Hamlet (Vol. 44) - Psychoanalytic Interpretations

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PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATIONS

H. R. Coursen (essay date 1982)

SOURCE: "'Who's There?': Hamlet," in *The Compensatory Psyche: A Jungian Approach to Shakespeare,* University Press of America, 1986, pp. 63-99.

[*In the following essay, originally presented in 1982, Coursen argues that a Jungian analysis of Hamlet clarifies some of the critical problems of traditional Freudian analysis. Coursen suggests that Hamlet's oedipal issues are themselves symptoms of "a deeper disturbance within Hamlet's psyche, that is, his inability to contact his feminine soul' or anima."*]

I

Tragic man rejects the compensatory energy of the psyche. In tragedy *hamartia* can often be defined as the hero's alienation from the *anima,* or the feminine principle within him. Iago flatters Othello's self-conception, or persona, into alienation from a Desdemona who had seen "Othello's visage in his mind" (I.iii.255), not just in his "occupation" (III.iii.362). Lear discovers the feminine in him, or it discovers him after his passionate efforts to keep "this mother" from his "heart" (II.iv.55) have obliterated his former consciousness. He awakens to the loving gaze of his "child, Cordelia" (IV.vii.72). Macbeth's nature, "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (I.v. 17) is discarded for a "mind . . . full of scorpions" (III.ii.39). Hamlet, however, is the preeminent example of the rejection of the feminine.

All *Hamlet* criticism must be "psychological criticism," even when it claims to be anything but. The play is uniquely framed to elicit from its auditors a subjective response. No matter how "objective" a critic may try to be, he must, in dealing with *Hamlet,* answer the question with which the play opens: "Who's there?" (I.i.l). Any claim to critical objectivity signals an inevitable surrender to unperceived subjectivity. The critic invariably stands and unfolds himself even as he believes that he is illuminating that universe of shadows that is Hamlet character and *Hamlet* play.

The greatest critics, I believe, admit their subjective stance and do not claim to tell us "what *Hamlet* means," but "what *Hamlet* means to me." It follows then, that the quality of the critique is not a function of any particular critical approach but of the human qualities of the critic himself.

We would not normally term Dr. Samuel Johnson a "psychological critic." Johnson, however, had the courage—not always shared by his 18th century colleagues—to admit that the plays moved him profoundly. His reaction to the death of Cordelia, for example, must be attributed to more than that the ending of *King Lear* may have violated Johnson's critical criteria:

> I might relate that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play 'till I undertook to revise them as editor.[1]

These words emerge, of course, during the almost century-and-a-half that Tate's happier version of *King Lear* was performed exclusively.

Johnson's comments on *Hamlet* suggest that he looks upon the character as somehow "real," or, at least, that Hamlet conforms to Johnson's sense of "nature." "I wish," Johnson says, "*Hamlet* had made some other defence [to Laertes, before the duel]; it is unsuitable to the character of a good or brave man, to shelter himself in falsehood."[2] Placed against Dr. Johnson's standard of "suitability," Hamlet disturbs the critic. In objecting to the psychology Shakespeare attributes to Hamlet, Johnson reveals his own psychology, one predicated on solid 18th century norms of decorum and stereotypic humanity.

Johnson could have read neither Thomas Erskine's defense of James Hadfield (26 June, 1800)—perhaps the first defense by reason of insanity—nor Darrow's defense of Loeb and Leopold, both of which Shakespeare anticipates in Hamlet's apology to Laertes. Hamlet, of course, is his own attorney. Later experience seems suddenly to illuminate what Shakespeare already knew. And, although Johnson's moral criteria are not our own, he turns out to be right. He can wish for another defense, but Shakespeare gives Hamlet the only apology he *can* make for the sudden, impulsive, and destructive actions of someone who is and is not Hamlet:

> Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet.
> If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
> And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
> Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.
> Who does it then? His madness. If t be so,
> Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd,
> His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

(V.ii.230-237).

Since I do not believe that Hamlet *is* ever mad, except "north-north-west" (II.ii.278). I believe that he does fabricate an elegant falsehood here, one that does not square with anyone's sense of goodness or bravery. That his repressed feeling level leaps past his rational persona—as it does so often in this play—and incites actions that puzzle Hamlet, making of him a Hamlet who does not square with his own sense of his personality, can only be termed, at best, "temporary insanity." The arm that struggled to put the sword back on its hanger as Claudius knelt at apparent prayer leaped out, almost by its own volition, to impale Polonius. But Hamlet "thought" it might be the king. Was he insane, or just mistaken? His mistake, however motivated by a sudden flash of feeling, becomes, later, "His madness." But, by then, before the full court, Hamlet cannot say to Laertes, "I thought your father was King Claudius."

We would agree, I believe, that Coleridge is a psychological critic, perhaps the first to whom the term can be applied, in that Coleridge is conscious of the admixture of his own personality that enters into his response. The results are brilliant *and* eccentric, profound *and* idiosyncratic, as great *Hamlet* criticism must be, for a reason Coleridge arrives at in discussing the Prince:

> Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will or opportunity, but every incident sets him thinking; and it is curious and at the same time strictly natural that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled at last by mere accident to effect his object. I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so . . .[3]

All of us, perhaps, have a smack of Hamlet ourselves. We do not, however, see Hamlet as Coleridge did—

Ralph Fiennes as Hamlet in the Almeida Theatre's 1995 production of Hamlet.

Hamlet as ineffective intellectual, "Hamlet as Coleridge"—or as the romantic Hamlet of Henry Irving, laying the back of his hand against his brow as he ponders the enormities of Elsinore, or as the slender delicate vase in which an oak tree is planted, as in Goethe's brilliant metaphor.[4]

If we extend Coleridge's insight, however, we may discover a generalization that incorporates it. Here is one possibility, presented by Bradley Pearson, the protagonist of Iris Murdoch's *The Black Prince:* "Shakespeare [in *Hamlet*] makes the crisis of his own identity into the very central stuff of his art. He transmutes his private obsessions into a rhetoric so public that it can be mumbled by any child . . . Shakespeare cries out in agony, he writhes, he dances, he laughs, he shrieks, and he makes us laugh and shriek ourselves out of hell."[5] Even if Pearson incorporates a rather radical interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis and the fallacy of reading back to an author's creative process, he accounts for the continuum of energy that gets exchanged between Shakespeare's creation and our own psychology of perception. The case for that continuum is made brilliantly in Norman Holland's book, *Shakespeare* and *Psychoanalysis.* Holland restricts his thesis to Freudian concepts of psychic energy by suggesting that a play like *Hamlet* moves us to respond by recapitulating our own infantile fears and fantasies. It may do that, of course, but it does much more than that, eliciting, as Coleridge proves, our response to who we think we are as adults as well. *Hamlet* may be, as T.S. Eliot says, "the Mona Lisa of Literature,"[6] but *Hamlet* is a play, an action that imitates action, not a painting. As Bradley Pearson says, "Being is acting. We are tissues and tissues of different *personae,* and yet we are nothing at all."[7]

The fiction that is *Hamlet,* then, reveals whatever "reality" inheres in us and, in turn, exposes the fictional premises of that perceived reality, particularly if we, like Coleridge, respond to Hamlet from the level of our own mere persona. Pursued to its conclusion, Pearson's thesis that being is acting and acting being would seem to equate not to a set of existential premises but to a cultural and personal nihilism. *Hamlet* the play will not support that conclusion, even though nihilism is one dimension that Hamlet and the play surrounding him explore. We might pursue Pearson's suggestion further to suggest that Hamlet's belief that "things" only "rank and gross possess" his "unweeded garden" (I.ii. 135-136) signals a "mid-life crisis," that terrible moment of pause, often activated by catastrophic personal emergencies, when psychic content, dormant for a lifetime, explodes within us with bewildering force. Suffice it that the principals of this play had reached Elizabethan mid-life by 1601: Hamlet is 30. Richard Burbage, playing Hamlet, is 34. And William Shakespeare is 37.

The 19th century critic who tended to read the plays back to the psyche of their creator was, of course, Edward Dowden. His work has been undervalued because of his simplistic categorization of Shakespeare's "moods" and his assignment of the plays to those moods. But here is Dowden's remarkable description of Hamlet's behavior after the play-within-the-play: "Hamlet is forever walking over the ice; his power of self-control is never quite to be trusted. The success of his device for ascertaining the guilt of Claudius is followed by the same mood of wild excitement which followed his encounter with his father's spirit; again he seems incoherently, extravagantly gay; again his words are 'wild and whirling words.'"[8] Dowden's Hamlet is hardly Coleridge's, "who all the play seems reason itself." Dowden captures Hamlet's erratic nature, as does Derek Jacobi, who played the role recently both at the Old Vic and in the BBC-TV version: "Hamlet swings into sudden intensely traumatic states."[9] Interestingly, Jacobi does not include Hamlet's behavior after "Gonzago" in his catalogue of these traumatic states. At that moment in the play, Hamlet believes that he has won:

> "For if the king like not the comedy,
> Why then, belike, he likes it not, perdy."

(III.ii.291-292).

I shall suggest that Hamlet himself has dictated, only moments before, something other than comedy for himself, and for the play which bears his name.

It remained for perhaps the greatest of Shakespearean critics, A.C. Bradley, to provide a version of Hamlet's character that would account for its inconsistencies. Bradley's thesis, of course, is "melancholy," which Bradley says is "neither dejection, nor yet insanity."[10] Bradley rejects the inherited view that Hamlet's actions and inactions emerge from an unfortunate synthesis between the thesis of revenge and the antithesis of Hamlet's character, or, as Bradley states the case, that Hamlet is "sure he ought to obey the ghost: but in the depth of his nature, and unknown to himself, there is a moral repulsion to the deed." "We are meant in the play," Bradley asserts, "to assume that he *ought* to have obeyed the Ghost."[11] Perhaps we are, although I believe that Bradley's certainty is open to question. What do we mean by revenge? How could Hamlet have obeyed the Ghost and remained true to "the depth of his nature"? That, of course, depends upon what we take Hamlet's nature to be. To define that "nature" is perhaps impossible, since the character of Hamlet forces our own natures to participate in his. It may be, however, as J.C. Maxwell suggests, that *Hamlet* is an incomparable revenge play precisely because its brilliant and introspective central character does not raise the issue of revenge *per se* to the level of his conscious consideration.[12] Thus, a *basic* issue of the play remains an underlying—and unconscious—energy within Hamlet. I shall suggest, however, that Hamlet fails to coordinate his perceived mission with his own nature.[13] Tragedy is the result of this disjunction between outer and inner imperatives.

Bradley goes on to suggest how much his thesis of "melancholy" incorporates. It accounts for Hamlet's lethargy as well as for his sudden leaps of energy, for Hamlet's procrastination and, crucially, for his inability to understand why he delays. Thus does Bradley create a pre-Freudian unconsciousness in Hamlet, a level of his psyche unavailable to him. Hamlet's doubt about the Ghost, Bradley claims, "is no genuine doubt; it is an unconscious fiction, an excuse for his delay and its continuance."[14] Of Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius in the Prayer Scene, Bradley says, "That this again is an unconscious excuse for delay is now pretty generally agreed."[15] Bradley invokes consensus when it suits him, as we all do. But he is hardly consistent. "Although Hamlet's own account of his reasons for arranging the play-scene may be questioned," Bradley says, "it is impossible to suppose that, if his real design had been to provoke an open confession of guilt [from Claudius], he could have been unconscious of this design."[16] Since Hamlet expresses the possibility of open confession, even if imputing the possibility to a generic "guilty creature . . . sitting at a play," one could argue that, as he speaks the lines, he *is* conscious of the design Bradley denies to Hamlet's consciousness. Bradley is very selective about what Hamlet is conscious of and unconscious about, as perhaps, we all are. While neither

Bradley nor Bradley's Hamlet contemplate the possibility of Claudius's open confession, I suggest that Hamlet does do so. Suffice it for now that the confession does not occur.

I conclude this survey with a recent qualification of "character" criticism delivered by Phillip Goldstein. He will serve to introduce the Freudian approach to the character of Hamlet.

Goldstein argues, as Francis Fergusson, Michael Long, and Philip Brockbank have,[17] that psychological critics neglect the *public* reasons for Hamlet's inaction. By narrowing the play to the context of an inner psychic struggle, the psychological critics ignore the social and political realities that impinge upon Hamlet's potential range of action. Thus Coleridge, Goldstein says, "In his reduction of Hamlet's hesitation to an unwarranted need to think . . . neglects not only the complexities of the new ethics of revenge but also the dilemma of the new politics of absolute monarchy."[18]

I am not sure what Goldstein means by "new" in either instance. He does, however, extend Hamlet's psychological problems into the world of the play, discerning in the latter area some sources for Hamlet's "inner" problems:

> Hamlet's dilemmas transcend his peculiarities because these dilemmas include the large ideological conflict between the Elizabethan faith in the great chain of being and the court's bourgeoise subordination of reason to passion . . . [Hamlet's] recognition of the heavy requirements of rational action turns his analyzing into more than a weak withdrawal into a private world, and the disorder of the universe, the degradation of reason by bestial passion, turns his melancholy into more than a morbid sensitivity.[19]

Thus the Marxist critic places an isolated psychic structure into a context which, among other things, defines the nature of Hamlet's isolation. It could be argued, however, that even the Ghost, a figure of the "old order" and, presumably a refugee from Purgatory, is guilty of the subordination of reason to passion for which Goldstein indicts the court of Claudius. Goldstein seems guilty, as well, of placing a 19th century version of Hamlet against a society conceived by Hermann Hesse. Yet the "world of the play"—its conflicts and those factors over which even a crown prince has no control—do tend to be ignored by psychological critics, in one version of the "misreading" against which I. A. Richards warns.

As I have argued elsewhere,[20] Denmark would seem to have been torn away from the protective and positive powers of the supernature. Denmark cannot contact the outer mystery with any effective ritual. A regicide reigns. More than "the time" is out of joint, however basic time is as a palpable rhythm of the supernature. Hamlet's task is impossible, is it not?—to revenge and at the same time to restore Denmark to its former status—an edenic model akin to the England that Gaunt remembers in *Richard II.* The earlier play is also shadowed by a murder committed before the play begins, and Gaunt is trapped with "this England" (II.i.50) in an inexorable historical process which cannot be reversed. As Gaunt speaks, it is already too late. Hamlet, however, is involved in a tragic action. If he is a tragic hero, his is the decision—the *hamartia*—that determines his destiny and that of Denmark. If it is also too late for Hamlet as the play begins, then he becomes merely a victim of social, political, psychological, and cosmic context—not the hero on whose "choice depends/The safety and health of this whole state" (I.iii.20-21).

I agree with Goldstein that the Freudians tend to concentrate on the inner conflicts that render Hamlet incapable of killing Claudius, thus ignoring the titanic external issues that confront Hamlet. Such neglect of the play's "world" equates to thinking too precisely on a "psychic" event isolated in Hamlet's unknown infancy and excited into potency by events that have occurred shortly before the play begins. A more important question, however, may be—*should* Hamlet kill Claudius? The Ghost, after all, does not so demand, unless we equate his word "act" with "kill":

But howsomever thou pursues this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven . . .

(I.v.85-87)

The Freudians suggest that Hamlet's "mind" is already "tainted," and that the source of the contamination *is* his mother. If they are correct, Hamlet is trapped in a dilemma that all men face, caught in a psychic crossfire that can destroy the souls of the best of men. The Ghost's positive injunction *in re* Gertrude has already been cancelled by negative forces in Hamlet's psyche.

II

The classic of psychoanalytic criticism is, of course, Ernest Jones's *Hamlet and Oedipus.* Jones argues that Claudius has taken Hamlet's place with Gertrude, and that although Hamlet's incestuous desire is, obviously, unconscious, it blocks him from killing his *alter ego,* Claudius. Lucianus "nephew to the king" (III.ii.242), as Hamlet identifies him, can do so in "Gonzago," when "something like the murder of [Hamlet's] father" (II.ii.596) is conflated in Hamlet's psyche with his wish to kill *Claudius,* a point I shall develop more fully later. Lucianus, then, is *not* a "Claudius figure" but a psychic substitute for Hamlet's desire to kill his uncle. Hamlet interrupts "Gonzago" after the murder of the recumbent Duke, but before the "murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife" (III.ii.261-262)). The son's oedipal fantasy is fulfilled in the murder of Hamlet Sr.-Claudius, and Hamlet blocks his new rival, Lucianus-Claudius by stopping the further fantasy of play-within. As the Closet Scene makes clear, Hamlet would keep Claudius from Gertrude in "reality." The play-within-the-play, as Hamlet experiences it, involves a confusing meshing of identities. Hamlet, however, under the compulsion of the oedipal drive interrupts a play that never begins again. In identifying Lucianus as "nephew to the King" (III.ii.242). Hamlet identifies his current status. The play-within, after all has been about a Duke, and Claudius is *brother* to the king. It follows, from the Freudian perspective, that Hamlet himself would be the illicit lover of Gertrude-Baptista, His interruption of "Gonzago," then, signals the psychic pressure imposed by the incest taboo.

Jones argues that Hamlet can only kill Claudius once Gertrude is dead. At that point, Hamlet has no compunctions about going after Claudius with both rapier and chalice. It could be argued, of course, that Claudius has, at last, provided Hamlet with sufficient and public reasons for the King's "execution," and that Hamlet knows that he himself is doomed at that point. While he has ample knowledge already that Claudius would have him dispatched, and should therefore have more than a premonitory fear of the duel, Hamlet's response to Claudius before the duel is that of a renaissance prince with his sovereign, as Knight has pointed out. Strange behavior in view of the list of grievances Hamlet has presented to Horatio, which, for Hamlet, justifies his "quit [ting Claudius] with this arm" (V.ii.68), but behavior arguing some continuing "mental—or psychic—block" within Hamlet. The use of poison—a fate often reserved for lust, in Middleton, Tourneur, and elsewhere in Shakespeare—enforces the Freudian case. Father, Uncle, Mother, and Son die by a poison bubbling out of sexuality, real or fantasized. The son is the victim of an oedipus complex that blocks Hamlet from killing his *alter ego* uncle until the mother is dead. The case is compelling, and cannot be dismissed merely because, as Kenneth Muir says, "some critics . . . argue that as Freud's theories were not propounded until 300 years after Shakespeare began to write, it is absurd for us to interpret the play in the light of psychoanalysis."[21] The play's suggestion of an "oedipus complex," some 2100 years after Sophocles created his vivid version of the myth, may at least account for the fascination of male critics with the character of Hamlet, even those critics—perhaps *particularly* those critics—who reject the Freudian formulation vehemently. We can never neglect Shakespeare's "final cause"—our continuing response to his art.

"Hamlet," Jones argues, "is . . . in a dilemma between on the one hand allowing his natural detestation of his uncle to have free play, a consummation which would stir still further his own horrible wishes, and on the

other hand, ignoring the imperative call for the vengeance that his obvious duty demands. His own 'evil' prevents him from completely denouncing his uncle's, and in continuing to 'repress' the former [his incestuous desires], he must strive to ignore, to condone, and if possible even to forget the latter [that is, Claudius's usurpation of Hamlet's place with Gertrude]; *his moral fate is bound up with his uncle's for good or ill.* In reality his uncle incorporates the deepest and most buried part of his personality, so that he cannot kill him without killing himself (Jones's *ital.*)[22] While I find Jones's unquestioning acceptance of Hamlet's "obvious duty" suspect, this argument is compelling. Hamlet could, it seems, kill Claudius if not *facing* a mirror held up to Hamlet's inner nature, and given the impulse of a recently frustrated rapier. The man behind the arras, however, turns out to be Polonius.

We might argue against Jones that Hamlet—except before the duel—does not do a very good job of ignoring, condoning, or forgetting Claudius's occupation of Hamlet's motherland—hardly "a little patch of ground" (IV.iv.18) in the psychic sense. The Freud-Jones thesis, however, is seductive. It explains motivation that seems unarticulated in the play, and action or inaction that seems unmotivated. Certainly Hamlet and Claudius—"mighty opposites" (V.ii.62) as Hamlet recognizes—are bound together in an inextricable fatality. The psychic linkage reaches its climax in "Gonzago," as I shall suggest, a play to which Hamlet responds far more vividly than does Claudius. Certainly Hamlet does swell with disgust upon his mother's matron-boned sexuality, perhaps even projecting his own unconscious wishes into his hissing "to post/With such dexterity to incestuous sheets" (I.ii. 156-157). Hamlet extrapolates her "frailty" (I.ii. 146) to include all women. He berates himself for his own "unpregnant" response to what Jones calls and Hamlet seems consciously to see as "his obvious duty." Hamlet's incapacity, as he views it, equates to the activity of the basest of women. He "Must, like a whore, unpack [his] heart with words,/ And fall a-cursing like a very drab; a stallion" (II.ii.587-588). He compensates for his perceived failure with torrents of self-accusation in which his own frailty must be equated to the "hire and salary" (III.iii.79) of female prostitution.

Against the Freud-Jones theory, however, other Freudians launch objections. Here we begin, perhaps, to discern the *reductio-ad-absurdum* of "method" in the hands of lesser practitioners. Avi Erlich, in *Hamlet's Absent Father,* calls Freud's "hunch" about Hamlet "misleading."[23] Erlich isolates the problem in what could be termed a sector of the oedipal dilemma, in Hamlet's difficulty in dealing with his *pater abscondus.* "Perhaps," says Erlich, "Shakespeare disguised a fantasy of an infantile son witnessing his father's castration at night by having an adult son encounter a victimized nocturnal ghost of his father."[24] Perhaps. For me, the play deals in sufficient depth with the problems of appearance versus reality, even if that depth entices others to seek yet a deeper level. Suffice it that it follows, as Erlich argues, "that if Hamlet needs to weaken himself, make himself antic, wish himself away, in order to prove his father strong, he is unfortunately going to deprive himself of just the strength he needs his father to model for him." "Thus," says Erlich, "one reason for Hamlet's not being strong enough to kill Claudius is . . . that his father, his model and namesake, was also not strong enough to kill him."[25]

This view projects Hamlet into a self-destructive search for a male role-model for the action Hamlet believes he should perform. And, since Hamlet cannot find positive "maleness" within himself, but discovers, instead, negative "femaleness," the case has merit. Trapped between contrary fantasies of masculine power and feminine impotence, Hamlet is himself unmanned, frozen "between two worlds/One dead, the other powerless to be born"—to borrow Matthew Arnold's remarkably useful phrase. The problem, as Erlich expresses it, is not the desire for the mother, but the need within Hamlet for a present and consistent image of maleness. The argument does not rule out the oedipus problem, but complicates the "solution" Jones claimed to have discovered. Erlich's thesis, however, may suggest that we need more comprehensive theory, as opposed to a "corrective" based on psychoanalysis.

