and her fighting soul!
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet. (III.iv.113-116)

This speech shows that the Ghost comes to recall Hamlet to his duty and at the same time he also shows his care for his wife and her repentance. The Ghost expects Hamlet to be Gertrude's guide to her confession. Ironically, Hamlet misunderstands thinking that Gertrude also sees the Ghost; he awkwardly asks her, "How is it with you, lady?" (III.iv.116).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, ed. Irving Howe. Literature and Ideas Series. (Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc.; A Fawcett Premier Book, 1972), p. 118.

¹⁵Ibid.

This question is dangerous to Hamlet himself since Gertrude cannot see the Ghost; she thinks that he is having hallucinations. But Hamlet can later indicate he is a normal person by his apology for his rude manners.

The appearance of the Ghost which, at first, causes Gertrude to view her son as hysterical, later makes her realize his love for her. The coming of the Ghost sobers Hamlet and enables him to regain his self-control. He, then, reveals that he has feigned madness, and he has been harsh to her because he wants to rescue her from the low and sensuous actions in which she is indulging. Gertrude, after listening to his confession, is aware of the harmful result of her degradation. She learns of Hamlet's love for her, and sympathizes with him, but she cannot devote herself only to him. She has another role to act--that is the role of a wife. Gertrude's heart splits "in twain" because she is not able to reconcile these two roles. The thought that her son is having a hallucination does not offer Gertrude "a gasp of relief" or leave her "off the hook."¹⁶ Moreover, the condition of her heart breaking in two does not show that "her mother-heart is cracked to witness how far gone is her poor son's mental sickness."¹⁷

The thought of Hamlet's madness stings her soul. It wrings her conscience to be aware of her influence on her son. She realizes that she has failed to live up to the ideal created by his love and respect for her. Her conscience calls her back to her mother's role, but, at the other end, the roles of the wife and Queen are also reminding her of other responsibilities.

¹⁶Eleanor Prosser, Hamlet and Revenge, p. 195.

¹⁷Bernard Grebanier, The Heart of Hamlet: The Play That Shakespeare Wrote (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960), p. 270.

At the end of this scene, Hamlet is different from what he appears to be at the beginning. His harshness has disappeared. Now he is calm and seems decisive. He appears reconciled to what is going to happen to him in the future, and his acceptance is revealed when he informs Gertrude that he is going to England, and that he knows that there is a sealed letter to be conveyed by Rozencrantz and Guildenstern to the King of England. His awareness of Claudius' plan of getting rid of him is also shown when he speaks of the letter and his two schoolfellows:

There's letters sealed, and my two schoolfellows,
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,
They bear the mandate, they must sweep my way
And marshall me to knavery. Let it work;
For 'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar, and 't shall go hard
But I will delve one yard below their mines
And blow them at the moon. (III.iv.203-210)

Hamlet's calmness and decision to face reality arise from his realization that the task of restoring his mother to saintly virtue is impossible. He tends to be realistic when he says:

Confess yourself to heaven,
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker. (III.iv.150-153)

He seems to accept the real Gertrude, but wants her to confess. However, in his altered attitude toward his mother's wrongdoing, Hamlet is still ignorant of the trouble that she is having. He sees that Gertrude can escape her sin only if she stops being Claudius' wife. In his narrow-mindedness and his loathing for Claudius, Hamlet overlooks the fact that Gertrude cannot easily withdraw herself from her relationship with Claudius. Now, she is tied to the duties of a mother, wife, and Queen.

The closet scene reveals that Gertrude's degradation greatly influences Hamlet. In this scene Hamlet blames Gertrude as a wife who betrays Hamlet's father, and has left dignity and chosen garbage. Hamlet

cannot accept this choice. She is his father's wife, his own mother, so it is his responsibility to restore her to the role of the faithful wife and virtuous mother. In his attempt to point out that his mother has degraded herself by marrying a man inferior to his father, Hamlet has in mind only the ideal view of his father's love and his own ideal image of his mother; he is not concerned with the idea that his mother's marriage violates moral law. He is blinded by his love for his father, and with his idealization of his mother. It can be said that Hamlet's savagery during his conversation with his mother "arises more from Gertrude's being polluted by her love for a lecherous man than from the fact that this man is her former brother-in-law."¹⁸ Hamlet's indignation is also due to Gertrude's choice of that "lecherous man," as Alex Aronson says, "The victory of the satyr over Hyperion leaves Hamlet without any meaningful mother-image. As the wife of his dead father, she is remembered as an idealized figure of purity and saintliness which in all likelihood she never was; as the wife of his uncle she represents sexual lust."¹⁹ Aronson is right in stating that Hamlet idealizes his mother as pure and saintly but may overemphasize the significance of lust to Hamlet who, according to this critic, sees his mother, in deciding to marry Claudius, guided by lust rather than reason.

Because Hamlet never convinces his mother of her misconduct in marrying her brother-in-law--he only shows his adoration for his father, expresses disgust for Claudius, and condemns his mother as being sensuous--it can be said that, at this crucial scene, the major motivation of his harsh action is not ethical, but aesthetic. This motivation also shows

¹⁸French, Shakespeare and the Critics, p. 46.

¹⁹Alex Aronson, Psyche and Symbol in Shakespeare (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 234.

that Gertrude has strong effect on her son's life. She has brought him up to obey the admonition "Honor thy father and thy mother." Yet she acts in a manner eliciting neither Hamlet's honor nor approval. Because of his mother's duplicity, Hamlet is torn by inner conflicts due to the breakdown of the idealistic image of his mother he has harbored.

Coriolanus is also influenced by his mother. Like Hamlet, Coriolanus lost his father, but he lost his in early childhood. He is left in the care of his mother, who is a noble Roman patrician, and whose idealism is directed towards nobility. He is brought up according to her idealism, and assigned to be a warrior, a status that provides advantages to both his mother and himself. To be the great Roman warrior is to gain nobility--his mother's goal--and to achieve fame--his own aim. When the play begins, Brutus describes Coriolanus as having no equal. He has attained what he and his mother always long for. Again Brutus speaks of him:

Fame, at which he aims,
In whom already he's well graced, cannot
Better be held, nor more attained, than by
A place below the first.²⁰

Besides being so valiant, Coriolanus has exhibited his valor in winning the battle with the Volscians. The wounds from the battle and the oak garland received as an honourable token give his mother more than delight. She takes great pride in Coriolanus, especially in his prowess in the battle. He is her beloved son because he is valiant; he brings fame to his family of which she is a part, a dominant part. There is no sentimentality in Volumnia's love for her son. Her regard for him is primarily that he is an agent of nobility. Volumnia's love is in con-

²⁰William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Coriolanus, in The Complete Signet Classic of Shakespeare, ed. Sylvan Barnet. I.1.265-268.

trast with Virgilia, Coriolanus's wife. Virgilia loves her husband not as a hero, but as a man. When Volumnia sees her son, she sees only his capability of heroic deeds, but Virgilia sees him as a man, sometimes a weak man.

The wounds from the war bring delight and pride to Volumnia, and also serve as the evidence of her son's valiant service for Rome. As soon as he is back from the war, he is nominated by the senators and patricians to be a consul. But his consulship has to be approved by the common people, the plebeians. Coriolanus has to follow the Roman custom of seeking the consulship by wearing the gown of humility, appearing in front of those people, and pleading for their voices. In his plea, he has to show the people his wounds and describe how he has got them. To Coriolanus, it is degrading to ask for the plebeians' support by boasting about his actions in the war, and by flattering the people in order to have their support. His reluctance to speak to the common people is justifiable. They should realize his worthiness through their own common sense; Coriolanus should not have to convince them of his own qualities, but what causes his reluctance more than his incapability of flattering is his sense of superiority, which is a product of his being brought up under his mother's idealism. His sense of superiority renders him inflexible. Volumnia blames him for being too absolute, and forces him to ask for the people's voices. Coriolanus attempts to follow her instruction, but he knows that he cannot do it. He reappears in front of the people, and this time he rages, and condemns them. They finally turn against him and banish him.

Coriolanus leaves his mother, wife, son, and country. The idea that always lingers in his mind is that while he has valiantly served his country and protected the Roman people from danger, he is rewarded unjustly

with banishment. He desires revenge because the people have wronged him. Then he joins the enemy--the Volscians led by Aufidius. When he decides to turn against Rome, Coriolanus is motivated by his rage. He ignores the fact that he is Roman, and that his mother and his family are in Rome; and when he is leading the Volscian army to destroy Rome, he realizes this fact, but he tries to cut himself from those natural bonds--the filial bond with his mother, the bond with his wife and his son--but there is no bond of patriotism in his mind. Now he is alone in this world; he has no other responsibility except that of the commander of the Volscian army whose aim is to destroy Rome.

The Roman statemen worry about the safety of Rome. They know of Coriolanus' ability, and they also know that Coriolanus' conciliation with the Volscians threatens Rome, and it might bring destruction to Rome. They decide to try and save Rome by changing Coriolanus' mind. They send Menenius because Coriolanus respects this man as his own father. Menenius goes to see Coriolanus with the full confidence that he can change Coriolanus' mind. When he meets Coriolanus, he mentions his love for him, the love like the love of a father for his own son. But the claim of such love is in vain since Coriolanus is not moved by it. Moreover, he rejects the intimacy between himself and Menenius; he rejects his relation to his mother and his family; he declares himself a servant of the Volscians, and determines to take revenge on Rome. After Menenius leaves, Coriolanus, in his conversation with Aufidius, promises not to listen to anybody sent from Rome. As soon as he completes his promise, he hears a shout. A group of people are coming. Coriolanus only guesses that a delegation is sent from Rome to talk to him again. He thinks the coming of that delegation may test his promise, but he confirms to himself that he will not yield.

This delegation becomes a test of his promise, as he foresees. He feels uncertain of his ability to control his emotions because his mother, his wife, and his son are in the group. His love for his wife and his son, and his reverence for his mother disclose themselves in his description of the people in the delegation:

My wife comes foremost; then the honored mold
Wherein this trunk was framed, and in her hand
The grandchild to her blood. (V.ii.22-24)

He realizes that they are all of his flesh and blood--and his mother is most honorably praised as the molder of his body. He struggles to reject the fact that he is bound to his family; he cries, "But out, affection!/
All bond and privilege of nature, break!" (V.ii.24-25). The bond of love for his family and the desire to have revenge on Rome are in conflict. He is gentle when he looks at his wife, his mother and his son, but when he thinks of his revenge, he declares that he "knew no other kin." (V.ii.37). Coriolanus' instinct as husband, father, and son is at work. He appears very sympathetic when he tells his wife about his being in the present situation. He informs her of his obligation and asks for her forgiveness:

Like a dull actor now,
I have forgot my part and I am out,
Even to a full disgrace.--Best of my flesh,
Forgive my tyranny; but do not say,
For that, "Forgive our Romans." (V.ii.40-44)

Then he turns to his mother with praise and reverence. He calls Volumnia "the most noble mother of the world" (V.ii.49). This shows the sharp contrast between his attitude toward his wife and that towards his mother. The sentimental and tender feelings that he has when he speaks to Virgilia disappear. They are replaced by reverence for his mother. Volumnia begins the first step of her plan by kneeling before him. She

knows well that this gesture will appeal to his emotional conflict since it is not proper for a mother, especially the most noble mother, to kneel to a son. Volumnia is capable of reading her son's mind; she can tell that her kneeling troubles him. He exclaims:

What's this
Your knees to me? To your corrected son?
Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
Filip the stars! Then let the mutinous winds
Strike the proud cedars 'gainst the fiery sun,
Murd'ring impossibility, to make
What cannot be, slight work. (V.ii.56-62)

Coriolanus feels that his mother's kneeling to him degrades her. In his speech, he expresses his high regard for her. He compares her to stars and suns. She is honorable and powerful; he is modest as pebbles and the gentle cedar. To let her kneel to him is disgraceful and improper, like letting the unworthy pebbles on the deserted beach strike the stars and letting the cedar turn against the powerful sun. Coriolanus' modesty in comparing himself to such objects also implies his attachment and his reverence. Though his courage is weakened by his mother's kneeling to him, he still refuses to change his intention. He still wants to take revenge on the Roman people, and to do so, he has to be unnatural—he has to be opposed to his former compatriots and to his kin. Volumnia appeals to him with her discourse upon patriotism. She points out that he is going to destroy Rome, which is the "dear nurse" of Roman people, and he will not kill only other Romans, but also his mother, his wife, and his son. She will not wait until Coriolanus leads the Volscian army to Rome; she will kill herself before she sees her son bringing calamity to Rome. Coriolanus is not moved by patriotism since he has decided to be unnatural. Besides, the Roman people deserve destruction because they have banished him from his country. Since then he has nothing to care for.

