Name: Hamlet, the Dane
Age: 15-30 years
Sex: Male
Birthplace: Elsinore

This consultant was asked to render an opinion on an interesting case, that of Hamlet, the Dane who was found murdered at Elsinore Castle. Several other bodies were noted on the scene. For details of the case please refer to case report, Hamlet, Act I to Act V. In summary this Dane appears to have murdered at least one of the victims and been poisoned by someone else. This report will attempt to reconstruct the psychological situation of the aforesaid Hamlet in an effort to ascertain what may have contributed to the subsequent carnage in Elsinore.

Hamlet was the only son of King Hamlet, the elder and Queen Getrude. His exact age is unclear. By some accounts he was at least thirty at the time of his death, but by other accounts, which this reporter would support on a psychological basis, he was an adolescent. Little is known of his childhood. His father is a well-known heroic figure, typical monarch of his age, who spent significant time away from home. There are strong indications that Hamlet idolized his father but apparently did not take after him, preferring instead, scholarly pursuits. He apparently spent considerable time as a boy in the company of his mother with whom he had an extremely close relationship.

Until about a year prior to his death he was a student at Wittenberg University. He was unmarried and childless. He left school to return to Denmark for his father's funeral. He was of course, upset over his father's death, but according to sources at court, he was even more upset about the situation he encountered when he arrived home. In the time since his father's death his mother had already married his father's brother, Claudius and this man had assumed the throne.

It was these events which apparently triggered the subsequent tragic sequence of events. He was noted to deteriorate mentally after his return. Several witnesses noted symptoms of melancholy and suicidal ideation. He also appeared ruminative and preoccupied, with notable hostility at times directed at his mother, Claudius, his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the court counselor, Polonius. He was also inappropriately hostile towards his girlfriend, Ophelia. His hostility remained at a verbal level, however, for quite some time. There are also indications of some psychotic ideation in that he was noted to be talking to walls and furniture and when asked for an
explanation he claimed to be in conversation with the ghost of his father.

His apparent loss of reality testing, however, may have been feigned. He did warn several friends that he would be assuming what he called "an antic disposition", which was apparently meant to account for any bizarre behavior that they might notice. It was clear to his associates that he was experiencing significant "moral pain", by their decription torn between a perceived necessity to act and avenge his father's death and between loyalty to his mother and her religious teachings. According to reliable sources, the ghost of his father had told him that his father had been murdered by Claudius and that Hamlet was to get revenge for this act while not harming his mother.

According to the accounts we have, Hamlet spent several months in a state of extreme ambivalence which finally erupted in violence. He confronted his mother angrily and while in her quarters, killed Polonius who was hiding behind a curtain eavesdropping. Hamlet perceived an intruder but probably did not know who it was. He expressed no remorse over the death of Polonius and his behavior changed radically after this.

He became much more assertive and deliberate and appeared quite a changed man. Claudius arranged for him to go abroad to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but his object was apparently to bring about Hamlet's death through the intervention of the King of England. Hamlet perceived this threat and instead led his two former friends into a trap which resulted in their deaths not his own. He returned to Denmark just after the death, possibly by suicide of Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius. Claudius was determined to bring about Hamlet's death so he poisoned a cup, resulting ultimately in the deaths of Gertrude, Laertes (Ophelia's brother) and Hamlet, but not before Hamlet had successful killed Claudius.

There are strong indications that Hamlet was strongly identified with his mother. Initially he was noted to be passive, vulnerable, verbally facile, concerned about relationships, and showing a tendency to use defenses more characteristic of females - verbal hostility, suicidal ideation as aggression directed at the self, indecisiveness. After the confrontation with his mother, however, there was a remarkable change in his attitude and behavior. He became much more assertive, direct, but unfortunately, violent. He appears to have successfully achieved a sterotypical masculine identity which cost him his life.

The question of psychosis is difficult to resolve. He was at times depressed, but this depression was probably on the basis of internalized aggression. The psychotic-like
thinking may have been purposefully feigned, typical of the role-taking of the Fool or the Madman or Madwoman, as a passive-aggressive way of speaking truthfully without responsibility. This consultant would assert that he fell into the neurotic realm of psychopathology and was apparently suffering from an Identity Disorder of Adolescence and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, secondary to the shocks he received upon his return home.

It is most unfortunate that the entire system appeared to enable his death to occur. The only sign of a healthy individual in the system is Horatio, who was not in any position of power. All the other members of the family can be seen to be quite seriously and characterologically disturbed and Hamlet became the scapegoat for what was presumably a multigenerational problem.

Sandra L. Bloom, M.D.