One is tempted to respond to Erlich on the level of persona and say, "Dammit, Hamlet's father *was* strong, physically, at least." Yet, he let Gertrude slip away to Claudius, *before,* it would seem, the poisoning in the orchard. Perhaps she sought something in Claudius that the "macho" Hamlet Sr. did not provide. Claudius, as

characterized, is far more sensitive and loving than either Hamlet or critics of the play tend to suggest. One is further tempted to argue that part of Hamlet's problem may be his effort to emulate his externally powerful father. Young Hamlet, however, is of a different generation and a different culture—a renaissance prince, not a feudal strong-man. His father, for example, is not described as a patron of the "tragedians of the city" (II.ii.329). One might ask, furthermore, whether one can kill a brother who plans to murder you. Perhaps you can, if you are king and privy to the plan. While death is, among other things, a kind of castration, I do not believe that the pouring of poison in the ear is symbolic of castration—unless, in the Freudian sense, it signals the destruction of *the female* organs of reproduction. *If* castration, it did not occur at midnight. The Ghost himself explains the reasons for his nocturnality. Still, however, the son of a physically powerful father can have his problems. We notice, however, that Prince Hamlet proves more than a match at rapier and dagger for the seemingly matchless Laertes. I suggest that Erlich's point is relevant, even if an already ambiguous text submerges under the weight of his thesis. The point, however, is paradoxical: Hamlet cannot discover what is "masculine" in him, unless he accepts the "feminine" in him. Since he cannot, any search for an external masculine role model can only plunge him into the self-laceration we witness.

Yet another neo-Freudian approach is that of P. J. Aldus, in *Mousetrap: Structure and Meaning in 'Hamlet'*. Aldus argues that the "Mousetrap" is really aimed at Gertrude, not at Hamlet's defined target, Claudius. "Who is the mouse?" Aldus asks. "Surely not the King. Hamlet calls him goat-like, satyr, adulterate beast, paddock, bat, gib, ape, but he is no mouse. Again we remember the opening challenge to the wrong person. In the mousetrap, it is to the queen."[26] The opening challenge (Who's there?) is delivered *by* the wrong person, by Bernardo, who is approaching the sentinel-on-duty, Francisco. And, while we might agree that Claudius is no mouse and does call Gertrude "his mouse" (III.iv. 190), as Hamlet constructs their love-scenes, Hamlet calls the figure behind the arras "a rat" (III.iv.25). Of course, a rat can copulate with a mouse, but farewell the animal analogies. Suffice it that Hamlet *does* confuse himself about the trap he sets ostensibly for Claudius.

Aldus would, by indirections, find directions out. And he is right: the play-within is at least partially an attack on Gertrude, who is herself sensitive to Baptista's over-protestations. The play-within-the play is obviously an attack on women and their meaningless vows, and might have continued that attack had Lucianus been permitted to woo Baptista. To narrow "Gonzago" down to a single vector, as Aldus does, however, is to over-simplify a moment of remarkable complexity.

Aldus suggests of the Closet Scene that, "In simple terms Hamlet desires the Queen agonizingly, but will substitute words that are sexual attack even as they excoriate the act."[27] Yes, that beautifully phrased sentence captures the ambivalent fascination of Hamlet's "Not this, by no means, that I bid you do . . ." (III.iv.l88ff.). Aldus, predictably, adduces the line, "I will speak daggers to her, but use none" as a phallic prop to his position.

Aldus, then, isolates the Oedipus complex in Hamlet's response to Gertrude. Erlich discovers it in Hamlet's unconscious response to his "absent father." Each offers a working out of and a corrective to the Jones thesis, but each merely validates a more comprehensive original, which, regardless of its crudities, does account for the complex interactions of father-son-mother-uncle, and, to some extent, for the conflations of father-son-uncle, mother-Ophelia, and Lucianus-son-father-uncle. That those conflations confuse me is true, but if drama is a "dream of passion" (II.ii.552), then both dreams and drama do the same thing. They confuse us insofar as we lack a comprehensive definitional frame.

A thesis that might, *mutatis mutandis,* combine the views of Erlich and Aldus is that of Peter Loewenberg.[28] In examining the rise of the Hitler Youth in the 1930s, Loewenberg suggests that German boys of the WW I years experienced the absence of fathers in war and, if they returned, their return in defeat and ineffectuality. These boys also experienced the humiliation and exile of a "father figure," Kaiser Wilhelm. Thus, after the failures of Weimar, Hitler represented a powerfully magnetic "father figure" for cohorts coming to young manhood in the early 1930s. As boys, these young men had also, often, experienced the absence of mothers

who worked in war plants and had little time or energy left for cooking what food there was, cleaning, or nurturing. Hitler *also* played, as Harold Lasswell noted in 1933, "a maternal role for certain classes in German society." National Socialism, Lasswell suggested, was "essentially the bundle of 'don'ts' of the nursemaid conscience."[29] Hitler, Erikson argues, "was a ruthless exploiter of parental failures."[30]

It follows, then, that while Hamlet consciously excoriates Gertrude for what he perceives as her vivid infidelity, he represses his sense of his father's failures. While the defection of Hamlet's parents would seem to occur later in his life than did the similar deprivation in the lives of the German cohorts, we remember that King Hamlet was off at war on the day his son was born, that is, if we believe the First Gravedigger: "I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras . . . It was that very day that young Hamlet was born" (V.i. 143-147). Loewenberg suggests that "parental deprivation in childhood . . . assumes increasing importance in later years as the child approaches and works through the oedipal conflict [and] has a profound impact on the personality and ideas of youth concerning father images, political authority, and sources of power."[31] It may follow that Hamlet's repression of his hatred of his father—a repression that would fix him at the adolescent oedipal stage—suggests why he, in contrast to Laertes and Fortinbras, is strangely apolitical.

If we make the large and questionable assumption of "Hamlet's absent father," it follows, according to George R. Bach, that "the mother may modify the child's personality development in the period of father-absence. The father is not available for imitation of or identification with masculine social behavior, and there is now more opportunity to imitate feminine attitudes and manners, and values of the mother."[32] In Hamlet's case, however, the mother is Gertrude. Hamlet's rage at her betrayal of his father—and of him—and his definition of all that is feminine as "fraility" drives him into stereotypic feminine behavior for which he berates himself. His self-hatred emerges partly from the masculine ideal he holds up to himself and from his misunderstanding of how that ideal distorts his perceptions of his own psyche. As Loewenberg argues, "the absent father is idealized [as a] defense against hatred toward the father by replacing those repressed hostile feelings with their conscious opposite."[33] The psychodynamics of Hamlet's family, then, have left him helpless between the destructive crossfires of the oedipal conflict.

A betrayal by both mother *and* father—the latter repressed in Hamlet's case—might drive a son towards the embrace of "negative value systems," where inner rage would be projected upon a scapegoat (Jew or Claudius) and where that rage would find its outlet in a negative code of behavior—Hitler Youth or the *lextalionis,* which for Hamlet becomes "a soul for a soul." Loewenberg argues that, for Germany, the effort to escape the past brought only its more devastating recapitulation: "What [the German youth] created was a repetition of their own childhoods. They gave to their children and to Europe in greater measure precisely the traumas they had suffered as children and adolescents a quarter of a century earlier."[34] The pattern repeats in *Hamlet* as well, but "with a difference." King Hamlet overcame Old Fortinbras on the day Hamlet was born. On the day he dies, young Hamlet, who has failed to resolve the issues that resided in him and in Elsinore, allows Young Fortinbras to become King of Denmark without drawing a sword.

The Freudians, we notice—assuming I have interpreted them fairly—do tend to remove Hamlet from the social context for which Goldstein argues. It is as if the play surrounding Hamlet were somehow a projection of his psychic imperception—and that is partly true. I suggest, however, that the unmoved mover, Shakespeare possessed a more comprehensive view than that of his title character. Nor, of course, would Freudian critics disagree. Another approach, however may clarify some of the critical—and dramatic—problems I have outlined thus far. And that brings us to Jung.

III

To begin to apply Jung to Hamlet it is best to examine one of the more superficial layers of the psychic structure Jung describes—the persona. The persona corresponds to our self-selected image of ourselves; it is that fictional person we hope that others will accept as the "real us." It is that aspect of the ego, or

"consciousness," that is oriented towards the objective world. We design it to create a specific impression of ourselves and, conversely, to conceal our inner nature from other eyes. Inevitably, that concealment of those energies that we do not want in our "image" leads to repression. Thus is born that threatening personality known as the shadow.

The persona, says Jolande Jacobi, is our "cloak around the ego." It includes three often competing aspects: 1) the "ego ideal," the behavior formed by social and parental conditioning, and by our perception of that conditioning, 2) the environment's view of the individual, particularly of the individual's role or career, a view that is often stereotypic and that thus forces us into stereotypic stances, and 3) the psychic contingencies that limit our ability to fulfill either ego ideal or our environment's vision of us.[35] The third factor can be a strength, in that it compensates for and negotiates with the demands of the first two components of the persona. If, however, we base our actions solely on collective demands, we neglect that inner nature to the point where it may activate itself to our inconvenience, as in the so-called "mid-life" crisis experienced either by the career-oriented male or the home-orientated woman, If, however, we insist exclusively on that inner nature, as introverts like Richard II, Brutus, and Hamlet tend to do, we may lose out on external rewards—marriage and career, for example. The persona requires the tension between its components to develop healthily.

While what may have been healthy negotiations become destructive conflict within Hamlet, the concept of persona accounts for the external energies that Goldstein defines. What constitutes correct action for a crown prince of Denmark whose father revisits the glimpses of the moon to demand that his son revenge regicide? The concept of persona accounts for Hamlet's specific response to the Ghost's demand. Hamlet's ego ideal would seem to have evolved—or changed, at least—from his father's military orientation to that of student, patron of the theater, and renaissance gentleman. He is able, even amid his trauma, to remain "in continual practice" (V.ii.209) with his rapier. Swordplay would seem to have developed from the previous generation into aristocratic exercise. Hamlet's ego ideal would seem challenged by the Ghost's demand, which, as Hamlet interprets it, would involve the use of the sword to kill. Hamlet, then, seems to impose upon himself the stereotypic role of revenger. And, regardless of which specific Freudian interpretation we accept, the "inner Hamlet" is troubled by conflicting energies for which he cannot account. In view of his later suggestion about "continual practice," we may not believe all that Hamlet says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but Hamlet does, it would seem, define his symptoms accurately: "I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises: and indeed it goes so heavily with me that . . . man delights not me, no, nor woman neither . . ." (II.ii.296-310). We know, however, that external events—the sudden death of his father (which, even before the Ghost's narrative, Hamlet suspects was not the work of a random serpent) combined with his mother's "o'erhasty" (II.ii.5-7) marriage to Claudius—have triggered Hamlet's inner reaction. That reaction, however is predicated on what already lay "hidden" in Hamlet's psyche—an unresolved oedipal dilemma perhaps. The question then becomes—is there any action Hamlet could take that would fulfill the demands of the persona, with its seemingly contradictory pull towards personal ideal (renaissance prince), collective expectation (the code of revenge), and inner imperative (which may be the need to resolve the oedipal conflict)? I believe so.

But before I suggest what that action or *in*action might have been, I wish to mine a little below the surface of the persona, to suggest who Hamlet is in a Jungian sense.

Jung isolates two basic human orientations—extraversion and introversion. The energy of the extravert is drawn to the object. His "attitude is characterized by the subordination to the demands which the object makes upon him." Even when Claudius, for example, introverts for the moment in his attempt at prayer, his crown, queen, and his own ambition keep his thoughts below, in the extraverted world of power politics, one complicated for him by his love for Gertrude. The psychic energy of the introvert is directed toward the subject. His inner value system is the important criterion. "The introverted attitude is characterized by the subject's assertion of his conscious aims and intentions against the demands of the object."[36] That extraverted

Lady Macbeth and introverted Macbeth cannot communicate effectively is a function of their different basic orientations. Macbeth translates his inner arguments into quantitative terms—"Golden opinions" (I.vii.34)—perhaps because Lady Macbeth can understand no other. Macbeth's "wrong reasons," however, open himself up for immediate counterattack and ruthless manipulation. "The introvert," says Jung, "interposes a subjective view between the perception of the object and his own action, which prevents the action from assuming a character that fits the objective situation."[37] Macbeth's hesitation at killing Duncan is akin to Hamlet's over the kneeling Claudius. The "subjective factor" equates to hesitation in the face of any external action that may not square with the character's perception of his inner nature. Action for the introvert must be played out satisfactorily on an inner stage before it can be achieved effectively in the outer world, unless, of course, the introvert behaves in contradiction to his own nature, as the Shakespearean tragic hero tends to do. The tragic hero may believe in what he is doing, as Lear and Othello do. He may believe, as Hamlet does, that "This thing's to do" (IV.iv.44). He may not believe in what he is doing as Macbeth does not. In each case, however, "consciousness" is the criterion, and in each case consciousness dictates the wrong choice. Othello and Lear, at least, are forced to admit as much. Macbeth becomes merely a frantic extravert, admitting all the good things he has lost, not merely "Golden opinions" (I.vi.34), but his "eternal jewel" (III.i.67). Hamlet dies, as Danby suggests, "a baffled young man,"[38] never having penetrated to the "heart" of his own inner "mystery." While both Macbeth and Hamlet provide eschatological reasons for their hesitations, Macbeth is right both in his assumptions about the world in which he lives and in his sense of what his killing of Duncan means to that world. Hamlet also lives in a world rounded by a palpable supernature, but he is, typically, incorrect in taking Claudius's stance of prayer for its reality. That is not to say, however, that he should kill Claudius at that point, or that he is consciously rationalizing his delay. The soliloquy convention insists that *we* believe that Hamlet's wish for Claudius's damnation is Hamlet's "real reason." We can see, however, that Hamlet is indeed interposing a subjective view between his perception of the object and his own action which prevents the action from assuming a character that fits the objective situation—as Hamlet interprets it. The Freudian, of course, would attribute the subjective interposition to the oedipal problem.

To the primary orientations of extraversion and introversion, Jung adds four functions: the evaluative functions of thinking and feeling, and the perceptive functions of intuition and sensation. Each function inheres in human beings, of course. Sensation tells us "that something *is."* Thinking "tells us *what* a thing is." Feeling "implies an evaluation." Intuition is *"perception of the possibilities inherent in an object"* (Jung's *ital.*)[39]

One function dominates in each person. This "superior function is always an expression of the conscious personality, of its aims, will, and general performance."[40] The conscious function, then, suggests how the *libido*—or psychic energy—of the persona is directed. In spite of an individual's self-conscious "image-making," however—and because of it—he remains unaware of the compensatory and often explosive power of subordinate functions, "opposed to the conscious aims, even producing effects whose cause is a complete enigma to the individual."[41] Such enigmatic effects can overwhelm the extravert, who overlooks the possibility of an inner life. Richard III, Henry V, Lear, and Lady Macbeth are examples at various extremes of what can happen to the extravert. Subjective factors can also engulf the introvert, who tends to overlook external determinants and to allow his often inappropriate subjectivity to emerge unbidden and against his conscious will. For all of his awareness of an inner life, the introvert is often a poor interpreter of its meaning.

Jung's typology allows us not merely to define the phenomenology of characterization—that is conscious attitude and its unconscious opposite—but also to grasp the way the plays work as interactions between characters: *i.e.* the introverted Macbeth vs. the extraverted Lady Macbeth. If Hamlet represents introverted thinking and Gertrude extraverted feeling, we have a way of understanding the relationship between son and mother than can incorporate psychoanalytic theory without having to define a specific "reason" for the mystery of Hamlet's character. It helps, I believe, to view Gertrude not merely as "mother," but also as a psychological type precisely opposite to Hamlet's type. In a sense Hamlet demands of Gertrude—why do you not evaluate things as *I* do? The answer is that Hamlet is a thinking type. "About, my brains!" (II.i.588) he

demands of himself. And, "there is nothing either good or bad but *thinking* makes it so" (II.ii.249-250). And, of course, he is an introvert who would not understand the extraverted ease with which Gertrude slid from one husband to another and thus remained Queen. Hamlet does, of course, force a moment of painful introversion upon Gertrude:

> 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.ii.91-93).

IV

I do not wish to deny the possibility that the oedipal problem accounts for Hamlet's behavior and for part of our response to his characterization. I suggest, however, that the oedipal problem may itself be symptomatic of a deeper disturbance within Hamlet's psyche, that is, his inability to contact his "feminine soul," or anima. The anima is the energy whereby the male recognizes and integrates into consciousness his androgynous nature. The introverted thinker is particularly susceptible to alienation from his androgynous nature. It follows that he is likely to be alienated from his specific mother, and to be "distanced" at least from the father who loved that mother. Here, I am emphasizing not merely the physical act of sexuality, but the emotional energies that flow into the act—the act that produced Hamlet, for example. In describing the conscious attitude of the introverted thinking type, Jung might be drawing a sketch of Hamlet, one that fills in Coleridge's perception that "Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the particular":

> Whether introverted thinking is concerned with concrete or with abstract objects, always at the decisive points it is oriented by subjective data. It does not lead from concrete experience back again to the object, but always back to the subjective content, [*i.e.* "The time is out of joint./O cursed spite, That ever *I* was born to set it right" (I.v.189-190), "How all occasions do inform against *me"* (IV.iv.32), and Hamlet's dying insistance that *his* story be told—the impossible task he assigns Horatio]. External facts are not the aim and origin of his thinking, though the introvert would often like to make his thinking appear so. It begins with the subject and leads back to the subject, far though it may range into the realm of actual reality. With regard to the establishment of new facts [such thinking] is only indirectly of value, since new views rather than knowledge of new facts are its main concern. It formulates questions and creates theories, it opens up new prospects and insights, but with regard to facts its attitude is one of reserve . . . facts are collected as evidence for a theory, never for their own sake.[42]

I suggest that Hamlet's "about my brains" (II.ii.588) and the elaborate strategy whereby Hamlet will at once validate the Ghost's "word" and "capture" Claudius's "conscience" (II.ii.606) reflect Hamlet's reserve in the face of facts, facts that his "prophetic soul" (I.v.41) glimpses even before the Ghost unfolds his tale. One of the reasons that the play unfolds as it does is that Hamlet must devise a method whereby to test theories he has spun out within his brain since his immediate acceptance of the Ghost as "honest." He seems constantly to require "grounds more relative" (II.ii.605) than what he had previously accepted *as* facts confirmed by his "prophetic soul." While "more relative" means "more pertinent," the word also suggests that Hamlet is, like the introverted thinker Jung describes, falling back into an infinite regress of "relativity." To send the mere "brain" about is to await an incomplete answer. It may be that Hamlet's play is compromised-in-advance by his perception that it is wholly "rational." Hamlet's plan for "Gonzago" emerges from introverted thinking, as Jung describes the type:

> [Introverted thinking] wants to reach reality to see how the external fact will fit into and fill the framework of the idea . . . the creative power of this thinking shows itself when it actually creates an idea which, though not inherent in the concrete fact, is yet the most suitable abstract expression of it.[43]

Thus—drama as imitation of an action, a *mimesis* Hamlet appreciates. The players are "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time" (II.ii.523-524) who will play, says Hamlet "something like the murder of my father / Before mine uncle" (II.ii.569-597). While the Freudian formulation may illuminate Hamlet's creation of a fictional *alter ego* in Lucianus, the play-within itself can be viewed as an inevitable product of Hamlet's habit of mind, one that creates abstractions of reality that imitate concreteness but are themselves merely "a fiction . . . a dream of passion" (II.ii.552). That a *mimesis* can activate *psychic* reality into being is an idea Hamlet expresses but ignores, until his production has its way with *him.* I shall argue that, in designing "Gonzago," Hamlet has done much more than to create the most suitable abstract expression of a thought. He has, potentially, opened a fictional doorway that leads out of appearance and into "reality." "Gonzago," however, accomplishes merely a return, for Hamlet and his world, to fictions and facades.

Jung's further description of the introverted thinker captures other aspects of Hamlet's character and behavior: "He will follow his ideas like the extravert, but in the reverse direction: inwards and not outward. Intensity is his aim, not extensivity."[44] Or—as Hamlet says—"O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself king of infinite space; were it not that I have bad dreams" (II.ii.255-256). "Although [the introverted thinker] will shrink from no danger in building up his world of ideas," Jung says, even if those ideas "might prove to be dangerous, subversive, heretical or wounding to other people's feelings, he is none the less beset by the greatest anxiety if ever he has to make [his ideas] an objective reality."[45] It is precisely that fear of fact as opposed to idea that contributes to Hamlet's destruction of his single opportunity to save Denmark and himself from the corpse-strewn "field" (V.ii.404) of the final scene. That moment occurs because Hamlet has viewed his play-within only in relationship to his need to "prove" the Ghost's honesty. His placing of a narrow hypothesis against the "abstraction" of drama denies him the vision that might allow him to achieve a solution to the problems that unfold even as he thinks about them, and *because* he can only think about them. As the introverted thinker hollows out his own capacity to do anything *but* think, he potentializes the energy of his repressed function, which is feeling. Hamlet, afraid of confronting the concrete fact, will be undercut by the data of his own emotions, which, although not concrete, are nonetheless, just as "real." The reality that Hamlet invites by narrowing a perspective that might have opened out to a saving inclusiveness is that of his own psyche, which itself incorporates much more than mere "thinking makes." The introverted thinker, Jung suggests, "begins to confuse his subjective truth with his own personality [*i.e.* 'Seems, Madam! Nay it is. I know not "seems";I.ii.76]. He will burst out with vicious, personal retorts against every criticism, however just ['Why man, they did make love to this employment. / They are not near my conscience':V.ii. 57-58]. Thus, his isolation gradually increases. His original fertilizing ideas become destructive, poisoned by the seeds of bitterness. His struggle against the influences emanating from the unconscious increases with his external isolation, until finally they begin to cripple him. He thinks his withdrawal into ever-increasing solitude will protect him from the unconscious influences, but as a rule it only plunges him deeper into the conflict that is destroying him from within."[46] Among the defense mechanisms Jung attributes to this type, if a male, is a "vague fear of the feminine sex."[47] Hamlet's fear of women *is* vague—however projected vehemently into general excoriation—because he has no effective contact with the woman-in-him. Even the most realized of androgynous natures might fear a specific woman—a Tamora or Cymbeline's Queen—but the unintegrated male psyche can only condemn a stereotypic totality.