He is no longer a citizen of Rome, so he does not have to be loyal to her. He is able to destroy Roman people since he no longer feels that he is a Roman.

Coriolanus is neither affected by patriotism, nor by his mother's mention of suicide. He decides to leave. Then Volumnia commands him to listen to her plea. First she advises him to arrange a reconciliation between Rome and Corioles. If Coriolanus still insists on destroying Rome, he certainly destroys nobility and brings bad reputation to his family. She satirizes his unnatural intention to destroy his native Rome as an attempt to act like the gods. Coriolanus' attempt to free himself from natural bonds is characterized as an effort to go beyond natural human limits. To betray the natural forces is "to tear with thunder the wide cheeks o' th' air" (V.iii.151). This god-like action is impossible for Coriolanus. He should feel that he is son, husband, and father. In order to remind him of these duties, Volumnia arouses his conscience by asking Virgilia and her son to speak to him. She condemns him for being irrational, and assumes that her grandson's childishness might move him. But she does not let Virgilia and little Marcius speak; she still continues attacking him. This time she brings up the filial bond. She claims her right to ask for gratitude since she has given him birth, has brought him up, and has led him to nobility. Coriolanus has become honorable because of her. She has done her best in her duties as mother, but she ironically claims his duty as a son. She says:

Thou hast never in thy life
 Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,
 When she (poor hen) fond of no second brood,
 Has clocked thee to the wars, and safely home
 Loaden with honor. Say my request's unjust,
 And spurn me back. But if it be not so,
 Thou are not honest, and the gods will plague thee
 That thou restrain'st from me the duty which
 To a mother's part belongs. (V.iii.160-168)

Volumnia ends her speech with an insult to Coriolanus as a son of a Volscian woman and the husband of a Volscian girl. This is an attack on his disloyalty to his mother and his wife:

Come, let us go.
This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
His wife is in Corioles, and his child
Like him by chance. (V.iii.177-180)

Being attacked for his ingratitude, and being denounced by his mother in his relation to her and his wife, Coriolanus can no longer be indifferent to his mother's plea. He yields to her at the cost of his life. By submitting himself to the filial bond, Coriolanus realizes that he has lost his chance to take revenge on the Roman people who have wronged him, that he is giving his life for the security of Rome, the country from which he is banished, and that he thus becomes a traitor for the second time. The reconciliation between Rome and Corioles, which his mother mentions in her speech, is impossible. Betraying the Volscians is certain death for Coriolanus as he knows. The description of his gesture ("Coriolanus holds her by the hand, silent,") and his speech expressing his defeat show that he is in a helpless situation; he cries:

O mother, mother!
What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!
You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But, for your son--believe it, O, believe it!--
Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortal to him. But it come.
(V.iii.182-189)

His mother succeeds in changing his mind. She prevails over her son and wins a victory for Rome. He expects his tragic death.

Coriolanus' yielding to his mother shows that he is under her influence. His decision to spare Rome is derived from his awareness of the filial bond. He submits himself at the point when Volumnia notes

that she has been a powerful and capable mother, who has provided his life and trained him to be noble. Therefore, he obeys her and spares Rome. Volumnia's role and her mother-image are very dominant in this scene. With her confidence, Volumnia "has no difficulty in crumbling her son's purpose. With each turn of the screw in her long speeches, Coriolanus must wince until he is brought to tears. Then, weeping, he holds her by the hand silent."²¹ This description of Volumnia's management of her son is very concrete. Volumnia--from her gesture of humiliation, her mention of patriotism, and her claim of the filial bond--is following her plan of forcing him to defeat. Finally she wins by her mother-power. Coriolanus is crumbled by the attack on his personal loyalties.²²

He does not change his mind about destroying Rome because he, "as a patriot . . . , realizes that the state is greater than the individual."²³ Patriotism does not make him change his mind; he does not even conceive of it as a high ideal. Because she realizes that his ideal now is not patriotism, Volumnia quickly changes to gratitude. She "reminds him of the duty and the gratitude that he owes to her--his mother."²⁴ Volumnia's charge of ingratitude is "the last, and perhaps the strategic, substantive argument she uses."²⁵ It turns Coriolanus' resolution, and consequently the play's outcome.

²¹I.R. Browning, "Coriolanus: Boy of Tears," Essays in Criticism 15 (1955) : 29-30.

²²S. Sen, "What Happens in Coriolanus," Shakespeare Quarterly 9 (1958) : 340.

²³Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare (New York: The Citadel Press, 1948), p. 300.

²⁴Peter F. Neumeyer, "Ingratitude Is Monstrous," College English 26 (1964) : 196.

²⁵Ibid.

There is no trait of mother-love in Volumnia's claim of the filial bond. The claim is a command which is, partly, motivated by patriotism and mainly by the purpose of preventing a loss of honour and reputation. She is a patriot in saving Rome, but she is a patrician in keeping her son from dishonoring the family. Volumnia would not deserve any condemnation for doing this if she had not used her son. This selfish action in using her son is implied in her assault with the filial duty. She "has clocked thee [Coriolanus] to the wars, and safely home/ Loaden with honor" (V.iii.62-63). She has made Coriolanus a warrior and he has become great and noble because of her. Actually, the honor loaded on Coriolanus is not for himself, but for her. Volumnia's purpose in saving Rome is a preservation of her ideal of nobility. Her intention in pleading with her son is self-seeking.

In this crucial scene, Volumnia's influence on Coriolanus is also shown through the contrast of her role and Virgilia's. Virgilia should have become the major force that changed Coriolanus' determination, but the close relationship between her and her husband has never been brought into Coriolanus' consideration before he decides to save Rome. Virgilia emphasizes this intimate relationship in her discourse with her husband two times: the first is when she first meets him; and the second, when she supports Volumnia's initiation of suicide in the mother's attempt to convince her son of their patriotism. Virgilia's calling her husband "My lord and husband" (V.iii.32) when she first sees him expresses her love and loyalty, and her claim of the intimate relationship with her husband. These argue against Coriolanus' statement that he becomes "a man . . . [who is an] author of himself/ And knew no other kin" (V.iii.36-37). Her speech tends to recall Coriolanus to the fact that she is attached

to him by natural bonds. When Volumnia threatens Coriolanus that she will commit suicide if he insists on destroying Rome, Virgilia also points out her intention of following Volumnia:

Ay, and mine
That brought you forth this, to keep your name
Living to time. (V.iii.135-137)

She stresses her role of being his wife who brings forth little Marcius to inherit his honorable name. But her words, which convey such intimacy, cannot melt his stubborn heart.

As one of the Roman delegates sent to talk to Coriolanus, and as his beloved wife, Virgilia speaks only twice on this occasion to her husband. She and her son merely appear as references in Volumnia's persuasive speech. From time to time, Volumnia draws Coriolanus' attention to his wife and his son. She points out the adverse results of his decision, but Coriolanus shows his indifference to her plea. When she brings up this filial bond, however, she presumes to change his decision. Coriolanus' yielding to his mother shows that Virgilia's role is less effective and less significant than Volumnia's role as his mother.

Coriolanus, whether he realizes how strongly he is bound to his mother or not, is mistaken in trying to destroy that influential natural bond—his filial duty to his mother. He struggles to escape from it, but he fails. He has obeyed his mother since he was a boy. He inherits her noble and valiant temperament. He has been shaped by her idealism, and has become the means to achieve her ideal of nobility. His existence depends on her; therefore, he cannot cut himself from her tie. Coriolanus' attempt to ignore this tie enables him to be a destroyer of the source

from which he springs. However, he is incapable of destroying what he has formerly believed in and stood for.²⁶

His decision to detach himself from the filial bond brings on his catastrophic end. The decision demonstrates Volumnia's power, and at last it turns against him. Volumnia knows that Coriolanus, in trying to free himself from this natural bond, is false to his nature. Her knowledge of this aspect of her son's nature is shown in her words: "There's no man in the world/ More bound to his mother" (V.iii.58-59). Knowing that Coriolanus is incapable of betraying her, she forces him to realize that she is his mother, and to acknowledge that he is her son; and, as the son, he has to be loyal and grateful to her.

The crucial scenes of Hamlet and Coriolanus demonstrate the mothers' power which destroys the sons. The crucial scene in Hamlet discloses that Hamlet's psychological disruption is caused by Gertrude's degradation--her being unfaithful to his father, her dishonorable act in marrying her brother-in-law, and her blameworthy choice of Claudius. All shameful acts she has done arouse conflicts in Hamlet; he is brought up as a noble man who follows the moral ideal of the age--he is taught to honor and love his parents--and he, himself, idealizes his mother. Gertrude's actions do not deserve his honor, but disappoint him, and shatter her idealized image. Obviously Gertrude is a major force in Hamlet's destruction.

The climactic scene of Coriolanus also illustrates the hero's dependence on his mother. It also shows that the mother is compelling her son to realize his filial duty, and that the son attempts to detach

²⁶Hermann Heyer, "From Plutarch to Shakespeare: A Study of Coriolanus," Shakespeare Survey, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, vol. 10 (London: Cambridge at the University Press, 1957), p. 57.

himself from the relation with his mother, but fails. Volumnia is intentionally giving death to her own son. Unlike Gertrude, who is hardly aware of her power over Hamlet Volumnia is well aware of her power. This is shown when she charges Coriolanus with being disloyal and ungrateful to her. The accusation of his lack of filial duty strikes his weak point--his being bound to his mother. Coriolanus, the victim of his mother's power, collapses and expects his death. Thus Coriolanus' destruction, like Hamlet's, is derived from his being responsive to his mother's influence; their death is preordained by the bond to their mothers.

CHAPTER II

MOTHERS AND SONS: THEIR CHARACTERS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS

The first chapter of this thesis examined the climactic scenes of the two plays and reached these conclusions: Gertrude's degradation causes psychological disruption to Hamlet; and Volumnia's powerful role of the mother destroys Coriolanus. In order to round out fully a proper understanding of the influence of these women on their sons, the character of both mothers and sons must be examined further.

It has been previously mentioned that Hamlet is affected by his mother's deterioration, which he cannot understand. Gertrude's temperament and her actions are ambiguous and enigmatic. She has a relatively small part in the play, but she appears dominant in the way her actions bring on the tragic outcome of the play. From these actions, it is difficult to decide whether she should be considered as an insensitive and sensuous or a thoughtful and considerate woman. Her decision to marry Claudius is questionable; it raises questions as to whether she is an accomplice in the murder of her dead husband, and whether she committed adultery while King Hamlet was still alive. Most critics who have analyzed Gertrude's character have dealt with these questions. These critics prefer to examine the evidence of Gertrude's innocence or guilt rather than examining her ambiguous character and incomprehensible actions as the cause of Hamlet's destruction.

