

Traditional Cosmology and Hamlet's Delay: Four Humours and Their Activation of His Personal Character

ZHANG Xiufang^{[a],*}

^[a]College of International Studies, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 25 July 2015; accepted 20 September 2015
Published online 26 October 2015

Abstract

There have been countless ways and perspectives to look into the causes and reasons why Hamlet has delayed in taking his revenge against his father's death. However, one thing should be noticed is that the Four Humour theory might serve well to explain the situation. Traditional cosmology holds that macrocosm contrasts and corresponds to microcosm by way of the two parallel analogies: for the former, the Four Roots to construct and build the cosmos or the world are water, fire, air and earth, and correspondingly for the latter, the human being is affected and even controlled and directed by the Four Humours, Phlegm, the Yellow Bile, Blood and the Black Bile, and thus form their various states of character. Though everybody has a tendency of determination of personal character by these four fluids, Hamlet together with his special elements has fostered his character by the service of objective backgrounds and subjective vicissitudes of all four fluids like that which has balanced the system of all seasons of the macrocosm.

Key words: Traditional cosmology; Hamlet; Delay; Four humours; Activation; Personal character

ZHANG Xiufang (2015). Traditional Cosmology and Hamlet's Delay: Four Humours and Their Activation of His Personal Character. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 11(4), 57-64. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/7666>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7666>

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: WHICH MATTERS, ACTION OR CHARACTER? DOORS TO HAMLET'S PROBLEM

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is among the most powerful and influential tragedies in English literature and one of Shakespeare's most popular plays during his lifetime. It has been exposed by many different, often self-contradictory attempts to answer the question "Why did Hamlet delay his revenge against his father's murder?" The psychological, intellectual, religious and social aspects might take part concerning his procrastination to take the revenge. Throughout more than 400 years, Hamlet's delay has been a hot topic of discussion and controversy among the critics, readers and audiences. They have worked out excuses to explain Hamlet's delay when his father instructed him as a filial son and descendant of the throne. All the efforts made in the past offer a broad horizon to have a better and comprehensive understanding about Hamlet's attitude towards revenge. But I could firmly believe that there are still some new perspectives required regarding this issue. Accordingly, two questions might be raised in order to investigate the advantages and disadvantages behind taking vengeance. The former one is why Hamlet's delay has been the foremost argument that aroused enormous attentions from prominent poets, dramatists, literature critics, physicians and philosophers. The latter is why most of them seemingly support Hamlet to employ violence that is strictly forbidden according to the *Bible* and the social conventions. Are their disputes unbiased or biased according to Aristotle's principle about the function of tragedies: "with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions"? (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, pp.363)

Besides, are they ignorant of the social conventions and Shakespeare's perspective about taking revenge?

Based on that, we could naturally conceive how Shakespeare treated revenge throughout his works, especially from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. These three plays are partially concerned with the theme of revenge, however, taking revenge as merely a means for Shakespeare to make the plot go smoothly, not as a primary purpose in his perspective. When Shakespeare constructed the character, for example, in case as one's beloved killed, the throne overthrown or the treasured thing lost, he tended to believe that taking revenge would incur successive disasters beyond the control of human power. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, Romeo fought for the fame and honor of his family and killed Tybalt, the man who killed Romeo's friend Mercutio. Romeo was confronted with the punishment of exile with the Prince's consideration to exemplify his kindness and mercy. However, the Prince's mild measure to punish Romeo for his revenge in a rash did not prevent the tragic results that the two families suffered from the losing of their beloved daughter and son respectively.

And for that offence
Immediately do we exile him hence.

.....
My blood for your rude brawls doth lie a-bleeding;
But I'll amerce you with so strong a fine
That you shall all repent the lose of mine
Bear hence this body, and attend our will;
Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill.

(*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.1.177-188)

From the Prince's attitudes towards the disputes and revenge, we could perceive that nobody gets the rights to take away other people's life randomly even if he could manipulate the power and exert influence granted by law or by God. Besides, repentance is important and necessary for people who were sinful, especially those who committed sins like murders. The same incident could be observed in Hamlet as well. Hamlet is planned for the play *Mousetrap* where the players could easily disclose the fact of his father's death, observing the fear and anger in his uncle's facial expression. On the way to meet his mother, Hamlet found Claudius praying, however, he decided to choose another proper chance to take revenge that brought a lot of criticism for his delay to take action.

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't.