If the introverted thinker tends by predisposition to fear women, his tendency might be a precondition for the constellation of an Oedipus complex. In Hamlet, the problem might be a symptom, activated by a specific Gertrude, of a deeper psychic disjunction. If so, as helpful as the oedipal theory may be in explaining Hamlet's behavior, it remains a manifestation of the "personal unconscious," which is the sum of unperceived or repressed personal experience. Personal experience, obviously, is conditioned by and is a function of psychic

typology. Beneath both the personal unconscious and the conscious orientation of the psyche that dictates the contents of the personal unconscious lies the collective unconscious. Among the archetypes of the collective unconscious, in the male, is the anima, the energy of the male's significant and powerful female minority. If unintegrated, the anima can become "minority rule."

V

The "anima," according to Aniela Jaffe is the "personification of the feminine nature of man's unconscious . . . This psychological bisexuality is a reflection of the biological fact that it is the larger number of male (or female) genes which is the decisive factor in the determination of sex. The smaller number of contrasexual genes seems to produce a corresponding contrasexual character, which usually remains unconscious."[48] One might add that the coding that creates a male foetus does not occur until some months into the process of gestation, meaning that no matter what a patriarchally motivated Book of Genesis may suggest, the female is *a priori,* as principal and as principle. Uncannily, Shakespeare describes the process in Sonnet 20. Jung's description of anima, is, predictably, less biological: "Every man carries within him the eternal image of woman, not the image of this or that particular woman, but a definitive feminine image. This image is fundamentally unconscious, an hereditary factor of primordial origin engraved in the living organic system of the man, an imprint or 'archetype' of all the ancestral experiences of the female, a deposit, as it were, of all the impressions ever made by woman . . . Since this image is unconscious, it is always unconsciously projected upon the person of the beloved, and is one of the chief reasons for passionate attraction or aversion."[39] While our birth, if we are males, may be a "dream and a forgetting," it would seem that we bring with us into the world not an unconscious image of the women from whom we have been born but of the woman we *were* biologically only months before. Our male lives, then, involve the search, almost invariably unconscious, for that which we were and for that which our consciousness and our physiology denies we ever were or could be. The "male ego" does all that it can, of course, to deny the feminine component of his psyche, thus must project his own feminine upon his biological mother, and thus may become trapped within the oedipal dilemma.

Suffice it that Hamlet is alienated from his anima. In discussing the upcoming duel with Laertes, Hamlet says: "I shall win at the odds; but thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart—but it is no matter . . . It is but foolery, but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman" (V.ii.210-214). Obviously, Hamlet has a deep and negative feeling about the duel, a misgiving that springs from his inmost heart. Even as he relegates such "foolery" to a womanish fear, however, he sneers at the woman-within who would warn him, at an augury emerging from his own repressed anima.

The man alienated from the positive energy of his anima will "forget himself," that is, fall victim to the "I don't know what came over me" syndrome, as Hamlet does when he discovers that the woman he loved "once" (III.i.116) is dead. He then exaggerates his "love" to a "sum" larger than that of "forty thousand brothers" (V.i.269-271), but later regrets his wild hyperbole: "But I am very sorry, good Horatio,/That to Laertes I forgot myself (V.ii.76-77). He may, Jung suggests, find himself acting "in a very womanish way"[50] when repressed feeling leaps out to contradict male "rationality" radically. Such a man, says Edward Whitmont, will exhibit "all sorts of compulsive moodiness, sentimentality, depression, brooding, withdrawal, fits of passion, morbid oversensitivity or effeminancy—namely emotional and behavior patterns that cause [him] to act like an inferior woman"[51]—inferior because the man alienated from his own feminine principle can only react from his stereotypic version of woman. While Whitmont defines several of the "sub-texts" that have informed actors depicting Hamlet, Hamlet himself is aware of precisely the behavior Whitmont and Jung ascribe to the "anima-alienated" male:

> This is most brave,
> That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,

Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A stallion.

(II.ii.583-588).

Aware of the manifestations, Hamlet cannot penetrate to their source.

Hamlet's "problem", then, is deeper than his mere relationship with Gertrude. When the archetype of the anima is not integrated into consciousness, its energy emerges as projection, pouring out as impulsive activity conditioned only by personal experience, that is, as a manifestation of that shallowly concealed *alter ego* Jung calls the shadow. Hamlet's inability to integrate his feminine energy into his consciousness and thus to respond effectively to his *specific* mother causes him to project negative feminine qualities onto Ophelia, in the nunnery and play scenes, and, as Whitmont indicates, provides a rationale for Hamlet's often bizarre actions—at Ophelia's funeral, for example. Such "reflex-like irruptions of the anima," Whitmont says, "come from the area of inferior function [which, in Hamlet's case, is feeling]. The instinctual and intuitive-emotional response is what the male is usually least capable of providing consciously."[52] Since Hamlet does behave compulsively, even pauses to praise the *principle* of "rashness," in a rationalization typical of the introverted thinker, we can accept Grebanier's description of "rash Hamlet."[53]

But Grebanier is among those critics who elevate a half-truth to the "whole truth," however corrective the process may be to other fractional versions of Hamlet's character. How do we account for the Hamlet with whom Coleridge claims a kinship—the troubled intellectual, the withdrawn philosopher? Does the Jungian thesis account for the obvious inconsistencies in Hamlet's behavior while at the same time providing a consistent theory of characterization? Marie-Louise von Franz describes the activity of the "negative anima," that is, the archetype's ability to create behavioral patterns. In doing so, she also describes the introverted thinking type: "The anima in this guise involves men in a destructive intellectual game. We can notice the effect of this anima trick in all those neurotic pseudo-intellectual dialogues that inhibit a man from getting into direct touch with life and its real decisions. He reflects about life so much that he cannot live it and loses all his spontaniety and outgoing feelings . . . Within the soul of such a man the negative anima will endlessly repeat this theme: nothing. Nothing makes any sense. With others it's different, but for me . . . I enjoy nothing.'"[54] The "moods" of men, even depression and deep melancholy, can be attributed to their divorce from the feminine-in-them, the principle that fertilizes the male ego.

While one must account for the powerful forces working on Hamlet as the play begins, his response *is* his response, and his efforts at resolving the problems he faces—for himself and for Denmark—emerge from his psyche, and no other. A theory that accounts for his conscious orientation *and* for its inevitably opposite unconscious activity, which can be positive if integrated, negative if repressed, permits us to accommodate erratic patterns of behavior, even to incorporate the oedipal dilemma, within a comprehensive description of character.

VI

The play, however, is that context within which theory either succeeds or fails.

A particularly brilliant moment in the recent BBC-TV production occurred when Derek Jacobi borrowed a skull-mask from the actors as an emblem of his "idleness" before the Mousetrap. "How fares . . .—our Cousin Hamlet" (III.ii.91), Claudius inquired with sour amusement, recognizing a kinship, perhaps even an *alter ego* in Hamlet's antic mask. Hamlet could almost have said, "Not where he eats, but where/'a is eaten!" (IV.iii.19)g. The skull-mask nicely anticipated the graveyard of Act V, and reminded us that, among other roles, Hamlet plays that of jester in Elsinore, the role vacated by Yorick some 23 years earlier. The court of

Claudius is characterized accurately by Michael Long as "manipulative, expeditious and politic, a matter of espionage and the political use of man by man against man," a place that holds "psychic energy [in] contempt."[55] In a Jungian sense, such a situation demands a compensatory response. Some of Hamlet's energy must flow towards the role of "fool," "foil" (V.ii.253), or Jungian shadow. In that role, Hamlet can show the court its unperceived and repressed inner nature, can hold the mirror up to the form and pressure of a psychic context that Claudius and his court would ignore as it floats along on the superficial surfaces of political "success." That is not to say that Hamlet is not, at times, his own jester. In a marvelous moment in the 1979 Theater at Monmouth *Hamlet,* Sam Tsousouvas also borrowed a prop from the players—a mirror. He was looking at himself when he said "virtue her own feature," then sneered and put the mirror aside as he said "scorn her own image" (III.ii.22-23). He was sneering at himself, of course, dismissing a feminine virtue with, as he perceived it, the more powerful feminine icon of scorn. Each, however, was an image of his own character, and each suggested the conflict emerging from the feminine within him, which "cannot come to good" (I.ii.158) if his tendency towards introverted thinking does not surrender to the saving energy of the anima which the introverted thinker represses so forcefully.

Claudius, of course, can afford no jester. Yet it is precisely the intention of the play-within to ignite a truth within the King, and to force him—even against his extraverted will—to express that truth openly. Beneath the extraverted thinker lies the repressed function of feeling, which will leap out, not as in Hamlet, in a sudden flash of manic energy, but in an expression of the truth of one's nature. That truth, if encouraged into being, takes precedence over conscious intention, and expresses as Claudius does, issues more ultimate and eschatological than mere kingship. Some might agree with G.R. Hibbard's claim that "the Prayer scene . . . reveals unequivocally that repentance and the giving-up of the crown are actions of which the King is incapable."[56] What the scene demonstrates, I believe, is that extraverted thinking has had a chance to reestablish itself within Claudius, even as other imperatives struggle to free themselves within him. Goldstein is only partially correct to suggest that "if not for the play-within-the-play, why should Claudius's conscience, which has been quiet until the prayer scene, suddenly start to torment him?"[57] Goldstein isolates the potential power of the play-within, a potentiality squandered in Claudius's anti-cathartic effort at prayer, but Goldstein ignores Shakespeare's characterization of Claudius. The conscience of the King has been aroused *before* the performance of "Gonzago" by the sententiousness of a mere Polonius:

> Poloni us: 'Tis too much prov'd—that with devotion's visage
> And pious action, we do sugar o'er the devil himself.
> Claudius: (Aside) O, 'tis too true!
> How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
> The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it,
> Than is my deed to my most painted word.
> O heavy burden!

(III.i.47-55).

Claudius seems "fit and season'd" for a "passage" (III.iii.86) other than that which Hamlet would arrange as he puts up his sword behind the kneeling King.

Hamlet may be a jester to the court of Claudius. But the jester, or fool, speaks truths unavailable to a king's consciousness. He is, then, like Lear's Fool, a kind of conscience. What happens to Hamlet is that he speaks from his unconsciousness during the performance of "Gonzago" and thus allows the conscience of the king to be caught only in its self-laceration. Hamlet mousetraps Claudius, but is himself an equal victim, perhaps a greater victim of the trap he has set. Hamlet ignores the deeper spring from which his plan for the play-within has come.

The skull-mask Jacobi employed linked his play-within-the-play with ancient drama, with the Greek drama which reported terrible off-stage events *via* breathless messengers—Sophocles's *Oedipus* and Euripides's *Medea,* for example, and the lengthy report about Priam and Hecuba in the Player's Speech. *That* is the drama Hamlet the perennial graduate student prefers, as Marchette Chute suggests in an incisive passage from *Shakespeare of London:*

> Hamlet ['s] idea of true theater was to hear the sorrows of the characters described at second hand in dignified and interminable blank verse . . . The proper thing to do was to describe [Hecuba] from afar . . . The play from which Hamlet quotes so admiringly represents the best practices of university stagecraft, with Hecuba's agony filtered through Senecan blank verse.[58]

The preference of the introverted thinker for experience "second hand" is reflected even in Hamlet's theatrical tastes. While "Gonzago" is of a different subgenre than is the Player's speech, it *is* an old play, formulated of sententious couplets, frozen firmly within its melodramatic premises, and conducted within the "unities" of time, place, and action. "Gonzago" stands as anti-type to the sprawl of the play surrounding it. The outer play represents the "reality" in which Prince Hamlet lives. Indeed, he seems to be a character in a play of which he would disapprove. He would seek "reality" *via* a fiction, through an end-stopped drama whose lines—except for his "dozen of sixteen" (II.ii.541)—have already been written. The irony is that fiction can be an avenue *towards* reality, as Shakespeare has shown in Rosalind's disguise, for example. The *tragic* irony is that Hamlet, so conversant with the trappings and shows of drama, does not grasp its potentiality. Or—if he does—his unperceived psyche cancels his conscious insight.

The inner play, for all of its antique formality, has the power to translate the outer play into something other than tragedy. As Hamlet's psychic energy explodes to destroy "Gonzago," he coerces his own play towards tragedy. That play, too, is a fiction, but Hamlet has an opportunity to allow the fiction he commissions to become a profound truth for the world he inhabits. If we look through "Gonzago" and extend the glimpse Claudius has already given of himself, we discern, in what might seem to be a tiny mirror at the end of an infinite regress, a reflection of a universe—that is the microcosm known as the soul.

I suggest of Hamlet what I suggested of those critics who would be "objective" about a drama, about this play and its title character. The "detached" stance, based on a set of derived "rules," merely encourages unperceived energies to flow forward. It is what happens to those of us introverted thinking type professors, when a class suddenly and unaccountably goes awry. Hamlet, the intellectual critic of theater, cannot accept his own standards. His own feeling explodes through his own too-rational plan, which has expressed the possibility of feeling, but is translated only into a rationality that becomes a tragic rationalization.

Hamlet merges with Lucianus, a case of *alter ego* inundating consciousness and becomes a character of whom he would disapprove in a bloody revenge play, in which only the relatively peaceful drowning of Ophelia and the presumed execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are delivered by report. The Jungian shadow, the unconscious personality formed *by* consciousness, leaps forward to evoke in Hamlet a fantasy of murdering Claudius "on the psychic plane," as Harold Goddard suggests.[59] That the fantasy of poisoning Claudius in the play-within becomes a double reality in the outer play confirms the moment of Hamlet's tragic "decision"—a decision made *for* him within a matrix of conflict that he could not control. Hamlet is the subject of a profound satire. He may prefer drama that is "caviary to the general" (II.ii.436-437) but his selection of the only script available to depict "something like the murder of [his] father" (I.ii.596) may signal a surrender of his own aesthetic system of values. It is *his* psyche, however, that caves in before his own melodrama, a surrender that suggests his own shallow sense of his original conception of what even melodrama might accomplish and his superficial grasp of who he is, as opposed to what his ego conceives him to be. The ego *mis*-conceives because it ignores the deeper conceptions and energies that lurk beneath our soap-opera daily lives. Hamlet's inability to abide by his old-fashioned rules, both in choice of play and in attitude of spectator,

is one factor that makes *Hamlet* the play a masterpiece of the new drama, with, as Chute says, "its mixture of comedy and tragedy, its failure to observe the unities, and all its other sins against decorum that any young gentleman from the universities would have noted immediately."[60]

The melodramatic "Gonzago," however, offered a kind of "comedy" to the soul of Claudius and a redemption for the world of Elsinore. Hamlet had to glimpse that possibility—as he did—and cling to it—as he did not. His smashing of the melodrama forces the "other play," the reality in which Hamlet lives, into the tragic mode. The play is Shakespeare's, of course, not Hamlet's, although the inner play is, in a sense, Hamlet's. (I do not believe that we ever hear "the speech" [III.ii.1]—Hamlet's insertion). Hamlet's "misinterpretation" of his own play allows "Gonzago" to draw Hamlet's psyche out destructively. He fails the decorum of even the melodrama of which he himself is the impressario. The play does capture Claudius's inner nature—later and too late. It captures Hamlet's sooner—and too soon. Once it has done so, it is too late for almost all of "Gonzago's" immediate spectators. Hamlet coerces not Claudius's confession, but his own.

The play-within represents a potential solution to the seemingly insolvable issues with which Hamlet has been wrestling. It is, at least, worth trying, is consistent with the various facets of Hamlet's persona, represents his control, at last, of the enigmatic energies of appearance and reality, and is a potential manifestation of Hamlet's creative soul, or anima, not just a product of his "brain." In all the play, it is his only "considered" action:

> I have heard
> That guilty creatures, sitting at a play,
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been struck so to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
> For murder, although it hath no tongue, will speak
> With most miraculous organ.

(II.ii.589-595).

Hamlet articulates the plan clearly, and expresses its ultra-rational possibilities—in "soul" and "miraculous." He further suggests that his "guilty creature" may "proclaim presently"—that is express guilt both publicly and immediately. This product of the "brain" seems to have transcended its biological and merely mental premises. While his own conception of drama does not encompass the complexity of the play in which he himself is captured, he might absorb a lesson from the First Player about "the realities of drama":

> O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wanned,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit; and all for nothing
> For Hecuba!
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her?

(II.ii.549-560).

Even here, Hamlet describes the male soul as feminine (that is, assuming that "from her working" refers back to "his soul"). But here we have a male weeping for a woman, a male evoking a subtext of a compassion that Hamlet, perhaps remembering a Gertrude "like Niobe, all tears" (I.ii.149), can find only baffling, if not hypocritical. In the Player, sub-text became a "reality" that convinced his auditors. Hamlet might draw three conclusions—might, if not swept into one of his outbursts of passionate feeling: a) revenge, as it is represented by Pyrrhus is a "hellish" activity; b) a fictional version of Claudius's crime, although perhaps the fiction of a Ghost, might force Claudius's soul to reveal its subtextual energy—the Player, after all, has moved from inside out on the basis of a remote fiction; and c) Hamlet had better not let his own soul be moved by his own conceit, as he observes his play, lest his own subtextual energies unkennel themselves to destroy his melodramatic masterpiece. Such a three-part formulation might seem the product of a scholar sitting in his study. So it is. If, however, we listen to Hamlet as he discusses guilty creatures sitting at plays or actors playing roles, and if we remember Hamlet's injunction about staying *in* one's role ("let those who play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them":III.ii.38-39)—even if that role be defined as that of spectator—we might recognize that Hamlet has expressed these possibilities and more. It is the tendency of the introverted thinker, however, to blast apart even those well-laid plans he has "thought" out in advance. The psychic moment is always charged with an energy that the thinking type cannot have "thought" about. In Hamlet's case, that energy emerges from his repressed anima. The incomplete conclusions Hamlet draws from the Player's response to Hecuba are a product of Hecuba's mourning for her dead king. Hamlet knows what "bisson rheum" (II.ii.506) is worth! A Player responding to the likes of Hecuba can only be "monstrous" (II.ii.551), because even passionate mourning can only be temporary and becomes, finally, less meaningful than the actions of "a beast that wants discourse of reason" (I.ii.150). While Hamlet may project his mother's example onto "all occasions" his inability to respond to *any* positive feminine action signals not just the contamination of his "personal unconscious" by personal experience, as in the case of the oedipal dilemma, but his alienation from the feminine principle within him, a psychic divorce that may dictate the negative working out of the oedipal problem.

The man controlled by the negative anima inevitably responds to women on the specific level of his perception of his specific mother. Such a man cannot penetrate to the deeper level of his own maternal being, to the *a priori* principle that precedes mere biology. Mere biology becomes, then, one of Hamlet's chief preoccupations when it comes to the two women in his life. It would seem that Hamlet wished to come to Hecuba so that he could believe in *her,* at least, but that the Player's "belief interrupts the potentiality for Hamlet's contact with a compensatory example of woman. So, too, do Ophelia's contrived "orisons" (III.i.90), whether Hamlet perceives the "lawful espials" (III.i.32) or not. He may, but it does not matter. The perverse and often moving love scene devolves into a brutal rejection of Ophelia by a Hamlet who, like so many would-be lovers, rejects his own hopes in the process. His affections may not "that way tend" (III.i.165) but the words and actions of the introverted thinker too often contradict the wishes of his nature. For Hamlet, the activity that emerges from the feminine nature of man, whether the Player's *mimesis* of response to the antique sorrow of Hecuba or Hamlet's intuitive grasp of the meaning of the duel, is bound to be rejected. Hamlet is programmed to scorn the principle of the feminine soul, even as he elsewhere berates his resultant womanish behavior. Whether Ophelia is a "worthy object" of Hamlet's affection is irrelevant. She is the human screen upon which Hamlet's unconscious anima is projected. She must get to a nunnery and become a nun or get to that nunnery which, in Elizabethan slang, was a brothel. The anima-alienated man can see women only as saints—in which case they do not exist as women—or as whores—in which case they also do not exist as women. A woman exists for a man only insofar as he can elevate the feminine principle from the depths of his psyche into consciousness.

The failure of "Gonzago" results partially from Hamlet's projection of his own shadow personality onto the figure of Lucianus, with his "Thoughts black" (III.ii 253). The play *may* resemble "something like the murder of [Hamlet's] father" (II.ii.596), but it becomes, as Hamlet begins to interact with it, something like the poisoning of Claudius, here on the psychic plane, in Act V, on the level of physical action. In one sense, Hamlet is Claudius poisoning King Hamlet, a *mimesis* of Hamlet's oedipal fantasy. In another sense Hamlet is

Lucianus killing Claudius, as Hamlet allows his shadow personality to become "nephew to the King" (III.ii.242). It is neither incidental nor accidental that the play-within does resemble the Ghost's description of his demise. What it comes to *mean,* however, is something else. Rather than eliciting the penitential imperative in Claudius towards open confession, it summons forward Hamlet's own unperceived psychic content. The "murderer" does *not* "get the love of Gonzago's wife" (III.ii.261-262) because Hamlet has interrupted the "anon" he promises. One could argue, then, that while the death of the father has been achieved, Hamlet must stop short of the possession of the mother by Lucianus. Both the oedipal dilemma and the incest taboo pertain, if we accept the Lucianus-Claudius-Hamlet conflation. If the recumbent "king" is Claudius, however, as it will be in Act V, when Hamlet forces the contents of the chalice down Claudius's throat, then Hamlet is responding to the inner drama of the shadow, responding from a shallow but powerful plane of the personal unconscious. Hamlet may have wished to play this role in Elsinore, with his "nighted color" (I.ii.68), but now the role plays him. In the psychic sense, "it is as easy as lying." Hamlet's confusion before his own production culminates as *he* breaks up the play, leaving the actors on-stage to gaze at a fleeing audience. Polonius's command is redundant. All Claudius asks for is "some light" (III.ii.267). Hamlet's inflation may term the result a "comedy" (III.ii.291), but his chance to achieve the King's "purgation" (III.ii.305)—and his own—has passed. He is quickly, and again, victimized by discrepancies between appearances and realities.[61]

Conventional wisdom on "Gonzago" is represented by Ruth Nevo:

> The King breaks down; Hamlet has triumphed. He has made the galled jade wince and the truth unkennel itself. It is his text that the players, the court, the King and the Queen all play. He is • master of reality, making his will prevail, no fool of fortune. His elation is unbounded . . .[62]

His elation, indeed, *is* unbounded. While we can understand, perhaps, how and why Hamlet feels he has succeeded, here is what has actually happened:

> Lucianus On wholesome life usurp immediately. [Pours the poison into the sleeper's ears.]
>
> Hamlet A poisons him i' th' garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.
>
> [Claudius rises.]
>
> Ophelia. The King rises.
>
> Hamlet. What, frighted with false fire? Queen. How fares my lord?
>
> Polonius. Give o'er the play.
>
> King. Give me some light. Away! Polonius. Lights, lights, lights!
>
> (III.ii.258-268)

While Horatio may be willing to grant Hamlet "Half a share" (III.ii.277) for the half of "Gonzago" Hamlet has permitted to be performed, I see no evidence here that Claudius has broken down. Alfred Harbage claims that "As the act of poisoning occurs, Claudius rises, crying for lights and rushing out."[63] In the superb 1964 Gielgud production, Alfred Drake rose slowly, looked at Hamlet with profound anger, and exited with dignity.