Interpretations of Gertrude's nature are various. Critics consider her as almost every sort from foolish and simple to a very considerate woman. These qualities are usually related to her innocence of the murder, her adultery, and her incestuous marriage. Bradley defends her from the charge that she might be an accomplice in murder, and most critics agree. Bradley sees that she neither has knowledge of the murder, nor participates in it. He writes, "She was not privy to the murder of her husband, either before the deed or after it."¹ In proving this, Bradley draws the evidence from Gertrude's reaction to the play and her exclamation "As kill a king?" (III.iv.31) when Hamlet speaks to her that his bloody action of killing Polonius is as bad as her murder of her husband. Bradley points out that the play does not at all move Gertrude, and her exclamation in the closet scene shows no sign of guilt. Bradley, then, adds "Further, it is most significant that when she and the King speak together alone, nothing that is said by her implies her knowledge of the secret."² J. Dover Wilson also states that Gertrude has no knowledge of the crime. He says, "Some have imagined that Gertrude knew of the murder all the time. But this is impossible."³ Like Bradley, Wilson uses the Queen's astonishment--"As kill a king"--her naive reactions to the play, and her speech to the King--"I doubt it is no other but the main,/ His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage" (II.ii.56-57)--as evidences to affirm Gertrude's innocence.⁴ Robert M. Smith also claims the same evidences as Wilson and Bradley to prove that Gertrude "is innocent. . .

¹Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 140.

²Ibid., p. 140.

³Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 252.

⁴Ibid.

throughout the play of any knowledge of the murder of Hamlet's father. The Queen is not an accomplice in the sources of the story; the Ghost ascribes his death to Claudius only; the King never exchanges confidences with the Queen as an accomplice in the murder."⁵

The charge that Gertrude might have been a participant in murdering her husband arises from Hamlet's suspicion. His mother has lowered herself so much that she might be capable of killing her old husband in order to marry his brother. Hamlet, himself, accuses her of possibly being an accomplice in the murder of his father. The Ghost of his father did not inform him of Gertrude's guilt or innocence of the murder; the spirit only blames Gertrude for being the "most seeming-virtuous queen" (I.v.46), when she was "won to his [Claudius'] shameful lust" (I.v.45). Hamlet's resentment over his mother's humiliating conduct pushes him to suspect her. The play that he uses to test Claudius' guilt is also used to criticize and test his mother. The verses that he assigns the Player Queen to speak represent his suspicions of his mother's action. Hamlet uses these verses of the Player Queen—"In second husband let me be accurst!/
None wed the second but who killed the first" (III.ii.184-85)—to attack Gertrude. But he sees no guilty reactions from her. Her speech expressing her attitude toward the Player Queen—"The lady doth protest too much, methinks" (III.ii.234)—does not resolve Hamlet's suspicions; therefore, in the closet scene Hamlet tests her again, and this time he becomes convinced that she never has a part in the murder. The second appearance of the Ghost can clear Gertrude of her guilt and convince Hamlet of her innocence. The Ghost appears right at the moment

⁵Robert M. Smith, "Hamlet and Gertrude, or the Conscience of the Queen," Shakespeare Association Bulletin 11 (April 1936) : 91.

when Hamlet is informing his mother of Claudius' crime. Wilson offers his interpretation of the coming of the Ghost: "the Ghost appears just in time to stop Hamlet speaking of the murder and taxing her with knowledge of it."⁶ Wilson further explains that the Ghost is satisfied with Hamlet's attack on her infidelity, and her second hasty marriage, but he does not want his son to tell Gertrude about the assassination and Claudius' being a murderer. Wilson writes, "but the fact must be kept from her, and the Ghost intervenes to prevent a revelation which would lay too heavy a burden of shame and guilt upon her."⁷ Though Wilson has a justifiable interpretation of the Ghost's second appearance, he only points out the sentimental reasons for the coming of the Ghost. Actually, the Ghost comes to prevent her from knowing the truth of the crime because Gertrude is innocent. She never knows of the murder, and she never has a part in it; therefore, she should not experience the mental agony of knowing about it. The Ghost's words telling about the Queen at his first appearance and the motivation of his second appearance can serve as evidence of Gertrude's innocence.

The possibility of Gertrude's adultery is also debatable.⁸ The leading critics like Bradley, Wilson, and Smith believe that she had committed adultery. Bradley's view is that Gertrude's adultery reveals her true nature and thus gives Hamlet a moral shock, and makes him long

⁶Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 252.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Though in one of the sources of Hamlet, Francois de Belleforest's Histoires Tragiques, the author indicates that Gertrude committed adultery with her brother-in-law during her marriage with Old Hamlet, in Shakespeare's Hamlet there is no overt indication of Gertrude's adultery.

for his death.⁹ Wilson considers the Ghost's speech:

Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
 With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,
 O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
 So to seduce; won to his shameful lust
 The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen;
 O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there,
 From me, whose love was of that dignity
 That it went hand in hand even with the vow
 I made to her in marriage, and to decline
 Upon a watch whose natural gifts were poor
 To those of mine.
 But virtue, as it never will be moved,
 Though lewdness court in a shape of heaven,
 So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
 Will sate itself in a celestial bed
 And prey on garbage. (I.v.41-57)

He states that the word "adulterate" is used by the Ghost to tell Hamlet that Gertrude has betrayed him when he was still alive; and these words "marriage-vow," "celestial bed," and "preying on garbage," indicate what the Ghost really means by "adulterate." The Ghost "is speaking of Gertrude's infidelity before his death." Consequently, Wilson also takes Hamlet's resentful words about his mother's nature, "O most pernicious woman!" (I.v.105), and his reproach of Gertrude's being dishonest to the marriage promise—"Such an act. . . makes marriage vow/ As false as dicers' oaths" (III.iv.45-46)—as the evidences that Gertrude has been false to her husband before his death.¹⁰ Smith agrees with Bradley and Wilson, and points out the same evidences as Wilson. Moreover, he stresses that Hamlet's words that Claudius "whor'd" his mother and the Queen's dishonesty of breaking marriage vows have only one interpretation—Gertrude's sin of Adultery.¹¹ Other critics, led by John W. Draper,

⁹Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 103.

¹⁰Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 293.

¹¹Smith, "Hamlet and Gertrude, or the Conscience of the Queen," p. 82.

argue against Bradley, Wilson, and Smith. They see that the word "adulterate" does not connote adultery. Draper says:

'adulterate' may well refer merely to Claudius' intentions or desires, and not to an accomplished fact involving Gertrude. . . . Adulterate, however, in Elizabethan times, retained something of its wide etymological meaning, as appears in its uses in the New Testament and in Canon Law, and so might refer to any act or thought that was 'unchaste' or 'lewd.'¹²

Then, Draper contends that the Ghost's speech implies that he lost his wife after his death; therefore, Gertrude has not been Claudius' mistress. Hamlet's word "whor'd" does not express the sense of adultery, but, according to Elizabethan sense, "whored" means "debauched," which "refers to the marriage, which being incestuous, was null and void, so that Claudius and Gertrude according to strict law were living in adultery like Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon."¹³ Miss Carolyn Heilbrun seems to follow Draper in interpreting the word "adulterate." She states with regard to Gertrude's adultery that the word "adulterate" should not be claimed as the Ghost's honest expression of his wife's adultery. She sees the Ghost as being too subjective and emotional in speaking of his wife's remarriage. Miss Heilbrun writes:

But even the Ghost used the word "adulterate" in full awareness of its modern restricted meaning, it is not necessary to assume on the basis of this single speech (and it is the only shadow of evidence we have for such a conclusion) that Gertrude was unfaithful to him while he lived. It is quite probable that the elder Hamlet still considered himself married to Gertrude, and he is moreover revolted that her lust for him ("why she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on") should have so easily transferred itself to

¹²John W. Draper, The Hamlet of Shakespeare's Audience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), p. 112.

¹³Ibid., pp. 113-114.

another. This is why he uses the expressions "seduce," "shameful lust," and others.¹⁴

Besides, Miss Heilbrun attacks Bradley and Wilson because, in their emphasis on Gertrude's adultery, they are "unable to see lust, the desire for sexual relations, as the passion, in the Elizabethan sense of the word, the flaw, the weakness which drives Gertrude to an incestuous marriage, appals her son, and keeps him from the throne."¹⁵ At this point Miss Heilbrun argues that Gertrude had no affair with Claudius while her husband was alive; and she also attempts to convince the reader that Gertrude is won by Claudius after the Old King's death. Gertrude, however, in deciding to marry her brother-in-law, is motivated by lust.

Miss Rosamond Putzel is another critic who does not view the Ghost's statement as evidence of Gertrude's adultery. By referring to Wolfgang Keller's assumption on the justifiable meaning behind the word "adulterate," Miss Putzel assumes that this word "may allude to a marriage which, as Wolfgang Keller pointed out forty years ago, would have been recognized by neither the Protestant nor the Catholic church in the sixteenth century."¹⁶ Furthermore, she quotes the meaning of the word "adulterate" from the N.E.D.: the meaning used in 1650's is "spurious," "base in origin." Then, by noticing that the word "adulterate" follows "incestuous" in the Ghost speech, she claims that the latter word or "adulterate" is "an intensification of the idea of baseness in the act of incest."¹⁷

¹⁴Carolyn Heilbrun, "The Character of Hamlet's Mother," Shakespeare Quarterly 8 (1957) : 206.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 202.

¹⁶Rosamond Putzel, "Queen Gertrude's Crime," Renaissance Paper (1961) : 39. Wolfgang Keller is mentioned in her note as the author of Shakespeare Jahrbuch (1919).

¹⁷Ibid.

There is more evidences that Gertrude does not commit adultery. First of all the word "adulterate" used by the Ghost is applied to Claudius, not Gertrude; and in using this word the Ghost tends to stress his loss of his Queen who, now, has been taken away by Claudius. Besides, as Miss Putzel notices, the word "adulterate" follows the word "incestuous," so the word, instead of having the meaning of "adultery," tends to emphasize the illegality of Gertrude and Claudius' marriage. The word "adulterate" appears only once, only in the Ghost's speech; and there is no implication of adultery in other words like "most pernicious woman," and "whor'd," which are used by Hamlet. These words are mere expressions of his resentment over his mother's degradation in remarrying another man, one to whom she cannot legally be a wife. Later in his speech, the Ghost's words, "Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand/ Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched," (I.v.74-75), show that he lost his Queen after his death. Then at the end of his speech, he repeats his order to take revenge on Claudius: "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be/ A couch for luxury and damned incest" (I.v.82-83). Here, the Ghost emphasizes incest, not adultery. He never mentions adultery again. The last evidence of Gertrude's lack of involvement in adultery is in Hamlet's speech in the crucial scene. Hamlet uses the word "matron" in his reproach, "If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,/ To flaming youth let virtue be as wax" (III.iv.84-85). When he uses this word, he refers to his mother as a used-to-be widow, and this discredits the accusation of Gertrude's being Claudius's mistress.

Though Gertrude's involvement in adultery and murder is debatable and often discussed in the critics' analysis of her character, it is not the influential aspect of her character; the incest of her marriage is

largely ignored by her son. Evidently, the side of her character which most disturbs Hamlet and contributes to his death lies in her degradation--her incapability of acting appropriately as the faithful wife and the virtuous mother. Hamlet cannot understand the reason of her degradation; and he presumptuously judges that his mother, in remarrying, is motivated by lust.

Gertrude's character does tend to be ambiguous. The critics fall into two groups: some see her as a weak and superficial woman, and others see her as being intelligent and strong-minded. Bradley sees her as having "a soft animal nature. . . very dull and very shallow."¹⁸ To Bradley, Gertrude is a simple and insensitive woman who likes to be happy, and also wants others to be happy. She does not realize her shameful act because she is untroubled by it; she is not capable of seeing her own shameful actions.¹⁹ Bradley is right in stating that Gertrude is insensitive. She is unable to know her son's character and to realize that her actions have greatly influenced her son, but Bradley overemphasizes her superficiality and dullness. Gertrude, though she appears an easy-going person, is not as dull and shallow as Bradley contends. Miss Heilbrun, who praises Gertrude as an intelligent woman, notes that Bradley fails to see Gertrude "for the strong-minded, intelligent, succinct, and apart from the passion, sensible woman that she is."²⁰ Bradley does not recognize Gertrude's courage in standing up for Claudius when Laertes is raising the mob against her husband. He states that she

¹⁸Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 141.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Carolyn Heilbrun, "The Character of Hamlet's Mother," p. 202.