(*Hamlet*.3.3. 89-93)¹

¹ Hamlet edited by Philip Edwards is an authorized version, which is convenient to make the quotations marked with accurate numbers of lines.

If the two presuppositions mentioned above are not reasonable, there must be other vital things catching the critics' attention and providing methodological guidelines for discussion in this field. It seems to be a hard nut, while one will find some clues when taking a brief view of the history of Shakespearean Criticism. From Ben Jonson to Goethe, from Coleridge to T. S. Eliot, their arguments varied from each other radically at the first sight. While examining their works carefully, we would come up with one thing in common. Aristotle's perception about character and action in *Poetics*² is taken as the starting point and basic guideline.

Tragedy is the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these--thought and character--are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on actions again all success or failure depends. (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, p.367)

However, the critics' disputes regarding which one is more responsible for the tragedy, action or character, might have mapped their perspectives towards Shakespeare accordingly. The Neo-classical critics in Britain highlighted Shakespeare's talents and his overall achievements, while Romantic critics didn't agree with Aristotle that character is second to action in tragedy that Goethe made a bold step in taking Hamlet as the subject and try to uncover the mysterious power leading to the plot to the end. From then on, academic remarks came to an agreement that Hamlet's melancholy was the key factor to make his action so postponed, while as for why Hamlet became melancholy, they varied a lot. Therefore, I would make an attempt to discover some links between Hamlet's melancholy and his delay to take action from the perspective of the Humour Theory that was originated in Ancient Greek, being improved in Roman and widely spread in Renaissance period.

2. THE FOUR HUMOUR THEORY: A COSMOLOGICAL CORRESPONDENCE TO CHARACTER FORMATION

In the fifth century B. C. E. Empedocles³ was inspired by Parmenides's principle that "Matter is without beginning

² See *Aesthetic of Aristotle* (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, pp.364-365), Aristotle takes six elements are parts of tragedy: Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song. Hence, the Plot is the imitation of the action: for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents. By Character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents. Thought is required wherever a statement is proved, or, it may be, a general truth enunciated.

³ Empedocles is considered the last Greek philosopher to write in verse and the surviving fragments of his teaching are from two poems, *Purifications* and *On Nature*.

and without end and it is indestructible”, and held that earth, air, fire and water were fundamental and eternal kinds of matter or elements, called “the roots of all” in *On Nature*.⁴ He believed that love and hate were the mighty forces to mingle the elements together.

the objects came into being by the mingling of elements through the active, physical and material forces, Love and Hate, or Harmony and Discord. Love or Attraction bringing the particles of the four elements together and building up, Strife or Hate separating the particles and causing the cessation of the being of objects. (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, pp.62)

However, Plato assumed that “the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) could not be spoken of as substances, for they slip away and do not wait to be described as ‘that’ or ‘this’ or by any phrase that exhibits them as having permanent being.” (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, p.249) In his opinion, they should be termed as qualities that made their appearance in certain place. Therefore, in *Laws*, Plato made further explanation about things that became perceptible to sense should be constructed with three dimensional shapes and illustrated the qualities of four elements with geometric figures:

the solids are then constructed, the cube being assigned to earth (as the most immobile or hard to move), the pyramid to fire (as the most mobile, having “the sharpest cutting edges and the sharpest points in every direction), the octahedron to air, and the icosahedron to water. (Ibid., p.250)

Plato’s writing *Timaeus* is intended to exhibit the organized Cosmos as the work of intelligence and to show that man partakes of the intelligible and the sensible world. And in Greek Neo-Platonic, schema of seeing the cosmos in the same patterns was reproduced from the largest scale (macrocosm) all the way down to the smallest scale (microcosm). Since the primary elements were ascribed such qualities: cold was to air, heat to fire, moist to water, and dry to earth. These qualities established a link in extending the theory of elements to understand the composition of man. Empirically, the corresponding substances of the human body could not be directly considered in terms of air, earth, water and fire. In the treatise *Of the Nature of Man*, Hippocrates⁵ argued that four fluids were the fundamental building blocks of the body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, which were taken as manifestations of the four primary elements, or the qualities of the elements. Having

⁴ There are about 450 lines of his poem *On Nature* extant, including 70 lines which have been reconstructed from some papyrus scraps known as the *Strasbourg Papyrus*. It was this poem which outlined his philosophical system. In it, Empedocles explains not only the nature and history of the universe, including his theory of the four classical elements, but he describes theories on causation, perception, and thought, as well as explanations of terrestrial phenomena and biological processes.