Patrick Stewart smiled at Derek Jacobi's BBC-TV Hamlet, as if to say, "So you know? You should not have let *me* know." Tim Wheeler, in the 1983 Monmouth production reached for a courtier's sword on "Give me . . . ," paused, said "some light" (III.ii.267) and strode from the room. I believe that the script shows two things: a) that Hamlet interrupts "Gonzago" for the last time, and b) that only Hamlet believes that Claudius has unkenneled his guilt. Horatio hardly confirms Hamlet's perception. Indeed, as McElroy argues, "Hamlet . . . accepts the Ghost's account and hence should be in no need of proof . . . Hamlet the enthusiast is once more caught up in the game, sanguinely anticipating the outcome: 'The play's the thing . . . '".[64] The play-within proves nothing about Claudius, except to Hamlet and those critics who accept Hamlet's interpretation of "success." That Claudius *is* guilty turns out to be true. But that Hamlet wastes his precious knowledge is also true. As Granville-Barker says, "it is a barren victory, lacking its conclusive stroke, and to be turned against its victor."[65] In other words, it is a defeat—not of Claudius, but of Prince Hamlet. It is Hamlet who is left on stage to leap about excitedly. I have never seen a production that allowed Claudius to exit in fear or panic. In anger, yes. Claudius does succeed in suggesting to the world of Elsinore that he is angry. Hamlet has convinced no one of what his "prophetic soul" already knew—that Claudius is guilty. Hamlet has forgotten the principle he articulated in his "guilty creatures" speech and becomes the victim of Holland's description of drama:

> By projecting what is in the characters outward into externally visible events and actions, a play paves the way for the audience's own act of projection. We find in the external reality of a play what is hidden in ourselves. Drama shows virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Watching a set of events in a play feels, for this reason, very different from reading them in a novel.[66]

Hamlet's failure can be understood in both the Freudian oedipal and the Jungian shadow contexts. It results more basically, however, from his creation of a work of art—a play—that can function on a level deeper than that of his own conscious understanding, or rationalization, of the way drama can work. "Gonzago" catches Claudius, powerfully but ineffectually. But it shows Hamlet to be the murderer in the garden. He has failed the creative and feminine principle within him that inspired "Gonzago." "The creative process," Jung says, "has feminine quality, and the creative work arises from unconscious depths—we might say, from the realm of the mothers. Whenever the creative force predominates, human life is ruled and moulded by the unconscious as against the active will, and the conscious ego is swept along by a subterranean current, being nothing more than a helpless observer of events. The work in progress becomes the poet's fate."[67] If Hamlet could *remain* merely an observer, saying "Now, let it work," then his plans for "Gonzago," seemingly fitted precisely to the tortured conscience Claudius has told us is there . . . well, that is another play, true. Hamlet merges with "Gonzago"—"a chorus" (III.ii.243), as Ophelia calls him—until he does prove helpless before the content his production activates in *him.* "Gonzago" as "success"—as most critics call it? The label may be a product of the critic who has made Hamlet his "moral interpreter," as Robert Ornstein, for example, claims Hamlet is in this play.[68] "Gonzago," I suggest, is hardly a "success," even if Hamlet wildly and whirlingly sees it as one. It is, instead, the play's tragic climax. The premature closing of "Gonzago" drives the outer play towards its negative fatality. The actions immediately after "Gonzago"—often elevated as *Hamlet's* "climax"—emanate from the potentially positive dynamic Hamlet has shattered. He is summoned to Gertrude's closet, discovers Claudius in the chapel and passes up his chance to kill the kneeling King, arrives in Gertrude's chamber, and kills Polonius. The pattern that includes the sparing of Claudius and the slaying of Polonius and that shows Hamlet again confused about the nature of "reality" emerges directly from the suddenly cancelled performance of "Gonzago." And for all of Hamlet's elation immediately after the Mouse-trap, the pattern hardly argues success. The "other ending" expressed by Hamlet in planning his play is forever unavailable. For Hamlet, now, revenge is not revenge unless the victim's soul can be dispatched to hell, although an incidental murder can be justified because the victim was "too busy" (III.iv.34).

Hamlet's play and its intrinsic failure capture the anima problem profoundly. Claudius's *ex post facto* invocation to "the sweet heavens" (III.iii.45) and his wish that his heart might become "soft as sinews of the

newborn babe" (III.iii.71) combine with the "heavy burden" (III.ii.55) of guilt he acknowledged before the play-within to suggest that he had it within him to be redeemed—if temporally doomed—by the reenactment of his crime, by a "dream of passion" (II.ii.552) that projected his own "truth"—even if consciousness would call it a "nightmare"—irresistibly before him. The negative anima—Hamlet's "whore" (V.ii.64) or Claudius's "harlot's cheek" (III.i.52)—might have been translated into the energy of salvation. While a specific Queen stands between both Claudius and Hamlet and their deepest self-expression, her power manifests itself only on the "personal" level. Hamlet is guilty of wasting his command of a potent fictional force that might have activated a deeper than personal level within Claudius, that level where the anima resides, with its command over the eternal, the feminine-in man, and with its ability to mediate, like the Catholic Virgin Mary, between the soul of man and God. At the very least, Hamlet fails to recognize that, as Leslie Fiedler says, the play-within has "an archetypal meaning quite independent of any individual's conscious exploitation of it."[69] The play elicits Hamlet's negative psyche; it does not give Claudius's inner imperative a chance to proclaim itself Thus Hamlet becomes a tragic hero acting in defiance of the ground of his own being, a ground inhabited by a feminine principle that expresses itself only to be scorned.

Shakespeare sets *Hamlet* up as a potential comedy. While we accept, ponder, and celebrate the play he gives us, we must, I believe, recognize that the play deepens into tragedy at the precise moment that Hamlet cancels the possibilities he has set loose in "Gonzago." It may be that Hamlet's production, coming as it does from his deepest creative instincts, that is, from the woman-in-him, must be rejected because Hamlet mistrusts that woman. His castigation of women in his outer world argues his hatred of the feminine within.

The Jungian approach allows us to describe Hamlet within the context of a failed androgyny. Such a failure is characteristic of the introverted thinker and can incorporate an oedipal dilemma. The Jungian approach, however, does not force us to reduce dramatic action to the activity of a specific complex in the title character. We can, then, accept the thesis that the complex *is* there, without coercing the complex into an "explanation" of a character and a play that will always remain seductively mysterious. Whatever he meant and whatever his character may mean as he is exposed to the litmus of our psyches, Shakespeare meant the mystery. Jolande Jacobi, for example, describes a basic *human* problem that Hamlet would seem to manifest. While the passage I quote would seem to be a response to the Freudian critics I cited earlier, it is in no way a direct response to the character of Prince Hamlet:

> Material deriving from the collective unconscious is never "pathological"; it can become pathological only if it comes from the personal unconscious, where it undergoes a specific transformation and coloration by being drawn into an area of individual conflict . . . Only an interpretation on the symbolic level can strip the nucleus of the complex from its pathological covering and free it from the impediment of its personalistic garb . . . If a complex embedded in the material of the personal unconscious seems to stand in inexorable conflict with consciousness, its nucleus, once laid bare, may prove to be a content of the collective unconscious. For example, the individual is no longer confronted with his own mother, but with an archetype of the "maternal," no longer with the unique personal problem created by his own mother as a concrete reality, but with the universally human, impersonal problem of every man's dealings with the primordial maternal ground in himself . . . how much more bearable it is for a son to conceive the son-father problem no longer on the plane of individual guilt—in relation, for example, to his own desire for his father's death, his aggressions and desires for revenge—but as a problem of deliverance from the father, i.e. from a dominant principle of consciousness that is no longer adequate for the son: a problem that concerns all men, and has been disclosed in the myths and fairy tales as the slaying of the reigning old king and the son's accession to the throne . . . Everything depends on whether the conscious mind is capable of understanding, assimilating, and integrating the complex, in order to ward off its harmful effects. If it does not succeed in this, the conscious mind falls victim to the complex, and is to a greater or lesser degree engulfed by it.[70]

Fortune, for Hamlet, is a "strumpet" (II.ii.236). While Fortune is a goddess no doubt fickle and inconsistent, Hamlet's projection of whorishness upon her signals his view of women, not necessarily Fortune's view of men. But Hamlet predicts what *his* fortune will be if he clings to his vision of woman—and of the woman-in-him—as strumpet.

The Freudian tends to approach a character as a "real person." The Freudian tends to posit an inevitable and perhaps valid infantile experience that Shakespeare does provide for Juliet, Leontes, and Polixenes perhaps, but not for Hamlet. Jung provides a thesis that coincides with characterization and that suggests that Shakespeare's plays imitate human actions that may emerge from premises deeper than those of personal complexes. Hamlet's tragedy—unique, royal, and superbly phrased—captures within it our own specific struggle towards identity. "Who's there?" (I.i.l) we ask of ourselves, perhaps even pausing for a reply. Hamlet's own reply must give us pause because it—like our own—is inadequate. Hamlet is forced into "the faction that is wronged" (V.ii.236). In so profoundly exploring his own identity—and insignificance—Hamlet helps us to explore our own, perhaps allowing us to transcend, for the moment, our insignificance even as we recognize that Hamlet transcends, even in tragic failure, whatever such as we might be, "crawling between earth and heaven" (III.i.129-130). The Jungian approach helps us account for inconsistencies in behavior—whether in a dramatic character like Hamlet or in ourselves. We may have a smack of Hamlet in us. In his own desperate and losing struggle to discover his identity and in his radical misinterpretation of the basic message of his selfhood, Hamlet makes our own identities possible—the imperative available in a great work of art, even in a lesser work like "Gonzago", which we accept or reject as we will. Hamlet's conscious effort to exploit even a melodrama like "Gonzago" leads to the drama's sudden exploitation of his *un*conscious.

Hamlet, "had he been put on," "might have prov'd most royal" (V.ii.399-400). But he trapped himself in an unsuccessful working out of a myth of identity. He has become mythological, of course, but his status as enigma cannot ignore his having proved himself a guilty creature sitting at a play. He exits, "loudly" and ironically, to "soldier's music" (V.ii.401-402). But that is Fortinbras' interpretation. An old regime is born again, where a new one might have reigned. The point was nicely made in the recent RSC *Hamlet,* when Fortinbras, suddenly remembering that he is king, moved back into center stage and coerced obeisance from the survivors in the throne room.

Notes

[1] *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare,* ed. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960), p. 98.

[2] *Johnson: Prose and Poetry,* ed. Mona Wilson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1951), p. 617.

[3] *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare,* ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: Capricorn, 1959), pp. 139-140.

[4] *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship,* I. IV. xiii.

[5] Iris Murdoch, *The Black Prince* (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 200.

[6] "Hamlet and His Problems," *Selected Essays: 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), p. 124.

[7] Murdoch, *Black Prince,* p. 200.

[8] *Shakspere: His Mind and Art* (New York: Capricorn, 1962), p. 156.

[9] *The WNET Dial* (Nov., 1980), 28.

[10] A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (New York: Meridian, 1955), p. 103.

[11] Bradley, pp. 86-87.

[12] "Shakespeare: The Middle Plays," *The Age of Shakespeare,* ed. Boris Ford (London: Penguin, 1960), p. 210.

[13] That is to say something very different than Eliot and others who impute the failure to Shakespeare. Cf. Virgil Whitaker: "In *Hamlet* Shakespeare failed to make his borrowed plot and his moral interests coalesce." *The Mirror Up to Nature* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1965), p. 201.

[14] Bradley, p. 111.

[15] Bradley, p. 113.

[16] Bradley, p. 84.

[17] "Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: The Analogy of Action," *The Idea of a Theater* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1953), pp. 109-154, *The Unnatural Scene* (London: Methuen, 1976), pp. 123-157, "Hamlet the Bonesetter," *Shakespeare Survey* XXX (1977), 103-115.

[18] "Hamlet: Not a Word of His Own," *Shakespeare's Studies* XIII (1980), 74.

[19] Goldstein, 77.

[20] *Christian Ritual and the World of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Bucknell, 1976), pp. 89-167.

[21] *The Singularity of Shakespeare, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 120.

[22] *Hamlet and Oedipus* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1949), pp. 99-190.

[23] *Hamlet's Absent Father* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1978), p. 24.

[24] Erlich, p. 63.

[25] Erlich, pp. 65-66.

[26] *Mousetrap: Structure and Meaning in "Hamlet"* (Toronto: U.T. Press, 1977), p. 162.

[27] Aldus, p. 166.

[28] *Decoding the Past* (New York: Knopf, 1983), pp. 240-280.

[29] "The Psychology of Hitlerism as a Response of the Lower Middle Classes to Continuing Insecurity" (1933), *The Analysis of Political Behavior* (Hamden, Conn., 1966), pp. 240-241.

[30] *Childhood and Society* (New York: Second Ed., Rev., 1963), p. 337.

[31] Loewenberg, p. 264.

[32] "Father-Fantasies and Father-Typing in Father-Separated Children," *Child Development* XVI (1946), 71.

[33] Loewenberg, p. 264.

[34] Loewenberg, pp. 279-280.

[35] *The Psychology of Jung* (New Haven: Yale, 1943), pp. 17-20.

[36] Campbell, *Portable Jung,* p. 311. *CW* XV, par. 114.

[37] Campbell, p. 229. *CW* VI, II, par. 620.

[38] "The Tragedies," *The Living Shakespeare,* ed. Robert Gittings (New York, 1960), p. 123.

[39] Campbell, PF). 25-26. *CW* VIII, p. 141

[40] Campbell p. 190, *CW* VI, par. 574.

[41] Campbell p. 200. *CW* VI, par. 588.

[42] Campbell p. 237. *CW* VI, par. 628.

[43] Campbell p. 230. *CW* VI, par. 608.

[44] Campbell p. 241. *CW* VI, par. 640.

[45] Campbell p. 242. *CW* VI, par. 641.

[46] Campbell p. 244. *CW* VI, par. 643.

[47] Campbell p. 245. *CW* VI, par. 644.

[48] "Glossary" to *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage, rev., 1965), p. 391.

[49] *CW* XVII, p. 198. Elsewhere, Jung says, "a larger mind bears the stamp of the feminine: it is endowed with a receptive and fruitful womb which can reshape what is strange and give it a familiar form." Quoted in Marie-Louise von Franz, *CG. Jung: His Myth in Our Time* (CG. Jung Foundation: G.P. Putnam, 1975), p. 145.

[50] *CW* IX, Part 2, par. 19.

[51] Whitmont, *Symbolic Quest,* p. 194.

[52] Whitmont, p. 190.

[53] Bernard Grebanier, *The Heart of Hamlet* (New York: Crowell, 1960). For a Jungian approach to Hamlet that relies heavily on Grebanier—with unfortunate results, I think—see James Kirsch, *Shakespeare's Royal Self* (New York: Putnam, 1966), pp. 3-183. An excellent psychoanalytic analysis of *Hamlet* is Bernard Paris, "Hamlet and His Problems: A Horneyan Analysis," *The Centennial Review,* XXI #1 (Winter, 1977), 36-66.

[54] Marie-Louise von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," *Man and His Symbols,* ed. C.G. Jung, Marie-Louise von Franz, and John Freeman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 178-179.

[55] Long, *The Unnatural Scene,* p. 127.

[56] "The Year's Contributions to Shakespearean Studies," *Shakespeare Survey* XXIII (1970), 149.

[57] Goldstein, 79.

[58] *Shakespeare of London* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949), p. 227.

[59] *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951), p. 369.

[60] Chute, p. 227.

[61] On Hamlet's failure to accomplish Claudius's "purgation," see O.B. Hardison, "Three Types of Renaissance Catharsis," *Renaissance Drama* (1969), 3-22.

[62] *Tragic Form in Shakespeare* (Princeton, 1972), p. 160.

[62] *William Shakespeare: A Reader's Guide* (New York, 1963), p. 324.

[64] *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (Princeton, 1973), p. 66.

[65] *Preface to 'Hamlet'* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1961), p. 98.

[66] *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* (New York, 1966), p. 238.

[67] "The Poet," *The Norton Reader* (New York: 4th Edition, 1977), p. 229, originally from *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933).

[68] *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1960), p. 235.

[69] "The Defense of the Illusion and the Creation of Myth," *English Institute Essays* (New York: Columbia, 1949), 76.

[70] *Complex/Archetypes/Symbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung* (New York: Pantheon, 1959), p. 20.

C. L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler (essay date 1986)

SOURCE: "Sight Lines on *Hamlet* and Shakespeare Tragedy," in *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development,* University of California Press, 1986, pp. 255-72.

[*In the following excerpt, Barber and Wheeler maintain that the psychological pattern in* Hamlet *involves Hamlet's "struggle to cope with the desecration of his heritage." The critics stress that this turmoil is the social reality which enables the play's psychological constructs to be expressed and which ensures the historical relevancy of* Hamlet.]

Piety, Outrage, and Theatrical Aggression in Hamlet

A psychological pattern is always an aspect of social life, an abstraction we make from observing an individual's way of coping with his relations to others. *Hamlet* is a play about disinheritance, experienced in its most drastic form, at the heart of a fully dramatized social world. It presents a hero who, though he should

be the embodiment of the heritage—"The glass of fashion and the mould of form, / Th' observ'd of all observers"—is "blasted with ecstasy" (III.i.153-54, 160). Hamlet's struggle to cope with the desecration of heritage, his outrageousness in response to outrage, his piety in spite of it, his struggle for expression—it is these social realities and gestures that make the play's psychological configurations expressible, and that enable *Hamlet* to keep its relevance through changing historical situations.

Freud provided a bridge from individual to social development in observing that the individual conscience, the cultural heritage as reflected in one's system of values and sense of self, is formed through the child's internalization of the culturally shaped values of the parents.[14] So too are individual attitudes toward and conceptions of the larger powers that sustain life. In a culture with an effectual religion, God is manifest in one's awareness of what validates and supports society, history, the universe. In a secularized culture, we still arrive, at maturity, at an awareness that the validating ground of individual life is larger than individuals. Acceptance of the parents' finitude and imperfection is part of the transfer of piety that recognizes the larger, culturally confirmed context as the source of the parents' being as well as the being of the child. A broader piety takes over from infantile dependence and, insofar as it does that, frees the child from the parents, permits him, in becoming a child of God, or a child of the times, to become a man.

Successful development permits the child to forgive the parents for not being gods; fixation along the road of development results in crippling investments of love and hate in idolatrous objects, parents or parent-substitutes. The deferred afflictions of the Oedipus complex, whether at the crisis of adolescence or erupting in later life, represent a crisis in the piety that normally sustains one's identity. In *Hamlet,* the father's return as a Ghost makes him the object of the son's idolatry. An idol is an inadequate image of the divine because it intervenes between the individual's worship and his awareness of the larger force in which he and his world are grounded. But his father's spirit is all that Prince Hamlet has. His lack of a stable, integrated image of the father at the core of himself makes the Ghost walk, creates the need to find him outside. And it allows filial piety to become an obsession. The Prince is trapped because his piety cannot get beyond the Ghost of his noble father, murdered by another father, ignoble, gross, revolting.

The Ghost, because it embodies the whole valid moral and social heritage, cuts off the protagonist (and to a large extent the play) from any wider allegiance. The nexus with what should be is almost entirely through Hamlet. Christian commentators, Roy Battenhouse, for instance, or Eleanor Prosser, point out that from a Christian point of view Hamlet embraces a sinful course in accepting the Ghost's charge to avenge his father's death, for "vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."[15] Hamlet pursues his ghostly father's will in place of God's will. To see the play from this vantage point, however, is to let us, and Hamlet, out of the modern world that this play helps to usher in; it is to propose an alternative that simply is not present within the play's fable. The fact that Hamlet is the legitimate heir makes him, will he nill he, the final court of appeal and authority that should bring Claudius to justice. It is an appalling situation of aloneness, an appalling task.

Hamlet has to meet the dismaying isolation of his secret, which Shakespeare makes us realize as soon as the others rejoin him after the Ghost has gone:

> I hold it fit that we shake hands and part,
> You, as your business and desire shall point you,
> For every man hath business and desire,
> Such as it is, and for my own poor part,
> I will go pray.

(I.v. 128-32)

Already there is the sense that nothing ordinary—"business and desire, / Such as it is"—matters. Hamlet's "and for my own poor part, / I will go pray," in its terrible sense of aloneness, edges on ironic recognition of his

situation, in which the religious dimension, the supernatural beyond the Ghost, is already out of range. We see the intensity of his suffering and isolation through the eyes of Ophelia in the next scene, where she reports that he has come to her closet looking "As if he had been loosed out of hell" (II.i.80). We feel his isolation too in the false diagnosis of Polonius, in Ophelia's helplessness, in his situation of being spied on, both by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and by the King and Polonius—with Ophelia as bait. Hamlet's heroic identity, his greatness, is his power of maintaining himself in his relation to the Ghost and in the vision of the world's corruption that goes with it.

In dramatizing this heroic striving, *Hamlet,* more than any other play, invites identification with the hero and yet does not fully guide us in what we are to make of him. We identify with all the tragic protagonists, of course; but we also regularly feel horror, dismay, or even something like amusement:

> LEAR: Dost thou call me fool, boy?
>
> FOOL: All thy other titles thou hast given away, that thou wast born with.
>
> (*Lr*. I.iv. 148-50)

We are aware, regularly, of more than the protagonist is, and this awareness balances the claims of the protagonist on us. But once Hamlet has seen the Ghost in the third scene, there is scarcely a moment in the action when anyone in the play, or in the audience, knows more than Hamlet knows. He even intimates that he sees through to the King's purposes in sending him to England: "I see a cherub that sees them" (IV.iii.48). Such judgments as are made on Hamlet are pointedly not to the point. We see through others with him, while the others are unable to see through him, to pluck out the heart of his mystery.