"can do nothing to help her son."²¹ Bradley also criticizes Gertrude for drinking the poisonous wine; he writes, "But then she meets her death because she cannot resist to please her son by drinking to his success."²² He, then, finally assumes that Gertrude, whose "belief at the bottom of her heart was that the world is a place constructed simply that people may be happy in it in a good-humored sensuous fashion," is one of the faulty characters in Shakespeare's tragedies who "dies a better woman than she had lived."²³ Miss Heilbrun, noting the lines spoken by Gertrude, states that she usually has conciseness of statement. She is courageous (in accepting that Hamlet's distress is due to her overhasty marriage), considerate, and intelligent--in her speech appreciating Ophelia's help in attempting to find the cause of Hamlet's madness (III.i.38-42).²⁴

Gertrude has both strength and weakness in her character. As a mother, she has love and consideration for Hamlet. She cares for him when he appears to be too obsessed with his father's death, and joins with Polonius and Claudius to seek the cause of Hamlet's distress. Her love and care for her son is consistent throughout the play, and these feelings are shown clearly in the important scenes. In the play scene her mother-love is shown when she asks Hamlet to sit by her: "Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me" (III.ii.109). She is always concerned with Hamlet's welfare. She volunteers to talk to Hamlet in her chamber in order to find out why Hamlet is so vexed. Though the idea may not

²¹Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 141.

²²Ibid., p. 142.

²³Ibid., p. 141.

²⁴Heilbrun, "The Character of Hamlet's Mother," p. 208.

have originated with her, it still shows her concern. From this time she begins to realize that her actions disturb her son, and she also learns that he loves and respects her. She, then, protects her son by keeping the secret of his feigned madness; she lies to Claudius by saying that Hamlet is in hysteria when he kills Polonius. At Ophelia's grave, she expresses her wish for her son's happiness: "I hoped thou shouldst been my Hamlet's wife" (V.1.244). In the duel scene where she and her son are going toward their deaths, she apparently takes Hamlet's side--this time she seems to think only of Hamlet; she does not think of Claudius. First she offers Hamlet her napkin so that he can rub his brows, then she drinks apparently to wish Hamlet's health, and before she dies she wipes her son's face. All these actions show that her love for Hamlet is true and praiseworthy.

The evidence presented indicates that she does not fail in her duty as an honest wife to Old Hamlet. She stays faithful to him until he dies; and she has no part in murdering him. As Claudius's wife, she also does what she regards as her duty. She respects Claudius as the wife should respect her husband. Even though Hamlet tries to convince her of her present husband's inferiority, and she realizes Claudius's defects, she still treats him as she used to do. Her admirable conduct as Claudius's wife is seen when she tries to prove to Laertes that her husband was not involved in Polonius' death. Her words declaring Claudius' innocence: "But not by him [Claudius]" shows her courageous act as the wife who tries to render justice to her husband. Gertrude's being Claudius' wife, in part, protects her son from being killed by her husband. Claudius, when Laertes asks him to use the King's power to get rid of Hamlet, cannot do as Laertes suggests since he knows that:

The queen his mother
 Lives almost by his looks, and for myself--
 My virtue or my plague, be it either which--
 She is so conjunctive to my life and soul.
 (IV.vii.11-14)

Claudius realizes that she, with her love, is united to Hamlet and he, with his love for her, cannot harm Gertrude by being known to act directly to kill her son.

While Gertrude is a sensible and an intelligent woman, she still brings calamity to her son's life, and the lives of others, including her own. Her weakness greatly contributes to catastrophe, especially to her son. Her decision to marry Claudius arises from her "domestic, malleable, and ductile" characteristics.²⁵ She is not independent. When Old Hamlet died, she was left alone. Hamlet is in Wittenburg. The sequence of events is not certain; perhaps Claudius usurps the throne, and becomes the King. Though there is no evidence that Claudius used his power as the King to win her, a weak and malleable widow like Gertrude does not have much choice. She decides to be the Queen again because she needs somebody to depend on.²⁶ Gertrude is not an idealistic woman who has high regard for such things as love or laws. She loves her old husband and had been faithful to him until he died. She is not a sentimental type or a love worshipper like her son. To her, death is common; and as for her dead husband, he just passes "through nature to eternity." This idea is revealed in her warning Hamlet not to be too obsessed with

²⁵ Putzel, "Queen Gertrude's Crime," p. 45.

²⁶ Baldwin Maxwell, "Hamlet's Mother," Shakespeare Quarterly 15 (1964) : 241, states that Gertrude, who has the character of a follower, needs a leader; that is why she marries Claudius. Draper, in The Hamlet of Shakespeare's Audience, states that the marriage of Gertrude and Claudius is "a political necessity" (p. 119). Gertrude serves as "the imperial jointress of this warlike state [Denmark]" (p. 113).

his father's death:

Do not forever with thy veiled lids
 Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
 Thou know'st 'tis common all that lives must die,
 Passing through nature to eternity. (I.ii.70-72)

When her husband died, the throne had been usurped, and she has to make an important decision in marrying Claudius. Yielding to her passion, and, possibly, motivated by her concern for the welfare of her son, she sees no point in moaning over her dead husband or in avoiding marriage to Claudius because of the technicality of incest. Gertrude is always seen depending upon Claudius, but after she speaks to her son in that closet scene, she is no longer a follower. Of course, she does not develop significantly as a leader, but she becomes intelligent, courageous, and thoughtful. She is admirable in her attempt to protect her son; however, she cannot stop his death—the death which, in part, arises from her being dependent on Claudius and Polonius. Besides the actions that affect her son's moral idealism, Gertrude has contributed another unforgivable action which drives her son to his death: that is her permission to have Polonius hide behind the arras, and eavesdrop on her conversation with her son. That thoughtless action causes Hamlet to kill Polonius. Hamlet falls in Claudius' power; though he can escape one of Claudius' plots, he cannot avoid that which arises from Laertes' determination to have revenge for Polonius' death.

Gertrude's insensitivity greatly contributes to the tragic fate of her son. She is insensitive in her inability to understand his idealistic character, and his idealized attitude toward her. She does not know that she is portrayed as an idealized mother. While Gertrude sees nothing wrong with her marriage to Claudius, Hamlet's soul is tortured to see his mother's degradation. Gertrude, who does not act in accord with his

ideals and standards, is unable to know that her actions are shattering her son's ideals; and, though she learns about it later, she cannot stop her son's downfall, which is caused by such actions.

Gertrude, like other characters in the play, is fallible, and her flaw tremendously affects her son's life; it provides a destructive force which drives him to his death. Gertrude is thus dramatically dominant and important; she is not at all negative or insignificant, as T.S. Eliot contends.²⁷

Hamlet's character also needs to be seen as fully as possible. Considering his procrastination in taking revenge on Claudius, critics interpret Hamlet's character in various ways. Coleridge sees Hamlet intentionally created by Shakespeare as "a person, in whose view the external world, and all its incidents and objects, were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind."²⁸ According to Coleridge, Hamlet belongs to an imaginative and meditative type, but he is so absorbed in his imagination and thought that he loses a balance between "the contemplative faculty" and the "power of action." Hamlet's indecision is derived from his over-indulgence in his reflections.²⁹ Wilson writes, "He does not say what he will do, he does not know what he will do, he merely delights in thought of doing something."³⁰ Hamlet's inactivity is due to over-powering emotion. Eliot, having admitted that

²⁷T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problem," in Discussions of Hamlet, ed. J.C. Levenson (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1960), p. 46.

²⁸S.T. Coleridge, "Lectures and Notes on Hamlet," in Discussions on Hamlet, p. 8.

²⁹Ibid., p. 11.

³⁰Wilson, What Happens in Hamlet, p. 226.

Hamlet's melancholy arises from Gertrude's guilt, claims that Hamlet

is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible,
because it is in excess of facts as they appear. . . .
The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his
puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation,
but a form of emotional relief.³¹

Hamlet's being contemplative and emotional is in part the result of his reaction to his mother's remarriage and the task of avenging his father.

Any judgment of Hamlet's nature should be based upon considerations of conventional rules under which he is brought up, and upon his thoughts and actions. Hamlet is a Renaissance nobleman trained under the ideals of that age. His nobility is shown in Ophelia's description of his character; Ophelia describes him as having a "noble mind," and "The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword" (III.i.152). She praises him as the model of the nobleman when she calls him "The glass of fashion, and the mold of form" (III.i.154). Theodore Spencer states that Hamlet "is trained to believe in the traditional optimistic view of the nature of man."³² His being brought up under this conventional belief encourages him to be idealistic. He always has "an unbounded delight and faith in everything good and beautiful."³³ His idealism confines his view of the real world.

Before Gertrude's second marriage, Hamlet, typically, had idealized his parents and their married life. He praises his father as a god--Hyperion; he regards his father's love for his mother as sincere and innocent. Gertrude has been idealized as his father's faithful wife.

³¹Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problem," p. 49.

³²Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, Lowell Lectures, 1942. 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1942), p. 95.

³³Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 96.

When his mother remarried Claudius, who is compared to the satyr, all of the ideal images he has created are destroyed. He is shocked that his mother no longer thinks of his father, his dignity, and his love. He is drawn from illusion to a partial awareness of reality, and the latter makes him suffer, and even fear that reality is unbearable.

Gertrude's second and hasty marriage thus shatters Hamlet's idealized world. He learns that evil exists, but he cannot accept it, especially the evil which involves his mother. This discovery renders Hamlet pessimistic. And while he is struggling in his confrontation with his mother's degradation, he learns another shattering truth that Claudius has murdered his father. In revealing this fact, the Ghost--which Hamlet fears may be an evil spirit--orders Hamlet to take revenge on Claudius. At this time Hamlet is suffering and depressed by the truth he has learned and the task he faces. His mind is in conflict. His mother has lowered herself so much that she disgusts him--but at the same time he still cares for her, and tries to restore his idealized image of her. Moreover, she has married the murderer of her husband, and Hamlet is commanded to kill that murderer. The disappointment with his mother and the duty of revenge put Hamlet in conflict with moral rules to which he has been committed. After speaking to the Ghost, and learning another truth, Hamlet declares:

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
 That youth and observation copied there,
 And thy commandment all alone shall live
 Within the book and volume of my brain,
 Unmixed with baser matter. (I.v.99-104)

Though he declares that he will follow the Ghost's order for vengeance, Hamlet seems to care more about his mother's salvation than about killing Claudius. Hamlet has an opportunity to kill his uncle when he finds him

in a defenseless position--kneeling and praying with his back toward Hamlet--but Hamlet passes up that chance. Though he has an excuse for sparing his uncle's life--that he is afraid he will send Claudius to heaven since he is in prayer--there may be a more subtle reason of which Hamlet is not aware of his desire to make his mother see her shameful act, and thus to restore her to that high standard of behavior which, as he thinks, she used to follow.

Hamlet becomes pessimistic; his disappointment with his mother alters his attitude toward the world. He "extends his feelings about his particular situation to cover his feelings about the world as a whole."³⁴ In his pessimism, he isolates himself from others; he likes to be alone, and to contemplate. In his soliloquies, his view of the world as gross and unprofitable is revealed; the view is always related to his mother. The following soliloquy shows Hamlet's psychological disruption because of his altered attitude toward the world. Hamlet is disgusted with evil and is unable to face it as he finds it; he seeks death to escape this weary and flat world:

O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. O God, God,
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on 't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature.
 Possess it merely. (I.ii.129-136)

Then the nature of his disgust for the world is expressed: it is his mother's frailty. She has such a brief love for his father; she moans over his death for a very short time, and then she hastily marries a man inferior to her former husband:

³⁴Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, p. 96.

That it should come to this:
 But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two,
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on: and yet within a month—
 Let me not think on't: frailty thy name is woman
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed by poor father's body
 Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she—
 O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
 Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle,
 (I.ii.137-157).

Sometimes Hamlet realizes that he indulges too much in thought—thought that is led by no reason. He knows that he is a "passion's slave," and knows that reason makes man noble, but he cannot control himself:

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in
 reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and
 moving how express and admirable, in action
 how like an angel, in apprehension how like a
 god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of
 animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence
 of dust? Man delights not me, nor woman neither.
 (II.ii.311-317).