⁵ Hippocrates is widely considered to be the “Father of Medicine”. His contributions revolutionized the practice of medicine; but after his death the advancement stalled.

followed Empedocles’ principle, an unstable combination of elements affected the physical world, or macrocosm, Hippocrates assumed that an unstable combination of humours would affect the human body which took as a microcosm that reflected the universe as a whole. Furthermore, in the treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, he made a tentative exploration about the constitution of the body and the character of the soul in the term *êthos*⁶, which is the common Greek word to speak about people’s nature or character (Bos, 2009, p.30). However, *êthos* cannot simply be regarded as the equivalent of the translated word ‘character’ shaped by the Enlightenment and Romanticism, which is generally considered the hidden inner core of a unique individual, while for the Greeks, *êthos* primarily referred to the disposition of a type that can be recognized in externally visible signs (Ibid., p.35). How to bridge the gap between external *êthos* and inner character is critical for the application of the Humour Theory to understand human nature. Fortunately, in the Second Century, Roman physician, Galen expanded the ideas of Hippocrates and incorporated psychological behavior into the Humour Theory. According to Galen, the composition of humours in human body will influence one’s character on the grounds that “an individual’s temperament, produced by the excess or deficiency of one or two of the humours, exercises a decisive influence on his or her passionate condition” (Hoeniger, 1992, p.63).

If we take the development of the Humour Theory into account, three key points are highlighted as followings: (i) The Humour Theory has a profound cosmological foundation based on the presupposition that the body constitution is correspondent to the primary elements that determine the makeup and destruction of the universe. And the features of four humours are related to the qualities of the four elements in a dual combination. Blood is warm and wet like air, yellow bile is hot and dry like fire; black bile is cold and dry like earth; phlegm is cold and wet like water. The principle, Love as the mighty force uniting four elements to form the universe and Hate making them separate and damage the universe, is also true for happiness and sorrow of human life, especially demonstrated by agents in literary works. (ii) The human mind should be incorporated into the body as Aristotle put it, “The body, then, must be as matter to the soul, while the soul is as form or act to the body.” (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, p.327) Moreover, what Aristotle means by “the soul is thus the realization of the body and inseparable from it” is completely conformed to the Galen’s perception that psychological characteristics were expressions of bodily processes and as such they were influenced by the particular blend or balance of the four humours (Stelmack

⁶ The Greek term that is used in *Airs, Waters, Places* to denote mental dispositions is *êthos*. This term, which originally meant ‘dwelling place’ and later came to denote habits and customs, is the common Greek word to speak about people’s nature or character.

& Stalikas, 1991, p.259). (iii) The four temperament categories should be taken as a dynamic, complicated and descriptive system that varies according to change of the humours and the movements of the universe, identified according to the metaphorical conception and terms to construct a round character or a flat character illustrated in E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*.

Consequently, we can interpret the characters in Shakespeare's works through the point of combination astrology⁷ with the Humour Theory, which was widely applied and flourished in medical and astrological areas during the medieval era in European countries. Most of Medieval writers might have been well-equipped with the cosmological approach, for instance, in Dantes' *Divine Comedy*, astrological symbolism with references to the planetary architecture of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, and Chaucer was versified in astrology when he created *the Canterbury Tales*. In fact, Shakespeare is an expert in this field constructing characters shaped by influences of astrology and Four Humours. Memorable humorous characters, like the choleric Hotspur and the sanguine Prince Hal, often help to accentuate the humour of the principle players. And round characters, such as Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth, could not be summarized in a single sentence or a simple image, for they were coloured with very confusing and conflicting traits only being perceived through the scene they had gone through. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the round characters like Hamlet, a thorough analysis should be made of the relationship between the nature of humours and the system of characterization, as well their influence on moral considerations.

3. FOUR HUMOURS AND SHAKESPEARE'S APPROACH TO HAMLET'S MELANCHOLY

In *Opera Otimia*, Galen made a definition of the character of the melancholic temperament that emotional behaviors as fear, depression, discontent and hate were related to black humour and external darkness and "all people call this affliction now melancholies indicating by this term that the (black) humour is etiologically responsible (Siegel, 1973, p.195). Galen's work was translated into English by Nicholas Culpeper, a student in "physick and astrologie", who explicitly presented Galen's theory to English readers about the influence of four elements on the human body and mind. He claimed that the earth was melancholy.