A curious impunity surrounds Hamlet. Although he is outrageous, insulting, impudent, people do not call him on it. After Hamlet has described the repulsiveness of old men to Polonius's face, the old man diverts indignation into objective observation: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (II.ii.205-6). Or again with Ophelia:

> HAMLET: I did love you once.
>
> OPHELIA: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
>
> HAMLET: You should not have believ'd me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I lov'd you not.
>
> OPHELIA: I was the more deceiv'd.
>
> (III.i.114-19)

The lack of direct response to Hamlet's outrageousness goes with the assumption that he is mad or deranged. Ophelia, who does not know how deeply his jilting has hurt her until she goes mad, says "O, help him, you sweet heavens!" and finally, "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" (lines 133, 150).

Even the King holds himself almost entirely in check, not taking up Hamlet's insults and insinuations:

> KING: How fares our cousin Hamlet?
>
> HAMLET: Excellent, i' faith, of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air, promisecramm'd—you cannot feed capons so.

KING: I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet, these words are not mine.

(III.ii.92-97)

Part of the other characters' helplessness, of course, comes from the sudden, shifting, half-hidden wit with which Hamlet attacks, as here, where he takes the would-be agreeable "How fares our cousin," *how do you do,* as though it were *how do you eat,* and answers "I eat the air" (*your promises*), implying *promises instead of the substance of the succession that you have taken from me.* "You cannot feed [even] capons so"—and, by implication, *I am no capon.* No wonder the King can say no more than "I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet, these words are not mine."

Only the Queen, in the pitch of excitement after the play-within-the-play, sets about wholeheartedly to rebuke her son, and she gets back, at once, better than she gives, as Hamlet turns her phrase: "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended." "Mother, you have my father much offended" (III.iv.9-10). When he has killed the man behind the arras, her natural humanity cries out: "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!" only to be put down at once by "A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king, and marry with his brother" (lines 27-29). Part of the tragedy, of course, is that his mother has forfeited the moral authority that might provide a vantage point from which to grieve for the "unseen good old man" (IV.i.12). There is thus no one to comment on the frightfulness with which Hamlet dismisses the death of Polonius when he discovers whom he has killed: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! / I took thee for thy better" (III.iv.31-32). Instead, Hamlet immediately returns to upbraiding his mother: "Leave wringing of your hands. Peace, sit you down, / And let me wring your heart" (lines 34-35).

As we watch the play, or are swept along in reading it, we are not invited to pause over the cruelty of Hamlet's taunts. The killing of Polonius makes more real the violence pent up in Hamlet; there is relief that he has reached to action, even if only in unpremeditated response, together with regret that it is not, as for a moment he thinks possible, the King he has killed. Polonius has been exhibited as something of a fool in his own right, a dotard version of the father-figure. The lack of compunction Hamlet feels about a man dead functions for us as a measure of the intensity of his deep sense of outrage about the people who matter. Indeed, his ruthlessness is somehow a testimony to his all-absorbing, heroic commitment to feeling the outrage done to life by the murder of his father and by what he perceives as his mother's infidelity.

The play is blind to Hamlet's faults except insofar as they are expressed by Hamlet himself. To insist on them, to go beyond Hamlet's own perceptions in dwelling on his destructiveness, his egotism, his ineffectualness and irresponsibility, is in a curious way discourteous, doing violence to an alliance with the sweet prince that audiences enjoy. When Hamlet plays hide-and-seek with those sent to find where he has hidden the body of Polonius, we enjoy his exhilarated fun in baffling everybody:

ROSENCRANTZ: What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

HAMLET: Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

(IV.ii.5-6)

There is a curious beauty about Hamlet's answer: it puts the death in the context of last things, suggesting a vision of mortality that makes life scarcely matter. But at such a moment, what an evasion, and how arrogant, how upstaging! That this is Hamlet's intention is manifest in the sequel about the sponge and the son of a king. And yet we are *with* Hamlet here as he puts the little eager terriers in their place.

We are with him even more, of course, when at last he is brought in, guarded, face to face with the King, who has seen the play, so that the chips are down between them:

> KING: NOW, Hamlet, where's Polonius?
>
> HAMLET: At supper.
>
> KING: At supper? where?
>
> HAMLET: Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten; a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table—that's the end.
>
> (IV.iii. 16-25)

This is the high point in the antics of Hamlet's madness and worth pausing over as a marvelous example of the way he keeps everyone else off balance by the displacements of wit: "At supper." "At supper? where?" The King, who should be on top, is maneuvered into the position of fall-guy. This technique of setting up the loaded leading question is of course standard with the Shakespearean clown or fool, and the discipline of writing such parts lay behind Shakespeare's handling of Hamlet's antic disposition. In effect, the Prince plays the fool's part as well as the hero's; his assumed madness gives him the equivalent of the court fool's license, which Shakespeare had recently exploited as a dramatic resource in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night.* Part of the fool's stock in trade was the pithy sententious generalization, suddenly brought home by fitting it to present company. Hamlet turns Polonius into a supper for politic worms, with as much relish as disgust—leaving behind all question of his own particular responsibility for the old man's death as he rises to sweeping statement: "we fat all creatures else to fat us." And meanwhile his invisible fool's-bladder keeps bobbing the King, showing him "how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (lines 30-31). His direct access to aggressive action against the King blocked, Hamlet plays the fool to enable himself to maintain the integrity of his hatred.

If we stop to add up Hamlet's actions and inactions, we find a catalogue of outrage and failure. But the play does not situate us to stop, does not provide anyone to help in the process of evaluation. No one in the play observes that Hamlet fails Ophelia. We see her and can collect from the fragments of her madness an idea of her profound shock from the cruel disappointment of maiden ardor, along with her grief for the father Hamlet killed. Her loss of Hamlet, indeed, is partly expressed through grief for her father. But Hamlet is off at sea; he is not brought to confront anything of how he has failed her. On the contrary, at her grave he is able to say, without any environing irony:

> I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all their quantity of love
> Make up my sum.

(V.i.269-71)

Hamlet arranges for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be "put to sudden death, / Not shriving time allow'd" (V.ii.46-47). "So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't" (line 56) is the only comment, from Horatio, on the drastic expedience with which Hamlet deals with what are, after all, only ignorant agents. Again, no one comments on his complete lack of a viable plan of practical action, even after his return from England. The nearest thing to such a comment is Horatio's practical reminder, while Hamlet rails against the King, that time is passing: "It must be shortly known to him from England / What is the issue of the business there" (V.ii.71-72). Hamlet's response—"It will be short; the interim's mine, / And a man's life's no more than to say 'one'" (lines 73-74)—is one of the great, heroic moments of the play. The current of resolution, so long diffused and roiled, sweeps deep and silent through the magical word "interim," as that word opens up after the strong

monosyllables. But the fact remains that he does not make any plan, accepting instead the initiative of the King and Laertes, with the result that it is not the King alone who dies, but also the Queen, Laertes, and Hamlet himself

In creating the role of Hamlet, Shakespeare, exploiting fully the resources of the new theater, could define a new position with respect to heritage, expressing loss of heritage with all its doubts, uncertainty, loathing of self and life, but also exhibiting a hero with strength to protect integrity against acquiescence in the corrupt world, on one side, or acquiescence in self-loathing, on the other. Hamlet is a potentially great man protecting his greatness, the greatness of the demand he makes on life, even as life fails or betrays that demand. What Hamlet has to meet this challenge, to master the enormously disruptive energies it releases in him, is his power of expression. He must save himself from suicide, and he does this in part by expressing his need for it, both directly and in violent self-contempt. It is also essential that he turn aggression outward, affirming the reality of corruption and violence. His power of expression works to prevent or divert him from taking direct action even as it gives theatrical release, assertive and ironic in the terms he establishes, to his aggression; but without it Hamlet could not maintain his wounded identity at all.

It is Hamlet's need for expression that lightens his spirits as soon as he hears that the players are coming. He uses them at once, calling for a speech that serves to identify what is working inside him. As in *1 Henry IV,* where we have a "play extempore" about a son's confrontation with his royal father, here we have a speech extempore, part of which Hamlet has by heart, about the destruction of a revered, aged king by a figure who is not restrained from action by any scruples whatever, "rugged Pyrrhus." It is a speech that, in its poised ambiguity, objectifies both Hamlet's feelings of grief and outrage "for a king, / Upon whose property and most dear life / A damn'd defeat was made," and Hamlet's wish that he could "make oppression bitter" by fattening "all the region kites / With this slave's offal" (II.ii.569-71, 578-80). We and Hamlet can experience both the horror of the killing of good old Priam and the terrible zest of it. It even swings around a moment of delay when Illium "stoops to his base," and Pyrrhus, distracted by the hideous crash, "like a neutral to his will and matter, / Did nothing" (lines 476, 481-82).

In developing Hamlet's preoccupation with the players, Shakespeare makes much of the use and abuse of expression and of its inadequacy as an answer to his protagonist's whole need. Hamlet's comments on acting rigorously subordinate the actors' need for expression to "the purpose of the playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (III.ii.20-24). Self is to be wholly absorbed in the discipline of playing as it looks beyond itself. Hamlet's whole discussion notably leaves out the personal motives, the need for self-preservation or reduplication, that animate the playing: "for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness" (III.ii.5-8). The individual's acting must fulfill, not disrupt, the team enterprise: no "necessary question of the play" (lines 42-43) must be neglected.

It is striking how fully *Hamlet* dramatizes the personal need for playing and formal theatrical action that is left out of Hamlet's account of the process as a professional discipline. Hamlet has "that within which passes show," but he is preoccupied by "actions that a man might play" (I.ii.85, 84). He feels the pressure toward theatrical violence that Kyd played on in *The Spanish Tragedy,* and he will often "tear a passion to tatters" (III.ii.9-10) in response to it. Dismayed by his own inaction, Hamlet laments:

> Yet I,
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
> Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
> And can say nothing.

(II.ii.566-69)

But in fact, of course, he is carried away in a torrent of words:

> Am I a coward?
> Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie throat
> As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
> Hah, 'swounds, I should take it.

(lines 571-76)

Hamlet, as usual, is the only one who sees the irony about Hamlet. And, as usual, unaffected by it, he proceeds at once to a further use of expression:

> I'll have these players
> Play something like the murther of my father
> Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,
> I'll tent him to the quick. If 'a do blench,
> I know my course.

(lines 594-98)

"The Murder of Gonzago" is intended by Hamlet to move acting to action by making the King proclaim his guilt. When it comes to the test, however, Shakespeare has Hamlet himself interrupt the necessary business of the play by aggressively summarizing its action instead of waiting for it to have its full effect on Claudius:

> 'A poisons him i' th' garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago, the story is extant, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murtherer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.
>
> OPHELIA: The King rises.
>
> (III.ii.261-65)

That the poisoner is the *"nephew* to the king" (line 244), as Hamlet blurts out at his entrance, makes what is acted, while replicating the crime of Claudius, simultaneously present a figure in Hamlet's relationship to Claudius reenacting the murder, as though to fit the crime exactly to the punishment, to "re-venge by re-presentation."[16]

The enormous poetic and dramatic creativity achieved in *Hamlet* depends in good part on this pressure to turn speech and acting into action. The need to channel aggression through verbal and theatrical expression in turn depends on the initial, given situation of the two powerful fathers, one murdered by the other, with Hamlet identified with both. Hamlet asserts himself by loathing Claudius; he asserts his father by loathing himself, including the repressed part of himself identified with Claudius's double crime of murder and incest. The constant discharge of cruelty at others is Hamlet's relief from the hideous suffering of his aggression toward himself. Release reaches manic proportions in the rhapsody of elation that follows the play-within-the-play. But the deep movement of the aggression that occupies Hamlet looks toward death, so that by the fifth act the universalizing of death in the graveyard is lyric release. The final havoc carries out the death-directed wish in action.

But whatever our conclusions when we add up Hamlet's actions, we are left with a sense of Hamlet as a moral hero in defeat, a sense of tragic loss, not just the sensational excitement of a revel in a blood bath. Why should

this be so? Part of our high sense of Hamlet in death is Shakespeare's skillful manipulation. In the previous scene, the satiric-lyrical universals of the graveyard have opened the floodgates, and the burial of Ophelia has given occasion for a new sort of self-affirmation. Then in the last scene Hamlet's gracious, sociable self is recovered and brought home to us at moments—with Osric for foil, for example—together with the resolution born of the acceptance of death:

> 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.220-22)

There is a staginess about some of it: Hamlet's apology to Laertes, for example, and Laertes' to Hamlet. But there is also Hamlet's concern, as he dies, about the succession, and about his "story," which Horatio must tell: "Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (lines 339-40). And we do feel, through these gestures, the abortive effort of a younger generation to renew society, a striving toward health.

Yet the tragic dignity and loss must be more than these final heroics—must be something earned, on the basis of a deeper striving. It must be something beyond the meaning we get if we simply reduce Hamlet's problem to the Oedipus complex—and yet it must be consistent with the presence of that complex, for the Freudian explanation clearly works. T. S. Eliot puts us on the way to part of an answer, I think, in his famous criticism of the play as "an artistic failure."[17] Eliot observed that "Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear. And the supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point: that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem" (p. 125). Eliot, responding to his own deepest preoccupations, as manifest later in his dramatic version of the Orestes-Hamlet theme, *The Family Reunion,* concluded that "Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* in so far as it is Shakespeare's [and not an adaptation of a lost earlier version, probably by Kyd], is a play dealing with the effect of a mother's guilt upon her son, and that Shakespeare was unable to impose this motive successfully upon the 'intractable material' of the old play" (p. 123). Hamlet's disgust for his mother "envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it; and nothing that Shakespeare can do with the plot can express Hamlet for him" (p. 125).

What Eliot ignores, focusing only on Hamlet's disgust in response to his guilty mother, is Hamlet's own sense of guilt—what the Freudian explanation makes central. Hamlet's guilt refers to his father not his mother; more accurately, it refers to his parricidal wish. It is this that cannot be given objective expression. The "possible action" that would correspond to this wish is not accessible, because the Ghost is a ghost. Hamlet cannot kill a ghost. Nor can he realize that the destructive force of his effort to serve the Ghost, to retrieve the heritage of his lost father, has its roots in the filial bond he struggles to keep intact by making it the entirety of his life. The given situation, Claudius's murder of the elder Hamlet, demands absolute loyalty to the memory of the idealized father and permits the diversion of the son's murderous wish from father to uncle. But since this repressed wish is unconsciously tied to the assumption that its enactment means death, Hamlet's hatred cannot be directed at Claudius without being deflected back onto himself as well. In the end, Hamlet is able to accept his destiny only when he has accepted death; he finally kills Claudius only when he himself has already received his death blow. It is Hamlet's "bafflement" in this situation that extends into the play the problem confronting its creator.

But *Hamlet* is, as Eliot said, a "puzzling" play, and "disquieting as is none of the others."[18] It is a play in which something gets out of hand. In it Shakespeare poses—and leaves open—the problem of control that later tragedies will master by an ironic balance. Fully achieved tragedy shows us, typically, a heroic protagonist rich in human values and commanding sympathy, but ultimately destructive. The action, in leading the

protagonist to his death, moves us toward ironic awareness of his role in necessitating the tragic outcome. Poised against the hero's aggressive self-assertion, and shaping our understanding of it, irony is the aggressive assertion of a vantage point on the protagonist by means of the dramatist's control over the whole action. Ironic awareness enables us to see, from the outside, the limitations and the destructive force of a figure who, like King Lear, is simultaneously the object of our full sympathy. In *Hamlet* we are invited to identify with the hero at the expense of comprehensive ironic perspective; there is no adequate basis for an outside, controlling perspective. The single-sided attitude it creates toward its hero is one of the striking differences between *Hamlet* and the ensuing tragedies. What the play does not provide is ruthless awareness of Hamlet, such awareness as we are to get of Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Antony, Coriolanus.

The play's failure to situate us to see its protagonist from any vantage point beyond that which Hamlet provides on himself extends Hamlet's failure to see past the Ghost, to develop a perspective on his majestic father beyond his immediate and absolute dedication of himself to identification with the Ghost. We said earlier that the Ghost gives theatrical embodiment to the overwhelming pressure of a potentially disabling predicament. The Ghost is theatrical in the straightforward sense that it is the enactment of a fantasy possible only in the theater. The fantasy comes in answer to the wish Hamlet has earlier recognized as beyond fulfillment in remembering his father: "'A was a man, take him for all in all, / I shall not look upon his like again" (I.ii. 188-89). But with the appearance of the Ghost to him, Hamlet is subjected, as we are with him, to a devastating theatrical power. The creation of the Ghost is an experiment in theatrical aggression that forecloses the possibility of ironic control. Shakespeare mimes omnipotence of mind to transform an impossible fantasy into theatrical actuality, unleashing the profoundly disruptive powers of the new theater in an open-ended way to engage and unsettle the audience as well as those who, within the play, encounter this "dreaded sight" beyond the reach of any controlling perspective.

The harrowing force of the Ghost's presence is registered fully, first in the responses of Horatio and the sentinels in the magnificent opening scene, then in Hamlet's agonized questions on the battlements:

> What may this mean,
> That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
> Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
> Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
> So horridly to shake our disposition
> With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
> Say why is this? wherefore? what should we do?

(I.iv.51-57)

As the Ghost departs Hamlet thinks he can participate in this power, which answers to a deep need within himself:

> My fate cries out
> And makes each petty artere in this body
> As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
> Still am I call'd.

(lines 81-84)

But despite the Prince's conviction here that the Ghost beckons to him with the call of enabling fate, and despite his subsequent absolute commitment to avenging his father's death, for Hamlet the Ghost's appearance puts out of reach the solution it seems at first to provide.

In Hamlet's confrontation with the spirit of his dead father, the overpowering pressure that Shakespeare copes with by creating the Ghost becomes the situation the protagonist must cope with within the play. Hamlet's means of coping is his use of theatrical aggression to engage and unsettle his audience within the play. In taking on a theatrical role like that of the licensed fool and adding to it the special heroic dimension of his extraordinary power to generalize skepticism and disillusion, Hamlet can keep his enemies at a distance while maintaining himself in the face of a potentially self-destructive predicament in which the inhibitions blocking direct action are insurmountable. And by using the players to stage "something like the murther of my father / Before mine uncle" (II.ii.595-96), he can give aggressive theatrical embodiment to the traumatic event revealed to him by the Ghost, releasing himself from its paralyzing force, at least momentarily, by directing it against Claudius.

In presenting the play-within-the-play, Hamlet is preoccupied with a motive and a cue for passion that come not from the fiction and the rhythm of an integrated dramatic performance but from within, and from offstage. To look at the place of *Hamlet* in Shakespeare's development is to consider how the cue for the whole play comes from Shakespeare, as the cue for the play-within-the-play comes from Hamlet. In *Hamlet* we can see the shift from the earlier work, with its base in a cherishing, parental sensibility that avoids full confrontation with fathers, to the confrontations with authority and heritage, grounded in relationship to the father, that characterize the great tragedies. The next section will take up the matter of how the hostility toward a good father not dealt with in *Hamlet* can be seen in what animates Iago in his enterprise of bringing out the weakness of a martial hero rather like Hamlet's father. Iago uses only what is potentially within his victim to make Othello destroy himself in the belief that he had been betrayed by his wife, as King Hamlet was betrayed. The naked parricidal motive against a gracious figure, in the attempt to become "no less than all" (*Lr.* III.iii.24), only finally gets physical enactment in the dagger that so horrifies Macbeth as he makes his way toward the murder of Duncan. In *Hamlet,* both Hamlet and Shakespeare understand as wholly separate objects of idolatry and hatred the single figure of a father who engenders the divided response of enduring loyalty and deadly opposition.

But if Hamlet's situation in the play reflects Shakespeare's predicament in constructing it, the play, in following out the destructive consequences of Hamlet's filial distress, also dramatizes the heroic and potentially paralyzing dimensions of a recurring cultural crisis that has its roots in Shakespeare's age and reaches into our own. *Hamlet* situates its hero, and its audience, at the node of despair and revolutionary protest, both of which draw perennially on heroic expectations whose roots are in infancy but whose definition is itself a heritage of culture:

> 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 mildewed ear,
> Blasting his wholesome brother.

(III.iv.55-65)

To vindicate the one, the other must be destroyed. Because in the almost four hundred years since *Hamlet* was written, Western men have repeatedly found themselves in predicaments akin to its hero's, the play's open-ended structure has taken up into itself unresolved energies of commitment and protest in successive

generations. As Hazlitt put it, "It is *we* who are Hamlet. The play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history."[19] This is a great destiny for a work of art, though there is a further kind of power in fully achieved tragedy.

In considering the radically disruptive, *potentially* revolutionary energies in *Hamlet,* it is crucial to recognize, however, that neither the hero nor the play envisages any alternative society. Marx pointed out how revolutionary groups have ennobled their goals by dressing themselves in the borrowed robes of earlier epochs, the English Puritans as Old Testament prophets, the French revolutionaries as Roman Republicans.[20] In Shakespeare's own time the revolutionary appeal of the Reformation to the primitive church was being urged by the radical religious minority—for example, in the Marprelate tracts.[21] The revolutionary impulse to think of innovation as the restoration of a pristine integrity clearly reflects psychological roots similar to those which animate Hamlet's expressions of disgust, protest, and the need for vindication. But there is no suggestion whatever in *Hamlet* of any alternative to established social forms, despite the Prince's drastic expression of their corruption and their limitations: "Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretch'd heroes the beggars' shadows" (II.ii.263-64).

The hero's criticism of society is shaped by the tradition of Christian disillusion, *de contemptu mundi,* rather than Protestant protest:

> HAMLET: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.
>
> CLAUDIUS: What dost thou mean by this?
>
> HAMLET: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar.
>
> (IV.iii.27-31)

The Christian discipline of contemplation, as in, say, a representation of the Dance of Death, used such recognitions to turn the heart away from the world to allegiance to Christ.[22] One response to Hamlet's predicament would be to turn from the world to religious objects—the response that Eliot dramatized in *The Family Reunion,* or "Follow the Furies," as that play was first titled.