This soliloquy not only reveals Hamlet's realization that he is violating the standard that reason should be sovereign in man, but it also expresses his concern for his mother's violation of that standard. Her reason "has become a panderer to her will (her fleshly desire), thus disgustingly reversing the natural order."³⁵ Hamlet is

torn apart by discovering that the traditional order in which reason should be in control of passion is only an appearance, and that the reality of his mother's action proves human beings to be only beasts, their specific function gone.³⁶

³⁵Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, p. 101.

³⁶Ibid., p. 96.

Spencer introduces the interesting view of Hamlet's thought that it "involves the world, the state, and the individual." Spencer emphasizes that Hamlet's thought "invariably leaps out to embrace the world as a whole."³⁷ His concern for the state is political; Hamlet is upset because Denmark is in the hand of the vicious king like Claudius. Some of Hamlet's speech from the play can be considered as evidence of his concern for the world and the state, for example his soliloquy of I.ii. 129-159 shows his view of the world as an "unweeded garden;" his conversations with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of II.ii.247-255, and of IV.ii. 26-29, demonstrate Hamlet's attitude toward the state (ruled by Claudius), and the King:

HAMLET Denmark is a prison.
 ROSENCRANTZ Then is the world one.
 HAMLET A goodly one, in which these are many
 confines, weeds, and dungeons, Denmark being
 one o' th' worst.
 ROSENCRANTZ We think not so my lord.
 HAMLET Why then 'tis none to you, for there is
 nothing either good or bad but thinking makes
 it so. To me Denmark is a prison.

and:

ROSENCRANTZ My lord, you must tell us where
 the body is and go with us to the king.
 HAMLET The body is with the king, but the king
 is not with the body. The king is a thing.

These three speeches can also be conceived as Hamlet's expression of his agony caused by his confrontation with reality. The world is like an unweeded garden because he has found evil in it; Denmark is the prison because he does not feel free to live in it, and it is also the place where he witnesses the vicious deeds of Claudius and his mother; and the King is a thing because he is the murderer of his father, and Hamlet

³⁷Ibid.

loathes him. Hamlet's view of the state and the world is more subjective and pessimistic than humane.

As for his thought involving the individuals, it is most significant. His bitter thoughts of Gertrude affect his view of the state, the world, and also other individuals. Hamlet becomes sarcastic and trusts nobody. In the nunnery scene, his resentment for Polonius' spying is delivered to Ophelia, the innocent lady who has been his love. His distrust of his mother makes him distrust Ophelia. In the same scene, Hamlet condemns the beauty of women as the transformer of honesty. Here, again, he refers to his mother's dishonesty:

Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once. (III.i.111-115)

Then he orders Ophelia to a nunnery, so that she will not be "the breeder of sinners" (III.i.121). But if Ophelia wants to marry, she should marry a fool because the fool will not be able to know that his wife makes a cuckold out of him. Again, Hamlet resents his mother for her betrayal of his father. Because his mother violates the ideals of innocent love and honesty, Hamlet disbelieves them, and

can think of the relation between the sexes only in the coarsest terms; he tortures both Ophelia and himself by doing so, attributing to her in his usual generalizing way the faults of her sex as a whole which his mother's behavior had revealed.³⁸

His sarcastic speech and rude treatment during the confrontation with Ophelia are thus motivated by his disappointment with his mother.

³⁸Ibid., p. 105.

Hamlet's melancholy derived from his mother's misconduct is often assumed to be caused by an Oedipus complex. Sigmund Freud first introduced this term. It is applied to a man who unconsciously desires to have a sexual relationship with his mother, and at the same time is jealous of his father.³⁹ Freud sees Hamlet's agony for his mother's degradation, and his inactivity in carrying out his revenge, as being derived from the Oedipus feeling. According to Freud, Hamlet has had this Oedipal attraction since his childhood, and he always longs to take the place of his father. Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because of his ambivalent feeling. On one side, he loathes Claudius because the latter is the murderer of his father and the confiscator of the throne, but on the other side, Hamlet has to admit that Claudius' being his mother's husband reminds him of his sexual desire for his mother. Freud states that "Hamlet's scruples of conscience . . . remind him that he himself is literally not better than the sinner whom he is to punish."⁴⁰

This interpretation of Hamlet as having an Oedipus complex is carried further by Ernest Jones. Like Freud, Jones sees an erotic feeling concealed in Hamlet's affection for his mother. This disguised erotic feeling has been with Hamlet, and repressed in his unconscious mind since his infancy. Then, in his youth, he "weaned himself from her [his mother], and turned toward Ophelia,"⁴¹ but, as Jones states, in paying courtship to her, Hamlet is motivated by his desire to eliminate the

³⁹Sigmund Freud, "On Hamlet and Oedipus," in The Design Within: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Shakespeare, ed. M.D. Faber (New York: Science House, 1970), p. 63.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 83.

⁴¹Ernest Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), p. 91.

disappointment due to his erotic feeling not being fulfilled. Then Hamlet's sexual desire toward his mother, which has been concealed in his unconscious, bursts out. Hamlet is vexed by his mother's conduct and regards it as the result of her coarseness and sensuality because of the erotic feelings "which once, in the infancy long ago, were pleasurable desires can now, because of his repressions, only fill him with repulsion."⁴² Furthermore, Hamlet also loathes and envies Claudius who has his father's place. His inaction, Jones believes, is derived from the awareness of this desire.⁴³

Though Freud and Jones' interpretation of the cause of Hamlet's melancholy and inaction is well-known, and followed by several scholars and critics, it cannot be considered a sufficient explanation of Hamlet's actions. Freud and Jones' approach to Hamlet's character is based on their clinical premises, but it is too restricted. Grebanier notes that the Freudian interpretation causes laughter; he writes:

It is probably wrong to jest about the "Oedipus complex" version of Hamlet, however, for the Freudians have made it no laughing matter. The damage they have wrought the play is incalculable. . . it is a false and vicious reading of the play's meaning, and it is high time that there be an end to it.⁴⁴

The Oedipus explanation really destroys the play for Grebanier; it destroys the sense of tragedy. It is no longer a tragedy for him if the hero's downfall is caused by his erotic attachment to his mother. Freud and Jones overlook the fact that Hamlet is a hero created under the literary conventions of the Elizabethan age. He is a Renaissance Chris-

⁴²Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus, p. 93.

⁴³Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁴Grebanier, The Heart of Hamlet, p. 99.

tian nobleman brought up under standards of that age. Being influenced by those rules, Hamlet conceives of the world as the place of beauty and goodness. He conceives of his parents as virtuous and wonderful, and idealizes their relationship. His mother's remarriage shatters his idealization, and opposes ethical rules in which he believes; and this becomes chiefly the cause of his inaction, even if other emotions may be involved.

There is no reason to believe that Hamlet's love for Ophelia is a compensation for his desire for his mother, and it is wrong to see his violent treatment of Ophelia as his expression of repressed erotic feeling for his mother. Moreover, Hamlet does not possess a significant characteristic of the Oedipus complex: that is the jealous feeling toward his father. It is notable that Hamlet never once shows any jealousy of his father. Bradley points out that Hamlet adores his father; he writes, "Where else in Shakespeare is there anything like Hamlet's adoration of his father? The words melt into music whenever he speaks of him."⁴⁵

Bradley has an appropriate term to describe Hamlet's character: Hamlet has an "exquisite sensibility" for the moral.⁴⁶ Being born as a nobleman, Hamlet is reared and has lived in a world that is always beautiful. His moral idealism plays a great role in shaping his view of man and the world. He sees no evil existing; he adores his father and sees nothing unworthy in his mother. When she remarries, Hamlet is forced to see another side of her, this makes him see the reverse side of the world and know that evil really exists.

⁴⁵Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 96.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 96.

Spencer believes that Hamlet's problem can be explained according to the Renaissance view. He says:

His discovery of the difference between appearance and reality, which produced in his mind an effect so disillusioning that it paralysed the sources of deliberate action, was a symptom that the Renaissance in general had brought with it a new set of problems, had opened new psychological vista, which the earlier views of man had not so completely explored. As we looked back on the period, it appears that the contrast between outward seeming and inner truth had begun, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, to seem the most easily available example of a more portentous awareness, which could by no other means be so readily described.⁴⁷

If Hamlet is not considered to belong to any age, his trouble can also be explained by the view that his agony is derived from his inability to confront reality. And in that reality his mother's misconduct causes his heartache, and it is also the source of his tragedy.

Turning to the general character of Volumnia, one notes that few critics express admiration for her. This Roman matron is seen as the mother who brings on her son's calamity. She is portrayed by Shakespeare as being the leader of her son; she is much more powerful than he is; and she represents more of the Roman patrician than he. Being so dominant, Volumnia is able to shape her son's life. Charles K. Hofling says, "It does reveal that Shakespeare regarded Volumnia as having exerted a definitely traumatic influence upon Coriolanus."⁴⁸

Volumnia is first introduced in I.iii. Her almost masculine temperament and the power which shapes her son's life are clearly shown in this following speech:

⁴⁷Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, pp. 105-106.

⁴⁸Charles K. Hofling, "An Interpretation of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," in The Design Within: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Shakespeare, ed. M.D. Faber (New York: Science House, 1970), p. 292.

I pray you, daughter, sing, or express yourself in a more comfortable sort. If my son were my husband, I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honor than in the embracements of his bed where he would show most love. When yet he was but tender-bodied, and the only son of my womb; when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way; when, for a day of kings' entreaties, a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding; I, considering how honor would become such a person—that it was no better than picture—like to hang by th' wall, if renown made it not stir—was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned, his brow bound with oak. I tell thee daughter, I sprang not more in joy at first hearing he was a man-child than now in first seeing he had proved himself a man.

(I.iii.1-19)

Volumnia is calming Virgilia, Coriolanus' wife. In her comforting words, she shows her pride in her brave son. She is proud of him because he is "the only son of my womb." He, by risking his life in wars, brings her honor, and this makes her rejoice. There is hardly a tender feeling in Volumnia. She rejoices at her son's being in danger in wars; she boldly admits that she is "pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame." She knows that cruel wars have made her son the great Roman warrior. There is no sentimental feeling, except maternal pride, in her attitude toward her son. Later in the same scene, she blames her daughter-in-law for worrying too much about her husband. Volumnia appears almost sadistic in her description of Hector's bloody fight with the Greeks:

Away, you fool! It more becomes a man
Than gilt his trophy. The breasts of Hecuba,
When she did suckle Hector, looked not lovelier
Than Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood
At Grecian sword, contemning. (I.iii.39-43)

Having this unusual hardness in her character, Volumnia "thus is seen to be an extremely unfeminine, nonmaternal person, one who sought to mold her son to fit a preconceived image gratifying her own masculine (actually

pseudo-masculine) strivings."⁴⁹ This description, which is based on psychoanalytic theory, is too harsh to portray Volumnia's character. Though she appears very rigid and dominant, she is neither unfeminine nor non-maternal. On the contrary, her femininity and her maternal force are so strong that they appear morbid. M.W. MacCullum has a more appropriate explanation of Volumnia's nature; he says of Volumnia:

the great-hearted mother, the patrician lady, the Roman matron. The passion of maternity, whether interpreted as maternal love or as maternal pride, penetrates her nature to the core, not, however, to melt but to harden it.⁵⁰

Volumnia's maternal force shapes her son. As a noble Roman patrician, she wants him to achieve nobility. She "clocked" [sic] him to wars, and Coriolanus comes back home "loaden with honor" (V.iii.64). She sees wars in which her son risks his life as a means to achieve honor; she sees his wounds as monumental gifts granted from gods; and most important of all, she sees her son as the "object of her love because he is to be the ideal which she adores."⁵¹ While Coriolanus is progressing toward nobility—her aim—she is delighted to see her goal being achieved. She once says:

I have lived
To see inherited my wishes
And the building of my fancy. (II.i.201-203)

This speech reveals her desire to see Coriolanus attaining nobility. Her son's being the great warrior is not enough; part of her goal is for Coriolanus to be a consul. This ambition is revealed in that same speech;

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 292.