An Element is a Body pure, simple, unmixed, from which all Natural things have their Original, They are held to be in number four, Fire, Air, Water, Earth; their Operations are Active as heat and cold, and passive as dryness and moisture. Complexions

⁷ In *A Brief History of Ancient Astrology*, Roger Beck introduces Ptolemy's achievements about the Remits of Astronomy and Astrology. They are two different approaches to celestial phenomena, an astronomical approach and an astrological approach.

are the Operations of these Elements upon Mans body, as when the Fire prevails, the body is Choleric, when the Air he is Sanguine, when the Water he is Phlegmatic, when the Earth he is Melancholy. (Stelmack, & Stalikas, 1991, p.261)

In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton also emphasized the traits of melancholic people as "irresolution, inconstancy, and vanity of mind" and that "their fear, torture, care, jealousy, suspicion, etc., continues, and they cannot be relieved." However, Wundt's classification of temperaments was based on two concepts, strength of emotions and changeability, rather than feelings and activity, he thought the melancholic was strong and disposed of slow change.

The choleric and melancholic are inclined to strong emotions; the sanguine and phlegmatic to weak emotions. The sanguine and choleric are disposed to rapid change; the melancholic and phlegmatic to slow change. (Wundt, 1886, p.391)

According to the above mentioned attitudes about melancholy and humours, the melancholic character might be featured like this: it is some kind of strong emotion dominating by the humour of black bile, which is slow to change with quality of heavy element earth characterized by coldness and dryness, especially when people is compressed by depression in his mature age in autumn. Therefore, within the framework of the Humour Theory, classification of characters in Shakespeare's works fall into two categories distinguished by E. M. Forster as the flat character and the round character. Comparing with the Countess in *Evan Harrington*, who is easy to recognized by the reader's whenever she comes in with their emotional eyes, Forster remarks that it's hard to sum up Becky that we remember her only in connection with the great scenes through which she passed and as modified by those scenes because she waxes and wanes and has facets like a human being (Forster, 1927, pp.68-69). In his opinion, successful model of round character, like Becky, is the right person that has the quality fitting to perform tragically for any length of time and can move us to any feelings (Ibid., p.73). Following Forster's advice whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way, let's have a look at what Hamlet has gone through in the process to take revenge, making a judgment about whether he is a round or a flat character.

First, Hamlet was distracted and overwhelmed by the black color, being plunged into an entire desperate hell when his father died unexpectedly and his beloved mother Gertrude promptly remarried to his uncle Claudius. Gertrude was bothered by his dark disposition, and said "Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off" and "do not seek for thy noble father in the dust," because "tis common; all that lives must die" (*Hamlet*.1.2. 68-71). But Hamlet rebuked when she said "Take it easy as every one must die, Passing through nature to eternity" is doomed, for his inner mind was exposed to more severe grief than his external appearance assumed. All the "inky cloak", "customary suits of solemn black", "the windy suspiration

of forced breath”, as well as “the fruitful river in the eye” could be taken as action played to every one, but his true sorrow and hate are like the trappings and the suits of woe. The harmony in Hamlet’s mind is broken that his original “sweet and commendable nature” is converted into black humour that made him choked and suffocated. Furthermore, Ophelia’s words also proved the change of his nature when she was sent as a spy to Hamlet. She was frustrated about Hamlet’s transformation in nature from inside to outside for he commanded her to nunnery and cursed her ignorance and beauty. In Ophelia’s memory, Hamlet was in a perfect body constitution with courtier’s eye, soldier’s sword, and scholar’s tongue, being observed as the mould of fashion and form in the fair state of rose, equipped with the noble mind and sovereign reason plus vows with the honey from music. Now he was “quite, quite down”, “Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh”, and his unmatched form and feature was broken with ecstasy. (*Hamlet*. 3.1.144-154) She was shocked that Hamlet had lost his unmatched balance in his mind and physical body as a noble prince, a learned young man and a courageous soldier in his prime time that his sweet nature and music had degenerated into distracted noises. To some extent, Ophelia’s judgment is partial for Hamlet merely pretended to be mad, while her concern about Hamlet’s change reminds that the mind and the body should work together to play the universal music in tune harmoniously, once one is broken, the other would follow the case correspondently.

However, the news about the coming of his father’s ghost seems to resume his courage again. As the ghost beckoned Hamlet to go with him, Hamlet followed his instruction firmly although his friends prevented him and warned dangerous environment would influence his mood when night approaching, the black bile would increase greatly which would make him lose reason and become mad.