But Hamlet does not move from loss to the promise of resurrection in Christ, as the Burial of the Dead invites mourners to do. Part of the tremendous originality of *Hamlet* is to present what might have been a religious problem without a religious solution: in other words, a potentially revolutionary situation. For Hamlet, however, there is neither the hope of resolution of later centuries focused on revolutionary change, nor the traditional Christian hope of resolution through participation in Christ's sacrifice. Hamlet is a hero because he maintains the core of his commitment, even though he confronts the revolutionary potential of the Oedipal predicament without any way to know what it is, without benefit of clergy, so to speak. Instead, the Ghost provides a father in some ways godlike, in which the hero invests something like worship, while the hero, in going about his father's business, invites our participation in his involuntary and imperfect sacrifice.

Hamlet is not, I think, a fully achieved tragedy, but rather a heroic-prophetic play with a "tragical" ending—in its vastly more complex and meaningful way, a play like *Tamburlaine.* It differs from *Tamburlaine* in presenting, not heroic outrage by direct assault upon tradition, but a crisis in the transmission of heritage that leads to heroic outrage. In its concern with inheritance, and in its focus on desperation—on the need for revenge as the core of a need for expression and vindication, on passive vulnerability struggling to become active, on language of magical expectation contorted into distraction, wit, or madness—*Hamlet* is remarkably like the one early play outside Marlowe's work that is both seminal and in its own right great, Kyd's *Spanish*

Tragedy. Both plays call for an identification with the hero's alienation that excludes critical perspective. As with Hieronimo's dedication to avenging his son's death, Hamlet's tie to the Ghost of his father is so total, with no one there except him to evaluate it, that the play cannot dramatize an understanding of Hamlet's destructiveness from a tragic perspective larger than his own. My own feeling is that *Hamlet* is not fully under control, just because, as Eliot said, too much of the author is in the Prince—though its very open-endedness is what, *pace* Eliot, makes the play's distinctive greatness. But to bring under full artistic control what Shakespeare was dealing with, there was unfinished business, notably the business of seeing through the ideal father.

Notes

[14] In *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis,* Freud writes: "The child's super-ego is in fact constructed on the model not of its parents but of its parents' super-ego; the contents which fill it are the same and it becomes the vehicle of tradition and of all the time-resisting judgements of value which have propagated themselves in this manner from generation to generation" (*Standard Edition,* vol. 22, p. 67).

[15] For Battenhouse, "Hamlet's inability to discriminate this fact [that the Ghost is a "damned spirit"] is at the core of his tragedy, . . . a tragedy inseparable from his own decayed faith" (Roy Battenhouse, "The Ghost in *Hamlet:* A Catholic 'Linchpin'?" *Studies in Philology* 48 [1951]: 192). See also chap. 4 of his *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 204-66. On the basis of extensive readings in both Protestant and Catholic writings on ghosts, Prosser finds a "definitive test": "No matter how convincing a spirit might be in every other respect, if it urged any action or made any statement that violated the teachings of the Church, it was an agent of the Devil" (Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967], p. 111).

[16] David Willbern, from whose work in progress this phrase is borrowed, observes that the need to do this is deeply grounded in the psychology of revenge and is a consistent feature of the revenge-play form, with its plays-(and audiences)-within-plays.

[17] T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," *Selected Essays,* new ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950), p. 123.

[18] Ibid. In considering *Hamlet* in relation to Shakespeare's power of development, it is well to recall Ella Freeman Sharpe's telling distinction: "The poet is not Hamlet. Hamlet is what he might have been if he had not written the play of *Hamlet*" (*Collected Papers on Psycho-Analysis,* ed. Marjorie Brierly [London: Hogarth Press, 1950], p. 205).

[19] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (1817), ed. Ernest Rhys (London: Everyman's Library, n.d.), p. 79.

[20] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), pp. 15-17. Marx distinguished such self-sanctioning by identification with a heroic past from his own call for a proletarian revolution: "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future" (p. 18). In "The Resurrected Romans" (*The Tradition of the New* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965]), Harold Rosenberg turns Marx's observation back against the revolutionary optimism it was designed to serve: "The true image of the historical drama would be less *The Communist Manifesto,* with its symmetrical human movements, than *Hamlet,* in which those on stage are exposed at all times to the never-quieted dead" (p. 168). That *Hamlet* is no longer regarded as Shakespeare's preeminent masterpiece, as it was in the age of romantic and revolutionary enthusiasm, may be partly because we are more aware of the problematic character of revolutionary hopes.

[21] Some of the common players, in the period when Shakespeare was starting in the theater, ventured to enter the Marprelate controversy on the establishment side, and after initial encouragement, were told firmly to leave religious matters alone. The Anglican establishment, under Archbishop Whitgift, was savagely repressing the radicals, resisting any further development of the reformation tendency. See E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. 1, pp. 261, 295.

[22] Theodore Spencer explored Christian attitudes toward death in relation to the drama in *Death and Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).

Janet Adelman (essay date 1992)

SOURCE: "Man and Wife Is One Flesh: Hamlet and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body," in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest,* Routledge, 1992, pp. 11-37.

[*In the following essay, Adelman explores the way in which Gertrude disrupts the familial and sexual relationships in* Hamlet, *and argues that her presence disables the son's relationship with the father.*]

In *Hamlet,* the figure of the mother returns to Shakespeare's dramatic world, and her presence causes the collapse of the fragile compact that had allowed Shakespeare to explore familial and sexual relationships in the histories and romantic comedies without devastating conflict; this collapse is the point of origin of the great tragic period. The son's acting out of the role of the father, his need to make his own identity in relationship to his conception of his father—the stuff of *1 and 2 Henry IV* and *Julius Caesar*—becomes deeply problematic in the presence of the wife/mother: for her presence makes the father's sexual role a disabling crux in the son's relationship with his father. At the same time, the relations between the sexes that had been imagined in the comedies without any serious confrontation with the power of female sexuality suddenly are located in the context of the mother's power to contaminate, with the result that they can never again be imagined in purely holiday terms. Here again, *Hamlet* stands as a kind of watershed, subjecting to maternal presence the relationships previously exempted from that presence.[1]

From the perspective of *Hamlet,* the father-son relationships of the earlier plays begin to look like oedipal dramas from which the chief object of contention has been removed. Both the *Henry IV* plays and *Julius Caesar* manage their sophisticated psychological explorations in effect by denying that women have anything to do with these explorations, ultimately by denying the complications that the mother poses for the father-son relationship. Before *Hamlet,* this relationship tends to be enacted in the political rather than the domestic sphere, and in the absence of women. Insofar as the triangulated conflict characteristic of oedipal material makes its way into these plays, the triangle is composed of a son and two fathers, not of a son and his parents; the son's identity is defined by his position between the fathers, not between father and mother. The *Henry IV* plays and *Julius Caesar* both strikingly represent the defining act of the son's manhood as the process of choosing between two fathers; in both, the son attempts to become fully himself by identifying with the true father rather than the false, an identification signaled by the son's willingness to carry out the true father's wish that the false father be disowned or killed. But the choice becomes increasingly problematic in these plays. In *1 and 2 Henry IV,* it is a relatively easy matter for Hal to kill off that "father ruffian" Falstaff (*1 Henry IV,* 2.4.254) by exiling him, thus becoming "father" to his brothers (*2 Henry IV,* 5.2.57) and the embodiment of his father's spirit (*2 Henry IV,* 5.2.125); in this cross-generational alliance, he becomes himself in effect by choosing to become his father. Although we may feel that he has diminished himself in his choice, the plays do not finally encourage us to wish other choices on him or to dwell at length on the selfhood he has lost. The choice and its outcome are far more complex in *Julius Caesar,* where becoming oneself by becoming one's ancestral father necessitates killing off—literally, not symbolically—a much more ambiguously powerful father than Falstaff. Brutus is pushed toward conspiracy partly by his desire to live up to the image of his great

ancestor and namesake, Junius Brutus, the slayer of tyrants (see, for example, 1.2.158; 1.3.82, 146; 2.1.53, 322). But immediately after Brutus has killed the man whom he himself sees as "the foremost man of all this world" (4.3.22), his enabling ancestral father drops out of the play; reference to him entirely disappears. In place of this father, the figure of Caesar increasingly comes to loom like a paternal ghost over the play, obliterating the memory of the heroic father on whom Brutus had hoped to found his selfhood. This interchange of fathers neatly poses one aspect of Brutus's tragic dilemma: Brutus kills one father apparently to satisfy the wishes of another, only to discover that he has slain the wrong father, that the dead father is not only more powerful but more powerfully his; only in killing Caesar—only as Caesar says "Et tu, Brutus?"—does he come to realize his position as Caesar's son and hence to suffer the disabling guilt that is the consequence of parricide.[2]

The triangulated choice between two fathers that is characteristic of these plays is at the center of *Hamlet;* here, as in the earlier plays, assuming masculine identity means taking on the qualities of the father's name—becoming a Henry, a Brutus, or a Hamlet—by killing off a false father. Moreover, the whole weight of the play now manifestly creates one father true and the other false. Nonetheless, the choice is immeasurably more difficult for Hamlet than for his predecessors; for despite their manifest differences, the fathers in *Hamlet* keep threatening to collapse into one another, annihilating in their collapse the son's easy assumption of his father's identity. The initiating cause of this collapse is Hamlet's mother: her failure to serve her son as the repository of his father's ideal image by mourning him appropriately is the symptom of her deeper failure to distinguish properly between his father and his father's brother.[3] Even at the start of the play, before the ghost's crucial revelation, Gertrude's failure to differentiate has put an intolerable strain on Hamlet by making him the only repository of his father's image, the only agent of differentiation in a court that seems all too willing to accept the new king in place of the old. Her failure of memory—registered in her undiscriminating sexuality—in effect defines Hamlet's task in relation to his father as a task of memory: as she forgets, he inherits the burden of differentiating, of idealizing and making static the past; hence the ghost's insistence on remembering (1.5.33, 91) and the degree to which Hamlet registers his failure to avenge his father as a failure of memory (4.4.40). Hamlet had promised the ghost to remember him in effect by becoming him, letting his father's commandment live all alone within his brain; but the intensity of Hamlet's need to idealize in the face of his mother's failure makes his father inaccessible to him as a model, hence disrupts the identification from which he could accomplish his vengeance. As his memory of his father pushes increasingly in the direction of idealization, Hamlet becomes more acutely aware of his own distance from that idealization and hence of his likeness to Claudius,[4] who is defined chiefly by his difference from his father. Difference from the heroic ideal represented in Old Hamlet becomes the defining term common to Claudius and Hamlet: the very act of distinguishing Claudius from his father—"no more like my father / Than I to Hercules" (1.2.152-53)—forces Hamlet into imaginative identification with Claudius. The intensity of Hamlet's need to differentiate between true father and false thus confounds itself, disabling his identification with his father and hence his secure identity as son.

If Gertrude's presence in *Hamlet* undoes the strategy by which father-son relations are protected in the Lancastrian tetralogy and in *Julius Caesar,* it simultaneously undoes the strategy that protects sexual relations in the romantic comedies: in *Hamlet,* both kinds of relationship are in effect contaminated by their relocation in the presence of the mother. Maternal absence is as striking in these comedies as in the tetralogy. And if, in the histories, this absence functions to enable the son's assumption of his father's identity, here it functions to protect comic possibility itself by sustaining the illusion that the endlessly appealing girls of the comedies will never become fully sexual women and hence will never lose their androgynous charm: having no mothers, they need not become mothers. Despite the degree to which marriage is the ostentatious goal of Shakespeare's romantic comedies, these plays rarely look forward to the sexual consummation that seals marriage; even *A Midsummer Night's Dream* does so only in the context of a series of magical protections against danger. The comedies tend rather to deflect attention away from female sexuality through a variety of devices: through a comic closure that defers consummation, through the heroine's sometimes unresolved transvestitism or allusion to the male actor who will remain when the play is over and costumes are removed, even through the

insistent cuckoldry jokes—jokes that serve both to deflect the imagined sexual act away from the male wooer and to defer it into the indefinite future, where, as Lavatch will say in a different mood, "the knaves come to do that for me which I am aweary of (*All's Well,* 1.3.41). The absence of fully imagined female sexuality is, I think, what enables the holiday tone of these plays; that sexuality is for Shakespeare the stuff of tragedy, not comedy.

The female sexuality largely absent from the comedies invades *Hamlet* in the person of Gertrude, and, once there, it utterly contaminates sexual relationship, disabling holiday. In her presence, Hamlet sees his task as the disruption of marriage itself: "I say we will have no mo marriage" (3.1.149), he says to Ophelia as she becomes contaminated in his eyes, subject to the same "frailty" that names his mother.[5] As he comes to identify himself with his cuckolded father—his "imaginations are as foul / As Vulcan's stithy" (3.2.83-84)—he can think of Ophelia only as a cuckold-maker, like his mother: "if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them" (3.1.139-41). Moreover, Ophelia fuses with Gertrude not only as potential cuckold-maker but also as potential mother:

> Get thee to a nunnery. Why, wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. (3.1.121-24)

The implicit logic is: why would you be a breeder of sinners like me? In the gap between "breeder of sinners" and "I," Gertrude and Ophelia momentarily collapse into one figure. It is no wonder that there can be no more marriage: Ophelia becomes dangerous to Hamlet insofar as she becomes identified in his mind with the contaminating maternal body, the mother who has borne him.

Hamlet thus redefines the son's position between two fathers by relocating it in relation to an indiscriminately sexual maternal body that threatens to annihilate the distinction between the fathers and hence problematizes the son's paternal identification; at the same time, the play conflates the beloved with this betraying mother, undoing the strategies that had enabled marriage in the comedies. The intrusion of the adulterous mother thus disables the solutions of history and comedy as Shakespeare has imagined them; in that sense, her presence initiates tragedy. But how can we understand the mother whose presence has the capacity to undermine the accommodations to which Shakespeare had come? Why should the first mother powerfully present in Shakespeare since the period of his earliest works be portrayed as adulterous? Why should her adulterous presence coincide with the start of Shakespeare's great tragic period?

Given her centrality in the play, it is striking how little we know about Gertrude; even the extent of her involvement in the murder of her first husband is left unclear. We may want to hear her shock at Hamlet's accusation of murder—"Almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king and marry with his brother" (3.4.28-29)—as evidence of her innocence[6]; but the text permits us to hear it alternatively as shock either at being found out or at Hamlet's rudeness. The ghost accuses her at least indirectly of adultery[7] and incest—Claudius is "that incestuous, that adulterate beast" (1.5.42)—but he neither accuses her of nor exonerates her from the murder. For the ghost, as for Hamlet, her chief crime is her uncontrolled sexuality; that is the object of their moral revulsion, a revulsion as intense as anything directed toward the murderer Claudius. But the Gertrude we see is not quite the Gertrude they see. And when we see her in herself, apart from their characterizations of her, we tend to see a woman more muddled than actively wicked; even her famous sensuality is less apparent than her conflicted solicitude both for her new husband and for her son.[8] She is capable from the beginning of a certain guilty insight into Hamlet's suffering ("I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father's death and our o'er-hasty marriage" [2.2.56-57]). Insofar as she follows Hamlet's instructions in reporting his madness to Claudius (3.4.189-90; 4.1.7), she seems to enact every son's scenario for the good mother, choosing his interests over her husband's. But she may of course believe that he is mad and think that she is reporting accurately to her husband; certainly her courageous defense of her husband in their next appearance together—where she bodily restrains Laertes, as 4.5.122 specifies—suggests that she has

not wholly adopted Hamlet's view of Claudius. Here, as elsewhere, the text leaves crucial aspects of her action and motivation open.[9] Even her death is not quite her own to define. Is it a suicide designed to keep Hamlet from danger by dying in his place?[10] She knows that Claudius has prepared the cup for Hamlet, and she shows unusual determination in disobeying Claudius's command not to drink it ("Gertrude, do not drink. / I will, my lord" [5.2.294-95]). In her last moment, her thoughts seem to be all for Hamlet; she cannot spare Claudius even the attention it would take to blame him ("O my dear Hamlet! / The drink, the drink! I am poison'd" [5.2.315-16].) Muddled, fallible, fully human, she seems ultimately to make the choice that Hamlet would have her make. But even here she does not speak clearly; her character remains relatively closed to us.

The lack of clarity in our impressions of Gertrude contributes, I think, to the sense that the play lacks, in Eliot's famous phrase, an "objective correlative."[11] For the character of Gertrude as we see it becomes for Hamlet—and for *Hamlet*—the ground for fantasies quite incongruent with it; although she is much less purely innocent than Richard Ill's mother, like that mother she becomes the carrier of a nightmare that is disjunct from her characterization as a specific figure. This disjunction is, I think, the key to her role in the play and hence to her psychic power: her frailty unleashes for Hamlet, and for Shakespeare, fantasies of maternal malevolence, of maternal spoiling, that are compelling exactly as they are out of proportion to the character we know, exactly as they seem therefore to reiterate infantile fears and desires rather than an adult apprehension of the mother as a separate person.

These fantasies begin to emerge as soon as Hamlet is left alone on stage:

> O that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
> 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. That it should come to this!
> But two months dead . . .

(1.2.129-38)

This soliloquy establishes the initial premises of the play, the psychic conditions that are present even before Hamlet has met with the ghost and has been assigned the insupportable task of vengeance. And what Hamlet tells us in his first words to us is that he feels his own flesh as sullied and wishes to free himself from its contamination by death, that the world has become as stale and unusable to him as his own body, and that he figures all this deadness and staleness and contamination in the image of an unweeded garden gone to seed—figures it, that is, in the familiar language of the fall. And he further tells us that this fall has been caused not by his father's death, as both Claudius and Gertrude seem to assume in their conventional consolations, but by his mother's remarriage,[12] the "this" he cannot specify for fourteen lines, the "this" that looms over the soliloquy, not quite nameable and yet radically present, making his own flesh—"this . . . flesh"—dirty, disrupting his sense of the ongoing possibility of life even as it disrupts his syntax.

Hamlet's soliloquy is in effect his attempt to locate a point of origin for the staleness of the world and his own pull toward death, and he discovers this point of origin in his mother's body. He tells us that the world has been transformed into an unweeded garden, possessed by things rank and gross, because his mother has remarried. And if the enclosed garden—the garden unpossessed—traditionally figures the Virgin Mother, this garden, full of seed, figures his mother's newly contaminated body: its rank weeds localize what Hamlet will later call the "rank corruption" of her sexuality (3.4.150-51), the "weeds" that will grow "ranker" if that

sexuality is not curbed (3.4.153-54).[13] In this highly compacted and psychologized version of the fall, death is the sexualized mother's legacy to her son: maternal sexuality turns the enclosed garden into the fallen world and brings death into that world by making flesh loathsome.[14] If Hamlet's father's death is the first sign of mortality, his mother's remarriage records the desire for death in his own sullied flesh. For in the world seen under the aegis of the unweeded garden, the very corporality of flesh marks its contamination: Hamlet persistently associates Claudius's fleshiness with his bloated sexuality—transforming the generalized "fatness of these pursy times" (3.4.155) into the image of the "bloat king" tempting his mother to bed (3.4.184)—as though in its grossness flesh was always rank, its solidness always sullied.[15]

The opening lines of the soliloquy point, I think, toward a radical confrontation with the sexualized maternal body as the initial premise of tragedy, the fall that brings death into the world: Hamlet in effect rewrites Richard Ill's sense that he has been spoiled in his mother's womb as the condition of mortality itself. The structure of *Hamlet*—and, I will argue, of the plays that follow from *Hamlet*—is marked by the struggle to escape from this condition, to free the masculine identity of both father and son from its origin in the contaminated maternal body. Hamlet's father's death is devastating to Hamlet—and to Shakespeare—partly, I think, because it returns Hamlet to this body, simultaneously unmaking the basis for the son's differentiation from the mother and the heroic foundation for masculine identity that Shakespeare had achieved in the histories.[16] As in a dream, the plot-conjunction of father's funeral and mother's remarriage expresses this return: it tells us that the idealized father's absence releases the threat of maternal sexuality, in effect subjecting the son to her annihilating power. But the dream-logic of this plot-conjunction is also reversible; if the father's death leads to the mother's sexualized body, the mother's sexualized body, I will argue, leads to the father's death. For the conjunction of funeral and marriage simultaneously expresses two sentences for the son: both "My idealized father's absence leaves me subject to my mother's overwhelming power," and "The discovery of my mother's sexuality kills my idealized father for me, making him unavailable as the basis for my identity." This fantasy-conjunction thus defines the double task of Hamlet and of Shakespeare in the plays to come: if Hamlet attempts both to remake his mother as an enclosed garden in 3.4 and to separate the father he idealizes from the rank place of corruption, Shakespearean tragedy and romance will persistently work toward the desexualization of the maternal body and the recreation of a bodiless father, untouched by her contamination.

A small psychological allegory at the beginning of the play—the exchange between Horatio and Marcellus about the ghost's disappearance—suggests what is at stake in this double task. The first danger in *Hamlet* is the father's "extravagant and erring spirit" (1.1.159) wandering in the night, the father who is—Horatio tells us—"like a guilty thing" (1.1.153).[17] As though in a kind of ghostly aubade, this father vanishes at the sound of the cock, who "with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat / Awake[s] the god of day" (1.1.156-57). At the approach of the sun-god, the guilty father is banished; and Marcellus's christianizing expansion of this conjunction explicates his banishment:

> It faded on the crowing of the cock.
> Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
> Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
> This bird of dawning singeth all night long;
> And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,
> The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
> No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
> So hallow'd and so gracious is that time.

(1.1.162-69)

Through an incipient pun, Marcellus transforms the god of day into the Son who makes the night wholesome because he is born from the mother's de-sexualized body; and the dangers he protects against are increasingly

identified not only with the father's guilty spirit but with the dark female powers of the night. The sequence here—from guilty thing, to sun-god, to the Son whose birth banishes the witch—follows the logic of a purifying fantasy: the female body of the night can be cleansed only as the guilty father gives way to the sun-god, allowing for the emergence of the purified Son.[18]

The exchange between Horatio and Marcellus predicts both Hamlet's confrontation with the night-dangers of the female body and the fantasy-solution to that confrontation: it establishes the Son born of a bodiless father and a purified mother as the only antidote to her power. And it specifically predicts Hamlet's need to remake his father as Hyperion, his attempt to find a safe basis for his own identity as son in the father he would remake pure. As though in response to this initial encounter with the impure father, the initial strategy of both Hamlet (in the soliloquy) and *Hamlet* is to split the father in two,[19] deflecting his guilt onto Claudius and reconstituting him in the form of the bodiless sun-god:

> 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. (1.2.137-40)

The identification of Old Hamlet with Hyperion makes him benignly and divinely distant, separate from ordinary genital sexuality and yet immensely potent, his sexual power analogous to God's power to impregnate the Virgin Mother (often imaged as Spirit descending on the sun's rays) and to such Renaissance mythologizings of this theme as the operation of the sun on Chrysogonee's moist body (*The Faerie Queene,* 3.6.7). Ordinary genital sexuality then becomes the province of Claudius the satyr: below the human, immersed in the body, he becomes everything Hyperion/Old Hamlet is not, and the agent of all ill.