⁵⁰M.W. MacCullum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background, with a forward by T.J.B. Spencer (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), p. 549.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 550.

then the speech continues:

Only
There's one thing wanting, which I doubt not but
Our Rome will cast upon thee. (III.1.2-4)

When Coriolanus refuses to plead for the Plebeians' voices, Volumnia instructs him; now she presents herself a diplomatist. She warns Coriolanus to stop his anger and use his brain to think of advantage--consulship. She is almost a hypocrite because she aims too much at the status of consul and takes it as a symbol of nobility. Hofling criticizes this action: "Volumnia gives much lip-service to 'honor,' but this attitude proves to be in part hypocritical."⁵² Willard Farnham praises her that she proves herself a different patrician from her son. She has a political mind that Coriolanus does not have. Farnham analyzes this characteristic of Volumnia as follows:

She is a political minded patrician with something of the Machiavellian in her character. One may say that she is a most necessary kind of person for the aristocrats to have in their number when the common people begin to acquire power and become a threat to aristocracy, but, to use a word of her own, she is not "absolute" in her aristocratic pride.⁵³

Volumnia speaks of herself when she instructs Coriolanus:

Pray be counseled;
I have a heart a little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage. (III.ii.28-31)

Certainly, Volumnia is proved a capable politician; and she also has a common characteristic of politicians: hypocrisy. She forces Coriolanus to hide his hatred for the plebeians and suggests that he flatter them.

⁵²Hofling, "An Interpretation of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," p. 293.

⁵³Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier: The World of His Final Tragedies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), p. 248.

She counsels him as follows:

Because that now it lies you on to speak
 To th' people, not by your own instruction,
 Nor by th' matter which your heart prompts you,
 But with such words that are but roted in
 Your tongue, though but bastards and syllables
 Of no allowance to you bosom's truth.
 Now, this no more dishonors you at all
 Than to take in a town with gentle words,
 Which else would put you to your fortune and
 The hazard of much blood. (III.ii.52-61)

When Coriolanus seems to disobey her instruction, Volumnia blames her son for being "too absolute" (III.ii.39), but she never realizes that she causes him to be so. Her praises for his valor, besides making him proud of himself, and making him try to please her more, also make him feel superior. Coriolanus' reluctance to plead for the plebeians' voices arises from his sense of superiority; he thinks that to ask for their support is to degrade himself. She never believes that Coriolanus' pride is derived from her training. She scolds him: "Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me,/ But owe thy pride thyself" (III.ii.128-129). But she does not know that in training him to be valiant in order to gain nobility, she also renders him proud. Now she accepts only his valor--the good part she cultivated in him--but she rejects the bad part, and sees it as an unforgivable thing derived from Coriolanus' character.

Being counseled by his mother, Coriolanus first obeys her, but when he appears in front of the plebeians, he arouses the mob against himself. Finally he is banished. Miss Mackenzie assumes that his banishment is the result of Volumnia's training of her son. She believes that Volumnia is fully responsible for Coriolanus' banishment and his destruction at the end. She writes:

[The] ultimate cause of the collision between the hero and the mob that ruins him is Volumnia, his mother, the great Roman matron whose fierce pride has strengthened in her son those

qualities that make him first the successful and triumphant soldier, and then, as he sets the hero-worshipping mob against him by a mixture of brutal arrogance and a far from ignoble pride, causes his banishment on a trumped-up charge, and then as a blind resentment rouses all the worse banishment from what he has been, till he can stoop to lead his country's enemies against itself. It is when the man whom she has bred has fallen, by his own greatness and littleness, to this, that Volumnia intervenes again and saves her son's honor at the cost of his life. . . . Volumnia saves for him the honour that her own training has brought to jeopardy.⁵⁴

Volumnia saves both her son's honor and her own. She cares more for the reputation of the family than for the life of her son. Her motivation in asking her son to spare Rome is partly from her patriotism, but this is mingled with her self-seeking nature. She sacrifices her son not only for Rome, but for her ideal. Coriolanus' betrayal of his native land will destroy the fame and nobility she has valued. In order to retain nobility, she has to destroy her son.

The assumption that Volumnia brings on Coriolanus' destruction is not equivocal. Her contribution to her son's disaster lies in the way she brings him up. She trains him according to her ideal of nobility. Craig explains:

Volumnia has brought up her son in a highly specialized way. She has quite definitely brought him up to be a soldier, a thing which means in chivalric opinion that he has been reared in pure nobility. . . . She chose to breed in him absolute knightliness and pure idealism.⁵⁵

She raises her son to achieve her ideal. With her mother-power, she dominates him; she has made him the man he is and finally she destroys him.

⁵⁴Mackenzie, The Women in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 347.

⁵⁵Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 289.

There is another woman who is important to Coriolanus, but who appears very weak. Virgilia, Coriolanus' wife, has a subordinate role in the play. She is intentionally created to provide a contrast with Volumnia. Her silence and frail femininity strengthen Volumnia's powerful image. The contrast between these two women is shown in the scene in which she and Volumnia are speaking of Coriolanus. While Volumnia claims that Coriolanus is her son, and she is proud of him because he has brought her fame and honor, Virgilia worries about his welfare. Volumnia expects the "good report" (I.iii.20) about her son, but Virgilia is afraid that she may hear a report of her husband's death. The contrast between these two women is also shown through their views of little Marcius' character. When Valeria describes his action of tearing a butterfly, Volumnia considers her grandson's action as valliant as his father's, but Virgilia sees her son's action belonging to "a crack" (I.iii.68).

Virgilia shows tenderness among violence. She exists with her powerful Amazonian mother-in-law and her warrior husband. Being dominated by these two violent forces, Virgilia seems to be shut in with silence. John M. Murry describes her inferior role thus:

Behind the haughty warrior and his amazonian mother. . . .
the exquisite, timid spirit of Virgilia shrinks out of
sight into the haven of her quiet home. One can almost
hear the faint click of the door behind her as it shuts
her from the noise of brawling tongues.⁵⁶

Though Virgilia has such a small part in the play, and has no influence on her husband, she stands by herself with her tenderness. Her nature, in contrast with Volumnia, points out Volumnia's flaw in driving her son

⁵⁶John M. Murry, John Clare and Other Studies (New York: Peter Nevill Limited, 1950), p. 233.

to destruction. Both Volumnia and Virgilia are aristocrats, but they have different attitudes toward their class. While Volumnia values nobility as the high ideal and tries to achieve it through her son, Virgilia does not think of nobility as her ideal; her only concern is the safety of her husband. Volumnia encourages her son to be best and then enjoys his greatness; Virgilia never once has a part in that encouragement and never glories in her husband's superior war deeds. She has only love and consideration for her husband. Coriolanus knows that she loves him, but he, like his mother, is so blinded with pride in his greatness that he finds her concern for him unnecessary. He comments on her weeping when he returns to Rome as a conquerer:

My gracious silence, hail!
 Woudst thou have laughed had I come coffined home,
 That weep'st to see me triumph? A, my dear,
 Such eyes the widows in Corioles wear,
 And mothers that lack sons. (II.ii.179-183)

It has been obviously shown in the play that Virgilia provides no destructive force to Coriolanus. She is aloof from all matters that contribute to Coriolanus' calamity. She has no desire to see him heroic and great; and she never encourages him to be so. This is shown in the beginning of the play and in the scene in which Coriolanus is forced to plead for support from the plebeians. Early in the play, while Volumnia is contentedly speaking of her son's heroism and claiming that her son's greatness is the result of her encouragement, Virgilia shows no appreciation of her husband's heroic deeds, and she also has no joy in them. Instead, she thinks of her husband as involved in violence and cruelty. In Act III when Volumnia is suggesting that Coriolanus speak hypocritically to the common people in order to be elected a consul, Virgilia has

and "fragments," and by overtly insulting them, Coriolanus shows his hatred for them and the pride he takes in his class. As the play proceeds, Coriolanus' pride and sense of superiority are more obviously exhibited. They render him harsh and inflexible, and later they destroy him.

Coriolanus' pride and inflexibility appear dominant in Acts II, and III of the play. Winning a victory for Rome, Coriolanus is awarded a high honor: he is named "Coriolanus" after the name of the city he has defeated and is nominated to be a consul. He accepts the new honorable name, but is reluctant to follow the customary practice of pleading for support for his consulship from the plebeians. According to the ritual, he has to show them his good service by showing his wounds from the battles, explaining how he got them, and finally asking for their affirmation for his consulship. Coriolanus has always been opposed to participation in this ritual; first, he is not enthusiastic about being a consul, and second, he sees that the custom forces him to be false to his nature. He regards it as degrading. He seeks fame and nobility in wars not in civilian affairs. He prefers to lead his army and risk his life in the battles rather than deal with those common people who render no service to their country and who are worthless as "curs," and "fragments." So he refuses to plead for their voices. He explains to his mother:

Know, good mother,
I had rather be their servant in my way
Than sway with them in theirs. (II.i.205-207)

His pride also makes him reluctant to follow that custom. Menenius knows this critical fact about Coriolanus. He says:

His nature is too noble for the world:
 He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
 Or Jove for 's power to thunder. (III.i.254-256)

Volumnia, in her attempt to make Coriolanus plead for the plebeians' voices, blames him:

You are too absolute;
 Though therein you can never be too noble
 But when extremity speak. (III.i.39-41)

Because his pride is so dominant and destructive that it causes his downfall, his nature from which his pride springs should be examined. Michael Goldman rightly sees Coriolanus as "immature, rigid to the point of being brittle."⁵⁷ Coriolanus is always a "boy"--as Aufidius shows at the end of the play. His childishness lies in his search for greatness to please his mother, his hot temper, and his lack of self-knowledge. He is an angry man whose emotion can be easily aroused. His furious temper cannot be concealed; it is always expressed in his words. He is frequently angry, especially with the common people. He is too rigid and thus becomes ignorant of himself and things outside himself. Browning says that Coriolanus lacks self-knowledge, and this disables him. In his refusal to ask for the plebeians' support, Coriolanus "actually and desperately needs the good-will and esteem of the people, but he tries to hide that fact, from a sense of the weakness and contemptibleness of such dependence."⁵⁸ Coriolanus is unable to see his weakness; he is unaware that he is too proud and too absolute. He sees himself as superior to others, and considers his valiant deeds in wars as an expression of the highest virtue, and believes this virtue should be automatically recognized by others. Coriolanus' lack of self-knowledge is also

⁵⁷Goldman, Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama, p. 118.

⁵⁸Browning, "Coriolanus: Boys of Tears," p. 28.

shown in his determination to detach himself from all natural bonds. He is incapable of knowing his inability to sever them, especially those which tie him with his mother. Later, he collapses because the bond he tries to cut compels him to yield.