What if it tempt you toward the flood my lord,
Or to be dreadful summit of the cliff that
Beetles over its base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form.

(*Hamlet*.1. 4. 69-73)

Hamlet exclaimed the blood frozen because fate’s cry “makes each petty arture in his body as hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve.” Expecting “with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love” he would take a quick step to sweep his revenge at the stories about murdering. Without hesitation, he made his plan to take revenge, setting out to resume “the time out of joint, to set it right” as his responsibility. From then on, he managed to resume the “courtier’s eye, soldier’s sword, and scholar’s tongue” with courage and reason in a noble mind, weighting vengeance over the moral conventions in Aristotle’s words,

courage is not boldness alone, nor is it cool foresight alone, but the synthesis of both—this character of synthesis preventing courage from degenerating into the daring of the foolhardy man

on the one hand or the prudence of the coward on the other hand. (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, p.337)

Frankly, Hamlet’s plan to revenge is not taken under external physical compulsion or in ignorance, just from his own choice and free. Aristotle explained ignorance as the situation that “while a man who acts in rage or under the influence of drink may be said to act in ignorance.” (Ibid., p.338) On the contrary, Laertes took revenge under ignorance after he came back from Paris in a rash and misused by King Claudius, ending up with his death in the trap to kill Hamlet and subsequently regretting his accomplice with the vicious King.

Hamlet’s cruel attitude towards woman should be taken seriously related to the change of his character resulted from imbalance of his humours. His indifference and cruelty to his mother and Ophelia happened during the process when he investigated the truth of his father’s death and pretended to be mad, both women were not in a sensible way to perceive the evil around them. His mother was cheated and whored by his uncle and Ophelia was misused by his father as a spy to test Hamlet. Hamlet’s words “Woman, your name is frailty.” can be regarded to indicate woman is the gender is easily hurt by male including himself.

It goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air and the fire all transferred into the way we hold the (pestilent and foul) congregation of vapors. (*Hamlet*. 2.2.280-286)

Being compressed with depression in his mind, Hamlet treated the beloved women in a merciless way that he was criticized for not making pains to fight against the king but hurting the innocent, obedient and charming women. For Hamlet, the world is in a completely different situation. The four elements of the world have lost their quality and changed into a strange thing. The change of temperament (the microcosms) would distort the image of the macrocosms, as well as the man living within it as Hamlet perceived in sensitive and accurate mind.

Hamlet’s passion was inspired by the Prince of Norway, who is handsome and capable, planning to take revenge after his father’s death to take back the land in the reign of Demark. Knowing about the plan he would be killed when he got England, Hamlet decided to take his father’s seal and changed the letter and made the two fellows disappeared. His passion is also violently explosion when he witnessed Ophelia’s funeral in her grave and disclosed the truth of killing Laertes father as he was a victim of madness.

Hamlet is cool when he got ready to attend the duel with Laertes who was burning like a flame with hate towards Hamlet for his father’s death and his sister insanity. Laertes claimed to take revenge under great impulsions.

O heat dry up my brains, tears seven times salt burns

out the sense and virtue of mine eye! By heaven, thy madness shall be paid with weight till our scale turns the beam. (*Hamlet*. 4.7.175-191)

And the death of his sister made him burning like fire and out of the control, Laertes would fight for his fame not the shame and tempted by the vicious king.

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. But yet
It is our trick; Nature her custom holds,
Let shame say what it will. When these are gone,
The woman will be out. Adieu my lord,
I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze,
But that this folly douts it.

(*Hamlet*. 4.7.185-191)

However, Shakespeare spends a lot of efforts to describe the grave-digging, the body and the clay and the dust and the use of the dust of the body. When the news came to him about duel, he has got a clear understanding about the death of somebody and nobody.

Alexander died, Alexander was buried. Alexander returned to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel. (*Hamlet*.5.1.176-179)

Hamlet's consideration of death and dust is also an implication of the circular of the world. God made man with the dust and the woman with the rib of the man. Now the man became into the dust and the woman would follow his suit. It is neither fearful nor avoidable for somebody and nobody, or for a woman with Christian ceremony or without the pray from the priest in the funeral ceremony. Here he resumes his mood and gives up his mask and ready to face the reality even it is dangerous, even he refuses his friend Horatio's suggestion to escape and give up. He declares as a soldier not a coward.