This work of splitting is already implicit in Hamlet's initial image of his mother's body as fallen garden, for that image itself makes a physiologically impossible claim: if Claudius's rank and gross possession now transforms the garden that is the mother's body, then it must not before have been possessed. Insofar as the soliloquy expresses Hamlet's sense of his mother's body as an enclosed garden newly breached, it implies the presence of a formerly unbreached garden; the alternatives that govern Hamlet's imagination of his mother's body are the familiar ones of virgin and whore, closed or open, wholly pure or wholly corrupt. And the insistence that the garden has just been transformed functions to exonerate his father, separating him from his mother's sexualized body: it is the satyr Claudius, not the sun-god father, who has violated the maternal space. Literalized in the plot, the splitting of the father thus evokes the ordinary psychological crisis in which the son discovers the sexuality of his parents, but with the blame handily shifted from father onto another man as unlike father as possible—and yet as like, hence his mother; in effect, the plot itself serves as a cover-up, legitimizing disgust at paternal sexuality without implicating the idealized father. But thus arbitrarily separated, these fathers are always prone to collapse back into one another. The failure to differentiate between Old Hamlet and Claudius is not only Gertrude's: the play frequently insists on their likeness even while positing their absolute difference;[20] for the sexual guilt of the father—his implication in the mother's body—is its premise, its unacknowledged danger. Even Hamlet's attempt to imagine a protective father in the soliloquy returns him to this danger:

> 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 . . .

(1.2.139-46)

This image of parental love is so satisfying to Hamlet in part because it seems to enfold his mother safely within his father's protective embrace: by protecting her against the winds of heaven, he simultaneously protects against her, limiting and controlling her dangerous appetite. But as soon as that appetite has been invoked, it destabilizes the image of paternal control, returning Hamlet to the fact of his father's loss: for Gertrude's appetite is always inherently frightening, always potentially out of control; as the image of the unweeded garden itself implied, it has always required a weeder to manage its over-luxuriant growth.[21] The existence of Gertrude's appetite itself threatens the image of the father's godlike control; and in his absence, Gertrude's appetite rages, revealing what had been its potential for voraciousness all along. Having sated herself in a celestial bed, she now preys on garbage (1.5.55-57); and her indifferent voraciousness threatens to undo the gap between then and now, virgin and whore, Hyperion and satyr, on which Hamlet's defensive system depends. Despite the ghost's insistence on the difference, sating oneself in bed and preying on garbage sound suspiciously like the same activity: the imagery of devouring common to both tends to flatten out the distinction. "Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed / And batten on this moor?" Hamlet asks his mother (3.4.66-67), insisting again on a difference that seems largely without substance, inadvertently collapsing the distance between the idealized and the debased versions of Gertrude's appetite and hence between the brothers she feeds on. But in fact the strenuousness of the opposition between them has indicated their resemblance all along: what they have in common is an appetite for Gertrude's appetite; and her appetite can't tell the difference between them.

The ghost's revelation of Gertrude's adultery is horrifying not only because it reveals that she has not been faithful to him—her rapid remarriage has already done that—but also because it threatens to undo the structure of difference that Hamlet has had to maintain in order to keep his father and Claudius apart. For if Gertrude's appetite for the two men is the same, then Old Hamlet is as fully implicated in her sexuality as Claudius. Hence in part Hamlet's shock when he meets the father he has idealized so heavily: when Old Hamlet appears to his son, not in his mind's idealizing eye (1.2.185) but in the dubious form of the ghost, he reveals not only Claudius's but also his own "foul crimes done in [his] days of nature" (1.5.12). The fathers Hamlet tries so strenuously to keep separated keep threatening to collapse into one another; even when he wants to kill one to avenge the other, he cannot quite tell them apart. In 3.3, on his way to his mother's closet, he comes across Claudius praying, a ready-made opportunity for revenge. But knowing that his father has committed foul crimes, and seeing Claudius praying, Hamlet becomes so unsure that there is an essential difference between them that he worries that God might send the wrong man to heaven. Even as he describes Claudius's murder of his father to himself, he conflates it imagistically with his father's crimes: "'A took my father grossly, full of bread, / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May" (3.3.80-81). Claudius's and Old Hamlet's crimes become equally broad-blown, as the two sinful fathers merge linguistically: the imagery of the rank garden, of over-luxuriant and swollen growth, has passed from Claudius to Old Hamlet, the "blossoms" of whose sin (1.5.76) are now broad-blown and flush. The highly charged word *grossly* registers this failure of differentiation: it hovers indeterminately between the two men, attaching itself first to Claudius (Claudius killed Old Hamlet grossly) and then to Old Hamlet (who died in a gross and unsanctified state); and in its indeterminacy, it associates both Claudius and Old Hamlet with the gross possession of Gertrude's unweeded garden.[22] Ultimately Hyperion and the satyr refuse to stay separated, so that Hamlet—and *Hamlet*—have to do and redo the distinction over and over again. Whatever Hamlet's original intentions in approaching his mother in 3.4, his most immediate need after the crisis of differentiation in 3.3 is to force her to acknowledge the difference between the two fathers ("Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended. / Mother, you have my father much offended" [3.4.8-9]). But even as he attempts to force this acknowledgment, he repeats the crisis of differentiation in yet another form. He presents her (and us) with two pictures initially indistinguishable and linguistically collapsed into one another: "Look here upon this picture, and on this, / The counterfeit presentment of two brothers" (3.4.53-54). As he begins the work of distinguishing between them all over again, the sense of counterfeit presentment becomes descriptive not only of the portraits as works of art but of his own portraiture, his own need both to present and to counterfeit these potentially similar false coins. Once

again his father becomes a god, with "Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself, / An eye like Mars" (3.4.56-57); and Claudius becomes a "mildew'd ear / Blasting his wholesome brother" (3.4.64-65). But his words undermine the distinction he would reinstate: the most significantly contaminated ear in the play belongs to Old Hamlet.

Finally, the myth of his father as Hyperion cannot be sustained; and its collapse returns both father and son to the contaminated maternal body. No longer divinely inseminating, the sun-god becomes deeply implicated in matter in Hamlet's brutal parody of incarnation:

> *Ham.* If the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion—Have you a daughter?
>
> *Pol* I have, my lord.
>
> *Ham.* Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive—friend, look to't.
>
> (2.2.181-86)[23]

Here is male spirit wholly enmeshed in female matter, kissing it, animating it with a vengeance; and—unlike the Son's—this conception is no blessing. If Marcellus's fantasy condenses father and son in a protective dyad, father and son here collapse into one another in their contamination: "Let her not walk i' th' sun," Hamlet warns Polonius; and his bitter pun locates the father-god's contamination in his own flesh. For this conception relocates the son in the dead matter of the unweeded garden: the horrific image of conception as the stirring of maggots in a corpse makes the son himself no more than one of the maggots, simultaneously born from and feeding on death in the maternal body.[24]

In the myth of origins bitterly acknowledged here, the son is wedded to death by his conception, spoiled by his origin in the rank flesh of the maternal body; and there is no idealized father to rescue him from this body. This fantasy of spoiling at the site of origin is, I think, the under-text of the play; it emerges first in muted form as Hamlet waits for the appearance of his ghostly father and meditates on the dram of evil that ruins the noble substance of man. When Hamlet hears the drunken revel of Claudius's court, he first fixes blame on Claudius for the sense of contamination he feels: "They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase / Soil our addition" (1.4.19-20). But as he continues, his bodily language rewrites the source of contamination, increasingly relocating it in the female body. "Indeed it takes / From our achievements, though perform'd at height, / The pith and marrow of our attribute" (1.4.20-22): through the imagery, the soiling of the male body—its pith and marrow emptied out at the height of performance—is grotesquely equated with intercourse and its aftermath.[25] And this shadowy image of the male body spoiled by the female in intercourse predicts the rest of the speech, where the role of spoiler is taken not by Claudius and his habits but by an unnamed and unspecified female body that corrupts man against his will:

> So, oft it chances in particular men
> That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
> As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty
> (Since nature cannot choose his origin),
> . . . 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.

(1.4.23-36, *passim*)

As Hamlet imagines man struggling against his one defect—the mark of his bondage to a feminized Nature or Fortune—the origin he cannot choose increasingly becomes not only the site but the agent of corruption. Even as Hamlet unorthodoxly proclaims man not guilty in his birth, that is, he articulates his own version of original sin: here, as in Richard Ill's fantasy of himself deformed by Nature in his mother's womb (*3 Henry VI,* 3.2.153-64), man is spoiled in his birth by birth defects not of his own making, and he takes corruption from that particular fault.

Fall/fault/foutre: the complex bilingual pun registers the fantasy that moves under the surface of Hamlet's meditation. For *fault* allusively collapses the female genitals with the act of intercourse that engendered the baby there, and then collapses both with the fall and original sin:[26] through its punning formulations, original sin becomes literally the sin of origin.[27] "Virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it" (3.1.117-18): formed and deformed in his mother's womb, man takes his corruption from that particular fault. Hamlet is indeed "to the manner born" (1.4.15), as he says at the start of his meditation: "It were better my mother had not borne me," he tells Ophelia (3.1.123-24); but he is "subject to his birth" (1.3.18).[28]

This subjection of male to female is, I think, the buried fantasy of *Hamlet,* the submerged story that it partly conceals and partly reveals; in its shift of contaminating agency from Claudius to the female body as the site of origin, Hamlet's meditation seems to me to be diagnostic of this fantasy. The poisoning of Old Hamlet is ostentatiously modeled on Cain's killing of Abel; Claudius cannot allude to his offense without recalling "the primal eldest curse upon't" (3.3.37). But this version of Cain and Abel turns out in part to be a cover for the even more primal story implicit in the unweeded garden, the prior explanation for the entrance of death into the world: the murder here turns not on the winning of a father's favor but on the body of a woman; and Old Hamlet is poisoned in his orchard-garden (1.5.35; 3.2.255) by the "serpent" who wears his crown (1.5.39).[29] On the surface of the text, that is, the story of Adam and Eve has been displaced, the horrific female body at its center occluded: Eve is conspicuously absent from the Cain-and-Abel version of the fall. But if the plot rewrites the fall as a story of fratricidal rivalry, locating literal agency for the murder in Claudius, a whole network of images and associations replaces his literal agency with Gertrude's, replicating Eve in her by making her both the agent and the locus of death. Beneath the story of fratricidal rivalry is the story of the woman who conduces to death, of the father fallen not through his brother's treachery but through his subjection to this woman; and despite Gertrude's conspicuous absence from the scene in the garden, in this psychologized version of the fall, the vulnerability of the father—and hence of the son—to her poison turns out to be the whole story.[30]

In an astonishing transfer of agency from male to female, malevolent power and blame for the murder tend to pass from Claudius to Gertrude in the deep fantasy of the play.[31] We can see the beginnings of this shift of blame even in the Ghost's initial account of the murder, in which the emotional weight shifts rapidly from his excoriation of Claudius to his much more powerful condemnation of Gertrude's sexuality. And in "The Murder of Gonzago," Hamlet's version of his father's tale, the murderer's role is clearly given less emphasis than the Queen's: Lucianus gets a scant six lines, while her protestations of undying love motivate all the preceding dialogue of the playlet. Moreover, while the actual murderer remains a pasteboard villain, the Queen's protestations locate psychic blame for the murder squarely in her. "None wed the second but who kill'd the first," she tells us (3.2.175). In her formulation, remarriage itself is a form of murder: "A second time I kill my husband dead, / When second husband kisses me in bed" (3.2.179-80). We know that Hamlet has added some dozen or sixteen lines to the play (2.2.535), and though we cannot specify them, these protestations seem written suspiciously from the point of view of the child, whose mother's remarriage often seems like her murder of the image of his father. When Hamlet confronts his mother in her closet immediately after his playlet, he confirms that he at least has shifted agency from Claudius to her: his own killing of

Polonius is, he says, "A bloody deed. Almost as bad, good Mother, / As kill a king and marry with his brother" (3.4.28-29). Given the parallel with his killing of Polonius, "as kill a king" first seems to describe Claudius's act; but when the line ends with "brother" rather than "queen" or "wife," the killing attaches itself irrevocably to Gertrude, playing out in miniature the shift of agency from him to her. For Claudius's crime is nearly absent here: in Hamlet's accusation, Claudius becomes the passive victim of Gertrude's sexual will; she becomes the active murderer.

And the play itself is complicit with Hamlet's shift of agency: though the degree of her literal guilt is never specified, in the deep fantasy of the play her sexuality itself becomes akin to murder. The second of the Player Queen's protestations—"A second time I kill my husband dead / When second husband kisses me in bed"—implicitly collapses the two husbands into one and thus makes the equation neatly: when her husband kisses her, she kills him. But this is in fact what one strain in the imagery has been telling us all along. As Lucianus carries the poison onstage in "The Murder of Gonzago," he addresses it in terms that associate it unmistakably with the weeds of that first unweeded garden:

> Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
> With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
> Thy natural magic and dire property
> On wholesome life usurps immediately.

(3.2.251-54)

Even as we see him poison the Player-King, the language insists that the poison is not his but hers, its usurpation on wholesome life derivative not from Claudius's political ambitions but from the rank weeds (3.4.153-54) of Gertrude's body. Its "mixture rank" merely condenses and localizes the rank mixture that is sexuality itself:[32] hence the subterranean logic by which the effects of Claudius's poison on Old Hamlet's body replicate the effects of venereal disease, covering his smooth body with the lazarlike tetter, the "vile and loathsome crust" (1.5.71-72) that was one of the diagnostic signs of syphilis.[33]

In Lucianus's words, the poison that kills Old Hamlet becomes less the distillation of a usurping fratricidal

Ralph Fiennes as Hamlet and Francesca Annis as Gertrude in the Almeida Theatre's 1995 production of Hamlet.

rivalry than the distillation of the horrific female body, the night-witch against whom Marcellus had invoked the protection of the Saviour born from a virgin birth; cursed by Hecate, it is in effect the distillation of midnight itself, the "witching time" when "hell itself breathes out / Contagion to this world" (3.2.379-81). The play here invokes the presence of an unbounded nightmare night-body, breathing out the contagion of her poison; and it gives shape to this horrific night-body through a curious and punning repetition. Horatio tells Hamlet that the ghost first appeared "in the dead waste and middle of the night" (1.2.198); and Hamlet repeats his phrase when he questions Rosencranz and Guildenstern about their relations with the lady Fortune:

> *Ham.* Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?
>
> *Guild.* Faith, her privates we.
>
> *Ham.* In the secret parts of Fortune? O, most true! She is a strumpet.
>
> (2.2.232-36)

"Waste" and "waist" coalesce in the dangerous middle of this strumpet;[34] and the idealized father turns out to be horribly vulnerable to the poison of her rank midnight weeds. For however mild-mannered Gertrude may be as a literal character, in fantasy she takes on the aspect of this night-body, herself becoming the embodiment of hell and death: the fires in which Hamlet's father is confined, the fires that burn and purge the foul crimes done in his days of nature (1.5.11-13), merely reproduce the fire of the "rebellious hell" that burns in her bones (3.4.82-88).[35] In anticipation of Lear's anatomy—"there's hell, there's darkness, / There is the sulphurous pit" (*King Lear,* 4.6.129-30)—punishment and crime coalesce: death is not only the consequence of sexuality but also its very condition.

This anatomy is in its own way perfectly orthodox; it condenses the story of the fall by making female sexuality itself the locus of death:

> Surely her house tendeth to death, & her paths unto the dead. All thei that go unto her, returne not againe, nether take they holde of the waies of life.
>
> For she hathe caused manie to fall downe wounded, and the strong men are all slayne by her. Her house is the waie unto the grave, which goeth downe to the chambers of death.
>
> (*The Geneva Bible,* Proverbs, 2:18-19, 7:26-27)
>
> Every encounter with the "strange woman" of Proverbs—and all women are sexually strangers—is thus a virtual reliving of the fall into mortality. But female sexuality in *Hamlet* is always maternal sexuality: Gertrude's is the only fully sexualized female body in the play, and we experience her sexuality largely through the imagination of her son. In *Hamlet,* that is, Shakespeare re-understands the orthodox associations of woman with death by fusing the sexual with the maternal body, reimagining the legacy of death consequent upon the fall as the legacy specifically of the sexualized maternal body. And except in the saving case of the Virgin Mother, the maternal body is always already sexual, corrupted by definition. The mother's body brings death into the world because her body itself is death: in the traditional alignment of spirit and matter, the mother gives us the stuff—the female matter—of our bodies and thus our mortality.[36] Birth itself thus immerses the body in death: hence the power of Hamlet's grotesque version of conception as the stirring of maggots in dead matter. Through this fusion of the sexual with the maternal body and the association of both with death,

> Shakespeare in effect defamiliarizes the trope of the "womb of earth" (1.1.140): death and sexuality are interchangeable in this psychologized version of the fall because both lead back to this maternal body. Hence also Shakespeare's punning equation of death and the maternal body in his reformulation of the Biblical source of danger: in the deep fantasy of the play, the deadly woman of *Proverbs*—"thei that go unto her, returne not againe"—is one with Hamlet's "undiscovered country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (3.1.79-80).[37]

Both death and sexuality return the traveler to the undiscovered country, familiar and yet utterly foreign, of the maternal body itself; and in *Hamlet,* this body is always threatening to swallow up her children, to absorb them back within her bourn, undoing their own boundaries. Death itself is a hell-mouth, swallowing Old Hamlet up between its "ponderous and marble jaws" (1.4.50), bringing him and Polonius "not where he eats, but where a is eaten" (4.3.19), where all are subject to "my Lady Worm" (5.1.87); and Gertrude is death's mouth, indiscriminately devouring her husbands "as if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on" (1.2.144-45). In this grotesquely oral world, everything is ultimately meat for a single table. Hence I think the slight *frisson* of horror beneath Hamlet's wit as he describes "the funeral bak'd meats" that "Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (1.2.180-81): we are never sure just what it is that is being consumed in the ceremonies of death and sexual union imagined here. And this momentary confusion is diagnostic of the play's fusion of eating and death and sex: in *Hamlet,* the turn toward the woman's body is always felt as the return to the devouring maternal womb, with all the potential not only for incestuous nightmare but for total annihilation implied by that return. Hence, I think, the logic of the play's alternative name for poison: "union" (5.2.269, 331).[38] For "union" is just another version of Hecate's "mixture rank," the poison that kills Old Hamlet: each is the poisonous epitome of sexual mixture itself and hence of boundary danger, the terrifying adulteration of male by female that does away with the boundaries between them.

> *Ham.* Farewell, dear mother.
>
> *Claud.* Thy loving father, Hamlet.
>
> *Ham.* My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh; so my mother.
>
> (4.3.52-55)

In this fantasy, it does not matter whether Hamlet is thinking of his father or of his incestuous stand-in; all sexuality—licit or illicit—is imagined as an adulterating mixture. And in this rank mixture, the female will always succeed in transforming the male, remaking him in her image, "for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness" (3.1.111-14). The imagined concourse of male honesty and female beauty ends in the contamination of the male by the female, his translation into a version of her. No wonder Marcellus associates the danger of invasion with the sweaty activity that makes "the night joint-labourer with the day" (1.1.81), obliterating the distinction between the realm of the witch-mother and that of the sungod father; no wonder Hamlet is so intent upon keeping his father's commandment—or perhaps his father himself—all alone within his brain, "unmix'd with baser matter" (1.5.104).[39]

For Hamlet is ultimately subject to the same adulterating mixture; the sexual anxiety registered through the play's two names for poison, like the incestuous marriage at its center, both covers and expresses a more primitive anxiety about the stability and security of individuating boundaries that finds its focus in Hamlet himself. Promiscuous mixture and boundary contamination everywhere infect this play, from its initial worry about invasion to its final heap of poisoned bodies: in a psychic world where boundaries cannot hold, where the self is invaded, its pales and forts broken down, its pith and marrow extracted, where mother-aunts and uncle-fathers (2.2.372) become indistinguishably one flesh, where even camels become weasels become

whales (3.2.367-73), identity itself seems on the point of dissolving or being swallowed up. And the overwhelming use of images of oral contamination and oral annihilation to register these threats to the self suggests their origin in the earliest stages of emergent selfhood, when the nascent self is most fully subject to the mother's fantasied power to annihilate or contaminate. Hence, I think, the centrality of Gertrude: for the play localizes its pervasive boundary panic in Hamlet's relationship with his mother, whose contaminated body initially serves him as the metaphor for the fallen world that has sullied him. And the selfhood that Hamlet constructs in response to this threat becomes the crux of the play: withdrawing himself from the sullying maternal body of the world, Hamlet retreats into what he imagines as an inviolable core of selfhood that cannot be known or played upon (1.2.85; 3.2.355-63), constructing an absolute barrier between inner and outer as though there were no possibility of uncontaminating communication between them; unable to risk crossing this boundary in any creative way, through any significant action in the world, he fantasizes crossing it through magical thinking—imagining the revenge that could come "with wings as swift / As meditation" (1.5.29-30) or through the power of his horrid speech (2.2.557)—or he mimes crossing it from within the extraordinary distance of his withdrawal, taking up a variety of roles not to engage the world but to keep it at bay.[40] Hence in part his intense admiration for Horatio, who plays no roles and seems impervious to outer influence, who is "not a pipe for Fortune's finger / To sound what stop she please" (3.2.70-71);[41] here as elsewhere, Hamlet figures the threat to (masculine) inner integrity as the sexualized female, aligning it with the strumpet Fortune in whose secret parts corrupt men live (2.2.232-36), as though all such threats were derivative from his unreliable mother's body. But there is no exemption from this body for Hamlet, no pure and unmixed identity for him; like honesty transformed into a bawd, he must eventually see the signs of her rank mixture in himself:

> Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
> That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
> A scullion!