Coriolanus, like his mother, is obsessed by his idealism. This idealism, as suggested by F.H. Rouda, is his belief in "the absolute integrity of the individual."⁵⁹ He thinks that Coriolanus is intentionally created as "a high-minded, emotionally untried youngster, whose insistence on asking more of the world than it has to offer is, after all, a form of innocence." Rouda portrays Coriolanus as the innocent youth among the "grey beards"--he uses these words to refer to other patricians who are older than Coriolanus. While these grey-beards are diplomatic, self-seeking, and self-protective, Coriolanus is "headstrong, impulsive, open." Unlike those old patricians, Coriolanus is not political, but he "enlarges our conception of what it is to be honest. . . , for all his ferocity he shows himself in his uprightness to be a lamb among wolves."⁶⁰ Rouda puts too much emphasis on the significance of Coriolanus' youth; he intentionally emphasizes Coriolanus' distinctive characteristics (mainly idealistic and innocent) which distinguish him from others. Rouda also distorts the pictures of the other patricians to exaggerate the contrast with Coriolanus. It seems that Rouda wants to present the idea that Coriolanus' ideal of absolute integrity, his impulsiveness, and his inflexibility are mainly caused by his being an inexperienced youth. Actually, the age has little to do with that idealism, his quick temper, and his haughtiness; all of these qualities arise from

⁵⁹F.H. Rouda, "Coriolanus--A Tragedy of Youth," Shakespeare Quarterly 12 (1961) : 103.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 104.

his self-esteem—he sees himself as a hero who serves his country with his heroic deeds in wars. Coriolanus also measures his own worth and that of others by deeds in battle. This attitude is shown when he argues with the plebeians about the share of corn:

They [the plebeians] know the corn
Was not our recompense, resting well assured
They ne'er did service for't. Being pressed to
th' war.
Even when the navel of the state was touched,
They would not thread the gates. (III.i.119-124)

Miss Catherine Stockholder believes that Coriolanus' unbending spirit is the result of his attempt to limit himself to his type. Like other tragic heroes, Coriolanus is preoccupied with "the image of extreme virile masculinity." Coriolanus' need to maintain this image is "reflected in hatred or admiration, of autonomous patriot and warrior," and he ironically becomes braggart, traitor, and boy.⁶¹ The truth of Miss Stockholder's statement is sound. Coriolanus strives to retain this masculine image, and he finds support for it from his mother and other patricians and in his pride and hatred of the plebeians. His mother always praises his valor and thus confirms that image. The admiration from other patricians like Menenius, Cominius, and Lartius also strengthens his concept of his own greatness. He, himself, thinks of his courageous deeds in the wars as a sufficient service for Rome and as an expression of his highest virtue. Through his belief that the greater person receives less love from the populace, Coriolanus convinces himself of his greatness when he receives no admiration from the plebeians. He consistently praises this manly image, but he is incapable of knowing

⁶¹Katherine Stockholder, "The Other Coriolanus," PMLA 85 (1970) : 229.

that there is irony in doing so. By trying to retain his manliness, he becomes boyish. He clings to his mother and becomes rigid and stubborn in his actions. Miss Stockholder has a good analysis of Coriolanus' ironic action in maintaining his masculinity:

He values "manly" virtues above all else, and uncompromisingly rejects all hesitation and mildness as womanly or boyish. In so doing, he tragically equates manliness with absolute autonomy, and his refusal to modify his action to the circumstances takes on an auro of boyish stubbornness.⁶²

It can be said that Coriolanus' attempt to retain the image of masculinity is at first encouraged by Volumnia. She sent him to wars since his early youth because of her belief that her son would become a man that way. Coriolanus then is convinced that valiant and heroic deeds are symbols of masculinity. He creates his image as a warrior in order to be manly; he tries to maintain this masculine image, and rejects anything that will make him weak. Coriolanus wants to belong to the type of man that he values, but this desire is frustrated by Volumnia and so is his attempt to retain his masculine image. The frustration is first seen when Volumnia forces him to follow the ritual in an attempt to achieve consulship. When Volumnia asks him to go back and speak gently to the people, he refuses to do so since he does not want to be false to his nature. He argues with his mother:

I talk of you:
Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me
False to my nature? Rather say I play
The man I am. (III.i.13-14)

He obeys his mother, but with perplexity: he does not understand why his mother wants him to play the role that is foreign. He obeys his mother as usual and goes to speak with the common people, but his resentment

⁶²Ibid., p. 232.

overwhelms him. He condemns those people, and then is banished as a traitor. Browning assumes that Coriolanus' anger at the people is primarily aroused by his resentment at his mother's domination of him. Browning says, "There is good reason to think that in his tirades against the city he is discharging the anger and resentment aroused by his mother's dominance."⁶³ It is possible to say that Coriolanus' anger is partly aroused by his mother's dominance. He is dissatisfied with his mother's order, and the feeling is an undercurrent which adds to his fury. Volumnia is always seen intruding into her son's life, and restricting her son's independence. Again, Browning believes that "in her striving to 'make a man' of him, she has (paradoxically) prevented him from achieving independent manhood."⁶⁴

Volumnia's control over her son has evoked psychoanalytic views on the relationship between mother and son. Like Gertrude and Hamlet, Volumnia and Coriolanus are believed by some psychoanalytic critics to have a sexually motivated relationship. Robert J. Stoller says that Volumnia takes her son as "the literal embodiment of her phallus which from infancy she had wished to attain by one means or another."⁶⁵ Stoller thinks that Shakespeare intuitively knows the modern concept of "cumulative trauma," the terms which explains the phenomenon of the relationship between the child and the mother. In the note of his article, Stoller uses Miss Ruth S. Eissler's definition of these terms:

⁶³Browning, "Coriolanus: Boy of Tears," p. 28.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁵Robert J. Stoller, "Shakespearean Tragedy: Coriolanus," The Design Within: Psychoanalytic Approaches to Shakespeare, ed. M.D. Faber, p. 332.

. . . cumulative trauma is the result of the breaches in the mother's role as a protective shield over the whole course of the child's development from infancy to adolescence--that is to say, in all those areas of experience where the child continues to need the mother as an auxiliary ego to support his immature and unstable ego functions.⁶⁶

Stoller introduces these terms because he thinks that Coriolanus' being subjected to his mother's pursuit of phallic interests is explained by the modern concept of "cumulative trauma." Then Stoller contends that Volumnia uses him to fulfill her ambition, and she "directly incites him to doom." She is responsible for his exile, because her "inexorable indoctrination from the cradle" renders him incapable of dealing with the populace. Then, Stoller continues, with this realization, Coriolanus hates his mother, so he submits himself to Aufidius "for their joint annihilation of Rome."⁶⁷ In the climax of the play Stoller describes how Volumnia's power disposes of Coriolanus:

Mother and son confront each other, both quite aware that the only choice is whether to die or to kill. She tells him he cannot kill her (Rome). She has no doubt what Aufidius will then do to her son. Coriolanus knows that his choice means her life or his. . . . He knows his master's voice, and for the last time obeys, as always, her command, this time that he be killed.⁶⁸

Shakespeare might intuitively know the phenomenon of "cumulative trauma," and try to create Coriolanus as an immature man who unconsciously thinks of his mother as a "protective shield" of his immaturity, but, certainly, Shakespeare does not confine Volumnia's idealism to phallic psychology. Stoller's view of Volumnia's attitude toward her son is disagreeable because Volumnia regards her son as an embodiment of her ideal of nobility, not of her desire.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 339.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 336.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 337-338.

Hofling also comments on the relationship between Volumnia and Coriolanus. He considers Coriolanus as fitting the category of "phallic-narcissistic character."⁶⁹ He refers to W. Reich's description of a phallic-narcissistic character as evidence to support his assumption.

Reich explains:

. . . the typical phallic-narcissistic character is self-confident, often arrogant, elastic, vigorous and often impressive. . . . Everyday behavior is. . . usually haughty. . . , derisively aggressive. . . . The outspoken types tend to achieve leading positions in life and resent subordination. . . . In contrast to other characters, their narcissism expresses itself not in an infantile manner but in the exaggerated display of self-confidence, dignity and superiority In spite of their narcissistic preoccupation with their selves they often show strong attachments to people and things outside. . . their actions are much more intensively and extensively determined by irrational motives. . . . One of their most important traits is aggressive courage.⁷⁰

Coriolanus' haughty, aggressive and unbending nature, his role of a great warrior, and his attachment to his mother is perhaps likely to be found in the phallic-narcissistic character. Hofling's attempt to draw Coriolanus as if this type might be more successful if his further explanation of the relationship between Coriolanus and his mother did not concern the prototype of the Oedipus complex. He hypothesizes that Coriolanus unconsciously identifies Rome with his mother. Then he elaborates:

Coriolanus' entire life until Act II has involved an effort to prove that he wanted nothing from mother-Rome except to serve and defend her. During Acts II and III, and particularly in the crucial third scene of the latter, he is in the position

⁶⁹Hofling, "An Interpretation of Shakespeare's Coriolanus," p. 290.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 291.

of asking something from her. What he is asking is her full acceptance of him as consul, that is, as father-figure.⁷¹

Then, he is accused of being a traitor to Rome, and Hofling thinks that there is some significance in that accusation. He writes:

The unconscious significance of the accusation appears to be that Coriolanus' acts have been entirely selfish and that what he has really wanted is exclusive possession of the mother. The charge strikes home the more readily for its coming at a time when Coriolanus has just set partially aside his arrogant pride, a quality which constitutes his main line of defense against both passive yearnings and oedipal desires.⁷²

Stoller and Hofling's assumptions are bound too much to sexuality.

Though their psychoanalytical views provide speculation about some aspects of Coriolanus' and Volumnia's characters which have not been discussed by other scholars outside the psychoanalysis sphere, their proposed explanation of the motivation of the character is at variance with Shakespeare's central view of his tragic hero. It is rather ludicrous to consider that Shakespeare portraying Coriolanus as his hero by assigning him repressed erotic feelings toward his mother; and Coriolanus is certainly not elastic. His rigidity has been discussed earlier. The relationship is more complex than Stoller and Hofling recognize. In order to compensate for the points overlooked by such critics, Gordon R. Smith's explanation of the relationship between Volumnia and Coriolanus should be considered. Smith states that Volumnia and Coriolanus belong to the "authoritarian pattern." He explains:

one of the commonest characteristics of authoritarians is to ally or identify themselves with a person, insti-

⁷¹Ibid., p. 300.

⁷²Ibid.

tution, class, god or other entity which is, or which the authoritarian thinks to be, of great strength.⁷³

Smith points out that Volumnia's "power-idol" is primarily the Roman state, and secondarily her son, who "is her support in maintaining her position with those patricians."⁷⁴ Coriolanus' idolization is primarily of his mother, and secondarily of the state. Coriolanus falls in the category of an authoritarian who always regards his parents as being wonderful.⁷⁵ Smith's notable and truthful statement seems to be supported by Rufus Putney who sees that the relationship between Coriolanus and his mother is reciprocal. Volumnia admires him and he respects her. Putney says "On the surface the relations between Volumnia and Coriolanus are marked by mutual admiration and respect."⁷⁶ She admires his ability, and he has reverence for her. Coriolanus' reverence for his mother is shown throughout the play. He speaks of her as "My mother/ who has a charter to extol my blood" (I.iv.13-15), and, in the crucial scene, as "the honored mold" (V.iii.22), and "Olympus" (V.ii.30).

However, Coriolanus unconsciously rebels when he joins Aufidius and tries to destroy Rome. Putney suggests that Coriolanus has a matricidal impulse when he intends to bring calamity to Rome.⁷⁷ In Hamlet, the hero is seen recognizing the possibility of his killing his mother. In Coriolanus, though he never directly speaks of his fear of killing his

⁷³Gordon R. Smith, "Authoritarian Patterns in Shakespeare's Coriolanus in The Design Within, ed. M.D. Faber (New York: Science House, 1970), p. 311.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Rufus Putney, "Coriolanus and His Mother," The Psychoanalytic Quarterly 31 (1962) : 368.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 375.

mother, his attempt to cut all natural bonds is open to the view that he intends to kill his mother. Nevertheless, it is rather overstating the case to say that Coriolanus wants to kill his mother. Actually, his decision to join Aufidius and turn against Rome is primarily motivated by his desire for revenge by destroying the Romans who cause his exile. In attempting to take revenge on them, Coriolanus may not weigh the possibilities that his revenge would cause his mother's death. In trying to cut his natural bonds, Coriolanus is not motivated by his hatred for his mother; he only wants to bring a calamity upon the Roman people whom he despises.

But Coriolanus cannot detach himself from natural bonds, especially one with his mother. He, as the obedient son, sacrifices himself. If there is a matricidal impulse lying hidden in his unconscious, it is not so powerful as his reverence and loyalty for his mother.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAGIC AFTERMATHS OF THE CLIMAXES OF THE PLAYS

In Chapter I, the examination of the climaxes of the plays has illustrated the influences of the two mothers on their sons; and it has also shown how each climax foreshadows the hero's disaster and the tragic outcome of the play. Now, the details of what happens after the climactic scenes will be considered.