Not a whit, we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of 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. (*Hamlet*.5.2.191-196)

At this time, he is really like a hero to fight for his fame. When he spoke of these words, he was neither angry nor depressed, but a man inspired with courage and reason. When Hamlet was dying in the fight by Laertes' poisoned sword, he asked Horatio finish two tasks: (i)revealing the truth in public to avoid further misunderstanding, (ii)returning the land back to the Prince of Norway that was taken by Hamlet's father by an agreement and a fight. In the end, Hamlet was applauded with the rite of war for a hero's funeral.

the soldier's music and the rite of war
Speak loudly for him
Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss.
Go bid the soldiers shoot.

(*Hamlet*.5.2.378-383)

Till now, it takes a long time for Hamlet to come to his rescue from frustration in mind and established into a man who could fight for justice and ignore the coming of death. His delay to take action against his father's death, in fact, is a process of growth in nature to shift from the intuitive emotion to the rational action. Assuming that Shakespeare advocates taking revenge, he would not let Laertes die with his own treachery and beg Hamlet's pardon. Laertes's repentance is the most appropriate way for those who take revenge in a rash. What Shakespeare intended to do is not to build up an aggressive character that is foolishly keen to take revenge but a character who is considerate of the consequences of his action. As Solomon was rewarded with treasure and power granted by God when he only asked for wisdom and understanding, Hamlet was also rewarded a fame and honor as a soldier instead of cowardice.

4. HAMLET'S DELAY: FOR WHAT ASPECTS OF CHARACTER SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE?

If all the people around Hamlet have done something wrong and his father's death should be compensated by taking revenge, whether can we say Hamlet's revenge is a moral process or not? I make a try to discuss it according to the five--point analysis of the moral process by Aristotle:

(i) The Agent desires an end. (ii)The agent deliberates, seeing that B is the means to A (the end to be obtained), C the means to B, and so on, until (iii) he perceives that some particular means near to the end or remote from it, as the case may be, is something that can be done here and now. (iv) The agent chooses this means that presents itself to him as practical, and (v) Does the act in question. (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, p.339)

Hamlet has a clear idea about the nature of his action when talking with Horatio concerning virtue and vice in terms of humours in one's body. There are really some vicious things in one's nature which would overgrow by some complexions and lose the forts of reason and one person would be judged by his small fault overlooking his infinite virtues.

So, oft it chanceth in particular men,
That for some vicious more of nature in them,
As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature can not choose his origin,
By their overgrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason.
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausible manners---that these men,
Carrying I say the stamp of one defect,
Being nature's livery or fortune's star,
His virtues else be they as pure as grace,

As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault.”

(*Hamlet*. 1.4.23-35)

Hamlet concept of virtue is similar to Aristotle's relative definition of virtue, "virtue is taken as a mean and can not be determined by mathematical rules and be equivalent to an exaltation of mediocrity in the moral life depends on the feeling or action in question. (as Qtd. in Copleston, 1993, p.337) The revenge in question is not taken in a rush under impulsion, which was well-planned and gone with the help of Hamlet's friends and the players, as well as the providence from the change of macrocosms. It can be roughly divided into two stages.

In the former stage, he was established as an irritated, confused, frustrated and cruel image with somehow well-organized mind, firmness, sensitivity and promptness to take action and other virtues, which are not easily recognized under the control of overwhelming humour of black bile. He pretended to be mad and took his beloved Ophelia as the subject, using the players sent by the King's spies to relate his father's death and frighten Claudius while passing by Claudius, he pondered the right chance to kill him. However, without hesitation he changed the letter and got to the messengers done in England. He was so lucky to survive from the tempest and pirates, returning back to Denmark. During this period, he claimed to "drink hot blood", which is forbidden in the *Bible*. Therefore, Shakespeare used it metaphorically to say Hamlet was want of courage because his father's ghost had frozen his blood that he was lack of quality of the humour of blood. And Hamlet's attitude to the death of Polonius made his mother think he was mad and should "Upon the heat and flame of the distemper sprinkle cool patience". In fact, at that moment, Hamlet was not burning with the humour of yellow bile but only compressed by black bile and need courage. He firmly told his mother: "

Don't look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects. Then what I have to do
Will want true colour: tears perchance for blood.