In Hamlet, the hero has markedly changed after he speaks with his mother in the closet scene. He confronts reality. Hamlet, before he leaves for England, is far from being passion's slave. In the soliloquy before he departs from Denmark, Hamlet is concerned with philosophical ideas. He values reason as the element which enables man to be superior to animals. Reason is "god-like" and renders man noble. Hamlet begins to have calm and self-control. He learns to be indifferent to what he calls "the event"--the outcome of actions; he realizes that the future and the outcome of any moral action is unknowable, and "solicitude for these unpredictable consequences must not usurp the present."¹ Hamlet reflects upon these matters in the following soliloquy:

What is a man,
If his chief god 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

¹Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 187.

That capability and godlike reason
 To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be
 Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
 Of thinking too precisely on th' event--
 A thought which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
 And ever three parts coward--I do not know
 Why yet I live to say "This thing is to do,"
 Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
 To do 'it. (IV.iv.33-46)

Hamlet has advanced to a philosophic state of mind. In the churchyard scene, he looks upon the transitions of life. He picks up Yorick's skull, and recollects the former incidents that he shared with this royal jester. The events recollected illustrate Yorick's greatness. Thinking upon the past events and looking at the skull, Hamlet realizes that man is in transition throughout life and finally he must come to his end--death. Hamlet contemplates the reality of life when he speaks to Horatio of the death of Alexander and Caesar and their transformed bodies after their deaths:

HAMLET Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this
 fashion i' th' earth?
 HORATIO E'en so.
 HAMLET And smelt so? Pah!
 HORATIO E'en so, my lord.
 HAMLET To what base uses we may return,
 Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble
 dust of Alexander till 'a find it stopping a
 bung-hole?
 HORATIO 'T were to consider too curiously, to
 consider so.
 HAMLET No, faith, not a jot, but to follow him
 thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to
 lead it; as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was
 buried, Alexander returneth to dust; the dust is
 earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam
 whereto he was converted might they nit stop a
 beer barrel?
 Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,
 Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.
 O, that that earth which kept the world in awe
 Should patch a wall t' expel the winter's flaw!
 (V.i.197-126)

Throughout the fifth act, Hamlet has shown himself a different man from that of the beginning. He was seen being torn apart between idealism and reality. He was not able to accept the real world, but in the last act he confronts reality. He no longer idealizes the world, but accepts it as it is. He has come to believe that man's life is shaped by high Providence. He tells Horatio, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.i.10-11). Then he, for the second time, believes that he was born to be a scourge and minister, to punish the wicked and set chaos in order.² This time, without resentment, Hamlet accepts the role of a scourge as an agent of justice for his father, for himself, and perhaps for the world. In his conversation with Horatio (V.ii.63-70), Hamlet speaks of his decision to take revenge on Claudius in order to attain justice:

Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon--
 He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,
 Popped in between th' election and my hopes,
 Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
 And with such coz'nage--is 't not to be damned
 To let this canker of our nature come
 In further evil? (V.ii.63-70)

Then he comes to accept the fact that death is inevitable when he knows that he is asked to fight with Laertes. Hamlet subjects himself to the power of Providence and death. He says:

There is special providence in the fall of a
 sparrow. If it be now; 'tis not to come; if
 it be not to come, it will be now; if it be
 not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all
 (V.ii.221-224)

This speech confirms Hamlet's belief in a divine Providence. It also

²The first time Hamlet feels that he was born to set things right when the Ghost appears and tells him about the evil deed of Claudius and his mother, and he feels that he is a scourge when he talks to his mother in her chamber.

illustrates his courage in facing death which he regards as a means of achieving justice as well as being the inevitable end of life.

At the end Hamlet is able to achieve justice; he finishes his role of a minister. He can declare Claudius' guilt to the public and bring order to the state. He is at peace when he dies. Horatio's farewell describes Hamlet's peaceful rest: "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,/ And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest" (V.ii.361-362).

Though Hamlet believes that his death is shaped by divine Providence, actually, it is the inevitable outcome of his being blinded by his idealism. His mother's actions draw him from his idealistic world. Hamlet suddenly faces reality and he is unable to accept it. He is torn between his aspiration for the idealistic world and the demands of the real world.

Gertrude's attempt to protect her son seems to fail. However, her effort to do so is admirable. She never tells the King that her son has feigned madness. When she finished talking with her son, and meets her husband, she tells him that Hamlet was "mad as the sea," (IV.i.7), when he killed Polonius. In the graveyard scene, she, again, protects her son by convincing others that Hamlet's pangs over Ophelia are "mere madness" (V.i.284). In the final scene, she obviously takes her son's side. She treats Hamlet affectionately and in drinking the wine, whether she knows that there is poison in that wine or not, saves her son from being killed by Claudius; however, Hamlet cannot escape death. Gertrude unknowingly contributes to Hamlet's tragedy.

In Coriolanus the outcome of the play and what will happen to Coriolanus are foreshadowed in Coriolanus' speech when he yields to his

mother:

O my mother, mother! O!
 You have won a happy victory to Rome;
 But for your son--believe it, O, believe it!--
 Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
 If not most mortal to him. But let it come.
 (V.iii.185-189)

Like Hamlet, Coriolanus, when he says "But let it come," makes himself ready for death. When he returns to Corioles, he, at the same time, walks into Aufidius' trap. Aufidius has already planned to convince other lords that Coriolanus, in sparing Rome, is a traitor. He also tries to arouse Coriolanus to seek his own death. By his taunt "thou boy of tears" (V.vi.99), Coriolanus bursts out in his rage, and his furious words, which condemn Aufidius and others, arouse the conspirators to kill him.

Coriolanus' tragedy is implied at the very beginning when Volumnia expresses her admiration for her brave son, and her influence is shown clearly with this admiration. She says: "To a cruel war I sent him," and "had I a dozen sons . . . I had rather had eleven die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action" (I.iii.14,22,24-25). Volumnia never accepts that she cultivates in him the sense of pride as well as valor. The destructive effect of her power on her son is shown first when she forces him to plead for the plebeians' voices. Coriolanus is incapable of doing so, and then is banished. He is "hopelessly divided between his unnatural discipline of 'honour' and his natural humanity."³ That "unnatural discipline of honour" and his desire to retain his perfect integrity drive him to "neglect all natural feeling and to return

³D.A. Traversi, "Coriolanus," Scrutiny 6 (1937) : 58.

at the head of his old enemies to sack Rome."⁴ But this unnatural feeling cannot overcome his natural human feeling; he later yields to his mother's command.

The destructive effect of Volumnia's power works again in the crucial scene. In this scene the mother and the son are in conflict: Volumnia, for her country's sake, tries to overcome her son; Coriolanus tries to ignore the fact that his mother is important to him. Stoller describes this scene as "a combat for survival, the mother's exploitation of the son always in the ascendancy."⁵ Coriolanus and his mother are like the two selves striking each other, but he is seen as passive. He tries to avoid Volumnia's power, but he fails. Though Volumnia's persuasion is motivated in part by her noble sense of patriotism, it is also caused by her desire to save her own ideal of nobility. She can save Rome and retain her idealism. It is notable that Volumnia can persuade her son to spare Rome, but she cannot make him see that he, as a Roman, saves his native land, and she "cannot even make him feel repentance—not the smallest—for having betrayed Rome in the first place."⁶ She puts her son in a predicament and leaves him with the charge of being a double traitor.

Coriolanus' yielding to his mother can also be conceived of as a result of his habitual desire to please his mother, but this time he pleases her with his life. His yielding to her brings death at the hands of Aufidius.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Stoller, "Shakesperean Tragedy: Coriolanus," p. 337.

⁶Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier, p. 259.

CONCLUSION

The central patterns of maternal influence on tragic events are strong and significant, then, in Hamlet and Coriolanus the two noblemen are dominated by their mothers' life-and-death power. Their lives are generated, their existences are directed, and their deaths are determined by that power. The strength of the mothers' powers is shown more vividly in contrast to the weakness of the sons. Hamlet's moral idealism contributes to the catastrophe. He is noble by birth and is brought up under the Renaissance ethical rules as a noble man. Hamlet, then, is influenced by the ideals of the age. By nature and training he is idealistic. Hamlet's idealization of his mother pictures her as a saint; he forms an image of her as a perfect mother and a faithful wife. Hamlet is obsessed by this idealized image of his mother until he discovers the facts about her. When he returns to Denmark, he has to confront the transformation of his mother: she does not act according to her idealized role. In his eyes, she is unfaithful to his dead father and degrades herself by marrying Claudius, whose qualities can never equal those of King Hamlet. Being unable to accept reality and disappointed with his mother's conduct, Hamlet becomes an inactive, pessimistic, and melancholy man. The idealized image of his mother is shattered; and he is torn between the ideals of the age, in which he believes, and his mother's deterioration. His inability to avenge the murder of his father, and his impetuous action in killing Polonius, which hastens his death, arise from

his frustration stemming from inability to reconcile the reality of his mother's unpleasant act with his idealization.

Coriolanus' first weakness is based upon his extreme reverence for his mother and his habitual obedience to her. He is seen as a son who is extremely loyal to his mother, and does everything he can to please her. These characteristics are the result of being brought up by his mother as an embodiment of her ideal of nobility. Being instructed that battles are a means to achieve nobility, Coriolanus seeks his greatness in wars; thus, when he is the greatest Roman warrior of his time, he is proud, inflexible, and rigid. His mother's compliments on his valor and his egocentricity provide his sense of superiority, as well as his view that he always plays the lonely hand, which makes him overlook the necessary support of the plebeians. Being proud and unbending, Coriolanus, instead of pleading for their voices, mocks them and arouses mutiny. At last he is sentenced to banishment. In his exile, he decides to take revenge on the Romans by joining his enemies, and Coriolanus is ready to destroy Rome when Volumnia, his wife, his son, and Valeria, are sent to persuade him to spare Rome. In the climactic scene, Volumnia is seen as most powerful in her role as Coriolanus' mother. In her plea, the point that changes her son's mind is not her death when Rome is destroyed, or patriotism, but filial duty. Volumnia is able to change Coriolanus' mind (and thus send him to death) by a demand that Coriolanus meet an obligation which he, as a son, cannot refuse.

The examination of the crucial scenes has shown the destructive influence of the mothers on their sons, and the inability of the sons to escape from this influence; these significant scenes foreshadow the heroes' deaths. They also refute some of the psychoanalytic views of

the causes of the tragic ends of the heroes. In Coriolanus, the climactic scenes show Volumnia's ultimate power that commands her son to yield. Coriolanus' yielding proves that her role of the mother is both generative and destructive. She creates her son, cultivates his greatness, and destroys him. After Coriolanus has yielded to his mother, there is no hope that he can survive. In Hamlet, the climax shows that Gertrude's influence on her son is due to her shameful act of remarrying and of choosing the man inferior to her former husband. Hamlet's harsh words and his reckless action demonstrate that Gertrude has destroyed his ideal. The great entanglement of action in this scene which arises from Gertrude's allowing Polonius to eavesdrop also helps to send Hamlet to his death. Being so furious, Hamlet fails to persuade his mother to repent (but she realizes that her son's frustration is caused by her remarriage and her choice of Claudius). He kills old Polonius eavesdropping behind the arras. This scene also marks Hamlet's change. His recognition of his mother's ignorance of his ideal and his killing of Polonius seem to sober him. He becomes calm and submits himself to Providence. The scene can imply Hamlet's catastrophe since the incidents which have happened to Hamlet seem to compel him to confront his tragedy.

These crucial scenes, by illustrating the real cause of the heroes's destruction, can be used to refute the views of the Freudian critics who see the heroes' repressed erotic desires for their mothers causing their passiveness. The psychoanalytic viewpoints are shown to be inadequate.

This study, which emphasizes the climaxes of the two plays, demonstrates that the personalities of the heroes have been markedly shaped by their mothers, and the results of this influence are the inevitable tragic outcomes of their lives.

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