(*Hamlet*, 3.4.126-129)

The second stage to take revenge is distinguished with reason, passion, consideration and courage, without hesitation and coldness and cruelty. He pondered about the afterlife of one's death and expressed his passionate love for Ophelia in public, revealing the fact he killed Polonius, which did not earn pardon from Laertes but merely increase his anger toward Hamlet. Hate made Laertes like a burning flame that consumed him in the end. All these things did not upset Hamlet again but provide chance to display his tolerance, courage and wisdom, and earning him respect, honor and fame after his death.

Combined the Humour Theory with Aristotle's

principle of moral process mentioned above, the process of Hamlet's revenge is a moral one dominated by virtuous traits that made a man to go through great scenes and be modified among them. From Hamlet's character, we can imagine how Shakespeare employed the cosmological approach and the Humour Theory to foreground Hamlet's melancholy in a variety of perspectives, which reflect the possible reasons that will influence his dynamic character. It is not his weakness but his virtues to be responsible for his delay.

CONCLUSION

In Shakespeare's works, the cosmological approach is well combined with astrology to reveal the process of human mind from the perspective of body constitution. The change of macrocosms and microcosm is correspondent to each other, the quantities of humours in the body will alter with environments, which will influence the human character to a great extent. The Humour Theory originated in Greek-Roman sheds light on the understanding of Characters in *Hamlet* and the process of hamlet's action in taking revenge. From the perspective of the Humour Theory, we can notice that Hamlet is a complicated round character like Sir John Falstaff that is not easily recognized by one sentence and one behavior. We should perceive one's character with the scenes that he has gone through as a dynamic system because one humoral type merely indicated the dominating part of humour, but not the overall components of human fluids. People tend to link the negative qualities such as slowness, fear, hesitation and depression with melancholy at the vital points for Hamlet's delay. However, this is not enough to get an overall understanding of Hamlet's virtues like courage, responsibility and sensibility, which are the right traits to excuse his delay. Naturally, we can take Hamlet's delay as kind of maturity for a man who could bear responsibility and relieve himself from the complete catharsis and take rational action to "set the time right when it was out of joint" as Hamlet declared.

REFERENCES

- Beck, R. (2007). *A brief history of ancient astrology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Bloom, H. (1998). *Shakespeare: The invention of the human*. New York: Riverhead.
- Bos, J. (2009). The rise and decline of character: Humoral psychology in ancient and early modern medical theory. *History of Human Science*, 22(3), 29-50.
- Bradbrook, M. C. (1979). *Shakespeare and Elizabethan poetry*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Bradley, A. C. (1955). *Shakespearean tragedy*. New York: Meridan.
- Bundy, M. W. (1929). Elizabethan psychology and Shakespeare's plays. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*,

- 28(3), 438-439.
- Copleston, F. C. (1993). *A history of philosophy (Vol I)*. Great Britain: Continuum.
- Fahey, C. J. (2008). *Altogether governed by humours: The four ancient temperaments in Shakespeare*. MA. Alachua: University of South Florida.
- Forster, E. M. (1927). *Aspects of the novel*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, F. E. (1963). *Shakespeare and his critics*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Hazlitt, W. (1906). *Characters of Shakespeare's plays*. London: J.M.Dent & Co.
- Hippocrates. (1849). *On Airs, Waters, and Places*. In F. Adams (Trans.). London: The Sydenham Society.
- Hoeniger, F. D. (1992). The medical mind of Shakespeare. *Renaissance and Reformation New Series*, 16(4), 75-77.
- Morgann, M. (1970). *An essay on the dramatic character of Sir John Falstaff*. New York: AMS Press.
- Morgann, M. (1972). *Shakespearean criticism*. In D. A. Fineman (Ed., trans.). Oxford: Clarendon.
- Shakespeare, W. (2003). *Hamlet, prince of denmark*. In P. Edwards (Ed.). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Shakespeare, W. (2003). *Romeo and Juliet*. In G. B. Evans (Ed.). London: Cambridge University Press.
- Shaw, A. B. (2002). *Depressive illness delayed Hamlet's revenge*. *Medical Humanities*, 28(2), 92-96.
- Siegel, R. E. (1973). *Galen on psychology, psychopathology and function and diseases of the nervous system*. Basel: S. Karger.
- Spencer, T. (2010). *Shakespeare and the nature of man*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Stelmack, R. M., & Stalikas, A. (1991). Galen and the humour theory of temperament. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 12(3), 255-263.
- Wundt, W. M. (2010). *Ethics: The facts of the moral life*. In E. B. Titchener (Trans.). Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.