(2.2.578-83)

He himself is subject to his birth: he would imagine himself the unmixed son of an unmixed father, but the whore-mother in him betrays him, returning him to his own mixed origin, his contamination by the sexual female within.[42]

The first mother to reappear in Shakespeare's plays is adulterous, I think, because maternal origin is in itself felt as equivalent to adulterating betrayal of the male, both father and son; *Hamlet* initiates the period of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies because it in effect rewrites the story of Cain and Abel as the story of Adam and Eve, relocating masculine identity in the presence of the adulterating female. This rewriting accounts, I think, for Gertrude's odd position in the play, especially for its failure to specify the degree to which she is complicit in the murder. Less powerful as an independent character than as the site for fantasies larger than she is, she is preeminently mother as other, the intimate unknown figure around whom these fantasies swirl. She is kept ambiguously innocent as a character, but in the deep fantasy that structures the play's imagery, she plays out the role of the missing Eve: her body is the garden in which her husband dies, her sexuality the poisonous weeds that kill him, and poison the world—and the self—for her son. This is the psychological fantasy registered by the simultaneity of funeral and marriage: the reappearance of the mother in *Hamlet* is tantamount to the death of the idealized father because her presence signals his absence, and hence the absence of the son's defense against her rank mixture, her capacity to annihilate or contaminate; as in Marcellus's purifying fantasy, what the idealized father ultimately protects against is the dangerous female powers of the night. The boy-child masters his fear of these powers partly through identification with his father, the paternal presence who has initially helped him to achieve separation from his mother; but if his

father fails him—if the father himself seems subject to her—then that protective identification fails. This is exactly the psychological situation at the beginning of *Hamlet,* where Hamlet's father has become unavailable to him, not only through the fact of his death but through the complex vulnerability that his death demonstrates. This father cannot protect his son; and his disappearance in effect throws Hamlet into the domain of the engulfing mother, awakening all the fears incident to the primary mother-child bond. Here as in Shakespeare's later plays, the loss of the father turns out in fact to mean the psychic domination of the mother: in the end, it is the specter of his mother, not his uncle-father, who paralyzes his will. The Queen, the Queen's to blame.

This shift of agency and of danger from male to female seems to me characteristic of the fantasy-structure of *Hamlet* and of Shakespeare's imagination in the plays that follow. The ghost's initial injunction sets as the prime business of the play the killing of Claudius; he specifically asks Hamlet to leave his mother alone, beset only by the thorns of conscience (1.5.85-87). But if Gertrude rather than Claudius is to blame, then Hamlet's fundamental task shifts; simple revenge is no longer the issue. Despite his ostensible agenda of revenge, the main psychological task that Hamlet seems to set himself is not to avenge his father's death but to remake his mother:[43] to remake her in the image of the Virgin Mother who could guarantee his father's purity, and his own, repairing the boundaries of his selfhood. Throughout the play, the covert drama of reformation vies for priority with the overt drama of revenge, in fact displacing it both from what we see of Hamlet's consciousness and from center stage of the play: when Hamlet accuses himself of lack of purpose (3.4.107-10), of failing to remember his father's business of revenge (4.4.40), he may in part be right.

Even as an avenger, Hamlet seems motivated more by his mother than by his father: when he describes Claudius to Horatio as "he that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother" (5.2.64), the second phrase clearly carries more intimate emotional weight than the first. And he manages to achieve his revenge only when he can avenge his mother's death, not his father's: just where we might expect some version of "rest, perturbed spirit" to link his killing of Claudius with his father's initial injunction, we get "Is thy union here? / Follow my mother" (5.2.331-32).

This shift—from avenging the father to saving the mother—accounts in part for certain peculiarities about this play as a revenge play: why, for example, the murderer is given so little attention in the device ostensibly designed to catch his conscience, why the confrontation of Hamlet with Gertrude in the closet scene seems much more central, much more vivid, than any confrontation between Hamlet and Claudius. Once we look at "The Murder of Gonzago" for what it is, rather than for what Hamlet tells us it is, it becomes clear that the playlet is in fact designed to catch the conscience of the queen: its challenge is always to her loving posture, its accusation "A second time I kill my husband dead / When second husband kisses me in bed." The confrontation with Gertrude (3.4) follows so naturally from this attempt to catch her conscience that Hamlet's unexpected meeting with Claudius (3.3) feels to us like an interruption of a more fundamental purpose. Indeed, Shakespeare stages 3.3 very much as an interruption: Hamlet comes upon Claudius praying as he is on his way to his mother's closet, worrying about the extent to which he can repudiate the Nero in himself; and we come upon Claudius unexpectedly in the same way. That is: the moment that should be the apex of the revenge plot—the potential confrontation alone of the avenger and his prey—becomes for the audience and for the avenger himself a lapse, an interlude that must be gotten over before the real business can be attended to.[44] It is no wonder that Hamlet cannot kill Claudius here: to do so would be to make of the interlude a permanent interruption of his more fundamental purpose. Not even Hamlet could reasonably expect to manage his mother's moral reclamation immediately after he has killed her husband.

Nor would that avenging death regain the mother whom Hamlet needs: once his mother has been revealed as the fallen and possessed garden, she can be purified only by being separated from her sexuality. This separation is in fact Hamlet's effort throughout 3.4. In that confrontation, Hamlet first insists that Gertrude acknowledge the difference between Claudius and Old Hamlet, the difference her adultery and remarriage had undermined. But after the initial display of portraits, Hamlet attempts to induce in her revulsion not at her

choice of the wrong man but at her sexuality itself, the rebellious hell that mutines in her matron's bones (3.4.82-83), the "rank corruption, mining all within" (3.4.150). Here, as in the play within the play, Hamlet recreates obsessively, voyeuristically, the acts that have corrupted the royal bed, even when he has to subject his logic and syntax to considerable strain to do so:

> *Queen* What shall I do?
> *Ham.* Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:
> Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed,
> Pinch wanton on your cheek, call you his mouse,
> And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses,
> Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
> Make you to ravel all this matter out
> That I essentially am not in madness,
> But mad in craft.

(3.4.182-90)

There has to be an easier way of asking your mother not to reveal that your madness is an act. "Not this, by no means, that I bid you do": Hamlet cannot stop imagining, even commanding, the sexual act that he wants to undo. Moreover, the bloated body of this particular king is not particular to him: it is the sexualized male body, its act any sexual act. The royal bed of Denmark is always already corrupted, already a couch for luxury, as Hamlet's own presence testifies. "Go not to my uncle's bed" (3.4.161), Hamlet tells his mother; but his disgust at the incestuous liaison rationalizes a prior disgust at all sexual concourse, as his attempt to end the specifically incestuous union rationalizes an attempt to remake his mother pure by divorcing her from her sexuality.

Act 3 scene 4 records Hamlet's attempt to achieve this divorce, to recover the fantasied presence of the asexual mother of childhood, the mother who can restore the sense of sanctity to the world her sexuality has spoiled: his first and last word in the scene is "mother" (3.4.7; 3.4.219). And in his own mind at least, Hamlet does seem to achieve this recovery. He begins the scene by wishing that Gertrude were not his mother ("would it were not so, you are my mother" [3.4.15]); but toward the end, he is able to imagine her as the mother from whom he would beg—and receive—blessing:

> Once more, good night,
> And when you are desirous to be blest,
> I'll blessing beg of you.

(3.4.172-74)

This mother can bless Hamlet only insofar as she herself asks to be blessed by him, signaling her conversion from husband to son and inverting the relation of parent and child; Hamlet is very much in charge even as he imagines asking for maternal blessing. Nonetheless, coming near the end of Hamlet's long scene of rage and disgust, these lines seem to me extraordinarily moving in their evocation of desire for the maternal presence that can restore the sense of the world and the self as blessed.[45] And the blessedness they image is specifically in the relation of world and self: as mother and son mirror each other, each blessing each, Shakespeare images the reopening of the zone of trust that had been foreclosed by the annihilating mother. For the first time, Hamlet imagines something coming to him from outside himself that will neither invade nor contaminate him: the recovery of benign maternal presence for a moment repairs the damage of the fall in him, making safe the boundary-permeability that had been a source of terror. Toward the end of the scene, all those night-terrors are gone: Hamlet's repeated variations on the conventional phrase "good night" mark his progression from rage at his mother's sexuality to repossession of the good mother he had lost. He begins with "Good night. But go not

to my uncle's bed. . . . Refraintonight" (3.4.161, 167), attempting to separate her from her horrific night-body; but by the end—through his own version of Marcellus's purifying fantasy—he has succeeded in imagining both her and the night wholesome. If he begins by wishing Gertrude were not his mother, he ends with the poignant repeated leave-taking of a child who does not want to let go of the mother who now keeps him safe: "Once more, good night . . . So again, good night. . . . Mother, good night indeed. . . .Good night, mother" (3.4.172, 179, 215, 219).

In the end, we do not know whether or not Gertrude herself has been morally reclaimed; it is the mark of the play's investment in Hamlet's fantasies that, even here, we are not allowed to see her as a separate person. To the extent that she looks into the heart that Hamlet has "cleft in twain" (3.4.158) and finds the "black and grained spots" (3.4.90) that he sees there, she seems to accept his version of her soiled inner body; in any case, her response allows him to think of his initial Nero-like aggression—speaking daggers though using none (3.2.387)—as moral reclamation. But as usual in this play, she remains relatively opaque, more a screen for Hamlet's fantasies about her than a fully developed character in her own right: whatever individuality she might have had is sacrificed to her status as mother. Nonetheless, though we might wonder just what his evidence is, Hamlet at least believes that she has returned to him as the mother he can call "good lady" (3.4.182). And after 3.4, her remaining actions are ambiguous enough to nourish his fantasy: though there are no obvious signs of separation from Claudius in her exchanges with him, in her last moments she seems to become a wonderfully homey presence for her son, newly available to him as the loving and protective mother of childhood, worrying about his condition, wiping his face as he fights, even perhaps intentionally drinking the poison intended for him.

In the end, whatever her motivation, he seems securely possessed of her as an internal good mother; and this possession gives him a new calm about his place in the world and especially about death, that domain of maternal dread. Trusting her, he can begin to trust in himself and in his own capacity for action; and he can begin to rebuild the masculine identity spoiled by her contamination. For his secure internal possession of her idealized image permits the return of his father to him, and in the form that he had always wanted: turning his mother away from Claudius, Hamlet wins her not only for himself but also for his father—for his father conceived as Hyperion, the bodiless godlike figure he had invoked at the beginning of the play. If her sexuality had spoiled this father, her purification brings him back; after 3.4, the guilty father and his ghost disappear, replaced by the distant heavenly father into whom he has been transformed, the one now acting through the sign of the other: "Why, even in that was heaven ordinant. / I had my father's signet in my purse" (5.2.48-49). Unexpectedly finding this sign of the father on his own person, Hamlet in effect registers his repossession of the idealized father within; and, like a good son, Hamlet can finally merge himself with this father, making His will his own. But though we may feel that Hamlet has achieved a new calm and self-possession, the price is high: for the parents lost to him at the beginning of the play can be restored only insofar as they are entirely separated from their sexual bodies. This is a pyrrhic solution to the problems of embodiedness and familial identity; it does not bode well for Shakespeare's representation of sexual union, or of the children born of that union.

In creating for Hamlet a plot in which his mother's sexuality is literally the sign of her betrayal and of her husband's death, Shakespeare recapitulates the material of infantile fantasy, playing it out with a compelling plot logic that allows its expression in a perfectly rationalized, hence justified, way. Given Hamlet's world, anyone would feel as Hamlet does—but Shakespeare has given him this world.[46] And the world Shakespeare gives him sets the stage for the plays that follow:[47] from *Hamlet* on, all sexual relationships will be tinged by the threat of the mother, all masculine identity problematically formed in relationship to her. For despite Hamlet's tenuous recovery of his father's signet ring through the workings of Providence, the stabilizing father lost at the beginning of *Hamlet*—the father who can control female appetite, who can secure pure masculine identity for his son—cannot be brought back from the dead; the ambiguities that attend the bodiless father-Duke of *Measure for Measure* merely serve to make paternal absence visible, underscoring at once the need for his control over the sexuality that boils and bubbles like a witch's cauldron in Vienna and the

desperate fictitiousness of that control. The plays that follow *Hamlet* enact and re-enact paternal absence in shadowy and fragmentary form—in the sick king of *All's Well,* in Lear's abdication, in the murder of Duncan, the fatherlessness of Coriolanus, the weakness of Cymbeline; and they thrust the son into the domain of maternal dread inhabited by all the avatars of strumpet fortune—the wicked wives, lovers, daughters, mothers and stepmothers, the witches and engulfing storms—that have the power to shake his manhood (*King Lear,* 1.4.306).

The central elements of the fantasy of maternal power in *Hamlet* will recur in a variety of forms, with first one and then another becoming most prominent; they will sometimes be the psychic property of a single character from whom Shakespeare distances himself, and sometimes find embodiment in the play as a whole in ways that suggest Shakespeare's complicity in them. Despite Shakespeare's sometimes astonishing moments of sympathetic engagement with his female characters, his ability to see the world from their point of view, his women will tend to be like Gertrude, more significant as screens for male fantasy than as independent characters making their own claim to dramatic reality; as they become fused with the mother of infantile need, even their fantasized gestures of independence will be read as the signs of adulterous betrayal. And the women will pay heavily for the fantasies—both of destruction and of cure—invested in them. For their sexual bodies will always be dangerous, the sign of the fall and original sin, the "disease that's in my flesh" (*King Lear,* 2.4.224), "the imposition . . . / Hereditary ours" (*The Winter's Tale,* 1.2.74-75): as they enter into sexuality, the virgins—Cressida, Desdemona, Imogen—will be transformed into whores, their whoredom acted out in the imaginations of their nearest and dearest; and the primary antidote to their power will be the excision of their sexual bodies, the terrible revirginations that Othello performs on Desdemona, and Shakespeare on Cordelia. For the emergence of the annihilating mother in *Hamlet* will call forth a series of strategies for confining or converting her power. Hamlet's desire for the return of the virgin mother who can bless him, undoing the effects of the fall, will be played out in Cordelia's return to Lear, Thaisa's return to Pericles, Hermione's return to Leontes, each of whom must first suffer for her participation in sexuality. And in the absence of these purified figures, parthenogenetic fantasies of exemption from the "woman's part" (*Cymbeline,* 2.4.174) will seem to offer protection against maternal malevolence. Enunciating his desire to "stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin" (*Coriolanus,* 5.3.35-37), Coriolanus speaks for all those who would not be born of woman (*Macbeth,* 4.1.80), undoing the subjection to birth that Hamlet discovered in himself. But the problematic maternal body can never quite be occluded or transformed: made into a monster or a saint, killed off or banished from the stage, it remains at the center of masculine subjectivity, marking its unstable origin. For the contaminated flesh of the maternal body is also home: the home Shakespeare's protagonists long to return to, the home they can never quite escape. . . .

Notes

[1] My sense of the shape of Shakespeare's career and of the defensive construction of both the comedies and the histories is deeply indebted to Richard P. Wheeler; see *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), esp. pp. 46-50, 155-64.

[2] Shakespeare generalizes this guilt by suppressing the rumor that Brutus was Caesar's illegitimate son; *2 Henry VI* testifies to his knowledge of it ("Brutus' bastard hand / Stabbed Julius Caesar," 4.1.137-38). *Hamlet* has often been understood as a reworking of the father-son conflict in the histories and *Julius Caesar;* see, for example, Norman Holland (*Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* [New York: Octagon Books, 1979], pp. 286-87) and C. L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler (*The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986], esp. pp. 11-12, 236-38). For the relationship between *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar,* see also Ernest Jones (*Hamlet and Oedipus* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1954], pp. 137-40); for that between *Hamlet* and the *Henriad,* see also Peter Erickson (*Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* [Berkeley: University of California, 1985], pp. 63-67), Wheeler (*Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies,* pp. 161, 190-91), and Linda Bamber (*Comic Women, Tragic Men* [Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1982], pp. 154-58). Though these accounts all acknowledge the

eroticizing presence of women in *Hamlet,* they do not all emphasize the significance of that presence; in this emphasis, my account is closest to Wheeler and to Bamber, for whom tragedy turns on the encounter with woman as Other.

[3] See René Girard ("Hamlet's Dull Revenge," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts,* ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint [Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986], pp. 280-302) and especially Joel Fineman ("Fratricide and Cuckoldry: Shakespeare's Doubles," in *Representing Shakespeare,* ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn [Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980], pp. 86-91) for the threat of collapse into No Difference. In Girard's reading, Old Hamlet and Claudius are the enemy twins between whom there is never any difference; Hamlet consequently has to try to make a difference where none exists and then to fire up his dull revenge mimetically when that difference cannot be sustained. Girard locates the no-difference in his myth of sacralizing violence; like most psychoanalytically oriented critics, I locate it in the common origin of both Old Hamlet and Claudius in the ambivalently regarded father of childhood. Though based in Girard, Fineman's account seems to me both richer and more far-reaching than his, in part because he engages with the "drama of individuation" through which Shakespeare represents the failed myth of differentiation and hence with misogyny as an expression of the fear of No Difference; in his account, as in mine, Gertrude's sexuality becomes the mark of No Difference.

[4] This is the likeness registered stunningly, for example, in Hamlet's "How stand I then, / That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd" (4.4.56-57), where *have* can indicate either possession or action. This likeness is the staple of most oedipal readings of the play, in which—in Ernest Jones's formulation—Claudius "incorporates the deepest and most buried part of [Hamlet's] own personality" (*Hamlet and Oedipus,* p. 100); see Holland's useful discussion of this and other oedipal readings (*Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare,* pp. 163-206). These readings have been extended and challenged by Avi Erlich (*Hamlet's Absent Father* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977]), who sees the basic motive of the play not in Hamlet's covert identification with Claudius but in his desperate need for a strong father who can protect him from his own incestuous impulses and from the castrating mother they would lead to: "Much more than he wants to have killed his father, Hamlet wants his father back" (p. 260). Although most oedipal accounts begin by acknowledging that Hamlet is initially more obsessed with his mother's remarriage than with his father's death, they usually go on to focus on the father-son relationship, discussing the mother merely as the condition that occasions the son's struggle with—or need for—his father (but see Irving I. Edgar, *Shakespeare, Medicine* and Psychiatry [London: Vision, 1971], pp. 288-311, for an exception). Without entirely discounting oedipal motives in the play, I want to restore what seems to me the mother's clear primacy in her son's imagination; I consequently emphasize preoedipal motives, in which fantasies of merger with and annihilation by the mother are prior to genital desire for her, and in which the strong father is needed more as an aid to differentiation and the establishment of masculine identity than as a superego protecting against incestuous desire. The extraordinary oral valence of both sex and killing in *Hamlet*—the extent to which both are registered in the language of eating and boundary diffusion—seems to me evidence of the extent to which even the more purely oedipal issues are strongly colored by preoedipal anxiety. My emphasis on Gertrude has to some extent been anticipated by those who stress matricidal impulses in the play, implicitly or explicitly making Orestes—rather than Oedipus—the model for *Hamlet;* see, for example, Gilbert Murray (*Hamlet and Orestes,* [London: Oxford University Press, 1914]), Frederic Wertham ("The Matricidal Impulse: Critique of Freud's Interpretation of Hamlet," *Journal of Criminal Psychopathology* 2 [1941]: 455-64), J. M. Moloney and L. Rockelein ("A New Interpretation of *Hamlet," International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 30 [1949]: 92-107), Harry Levin (*The Question of Hamlet* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1959], p. 65), Theodore Lidz (*Hamlet's Enemy,* [London: Vision, 1975]), and Maurice Charney ("The 'Now Could I Drink Hot Blood' Soliloquy and the Middle of *Hamlet*," *Mosaic* 10 [1977]: 77-86). Jones (pp. 106-7), Edgar (pp. 294-98) and Erlich (p. 152) see matricidal rage primarily as a derivative of oedipal desire; in the accounts of Moloney and Rockelein (pp. 99, 106) and of Lidz (pp. 183, 231), it is also derived—at least incipiently—from the relationship to the overwhelming preoedipal mother. For more explicitly preoedipal readings of *Hamlet,* see, for example, accounts of the play's oedipal issues as covers for preoedipal masochism (Edmund Bergler, "The Seven

Paradoxes in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet,'" *American Imago* 16 [1959]: 379-405) or narcissism (Kaja Silverman, "*Hamlet* and the Common Theme of Fathers," *Enclitic* 3 [1979]: 106-21), or of Hamlet's sarcasm as oral aggression (M. D. Faber, "Hamlet, Sarcasm, and Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalytic Review* 58 [1968]: 79-90); see especially Wheeler's account of Hamlet's attempt to build a self both by incorporating the image of an ideal father and by recovering the trust shattered by disillusionment with his mother (*Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies,* pp. 161, 190-200). Although I share many details of interpretation with Avi Erlich, whose work I learned from and reacted against in my earliest days at Berkeley, my account of the play is most deeply indebted to Wheeler's.

[5] Ophelia's contamination by association has been a commonplace of *Hamlet* criticism for a long time; among the legions, see, for example, A. C. Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy* [New York: Meridian Books, 1955], p. 101) John Dover Wilson (*What Happens in Hamlet* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951], p. 133), and Harley Granville-Barker (*Prefaces to Shakespeare* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946], p. 79).

[6] Most apparently do: see, for example, Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy,* p. 136), Wilson (*What Happens in Hamlet?,* pp. 251-53), Bertram Joseph (*Conscience and the King: A Study of Hamlet* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1953], p. 94), Carolyn Heilbrun ("The Character of Hamlet's Mother," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 8 [1957]: 204), Rosamond Putzel ("Queen Gertrude's Crime," *Renaissance Papers, 1961,* ed. George Walton Williams [Southern Renaissance Conference, 1962], p. 44), Rebecca Smith ("A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude," in *The Woman 's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare,* ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980], p. 202) and Roland Mushat Frye (*The Renaissance "Hamlet": Issues and Responses in 1600* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984], p. 151), all of whom think that her response demonstrates her innocence. Others note that her involvement—particularly in comparison with the sources—is left ambiguous (see, e.g., William Empson, "*Hamlet* When New," *The Sewanee Review* 61 [1953]: 37, and Lidz, *Hamlet's Enemy,* pp. 78, 81); and at least one critic is sure that she knows of the murder (Richard Flatter, *Hamlet's Father* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1949], pp. 30-31, 59-80, and 153-60).

[7] Ever since Joseph (*Conscience and the King,* pp. 17-8) pointed out that "adulterate" in Shakespeare's time could apply to sexual sin generally, not just to what we moderns narrowly call adultery, critics have cautioned against assuming that Gertrude and Claudius were adulterous in our sense (see, e.g., Putzel, "Queen Gertrude's Crime," p. 39; Smith, "A Heart Cleft in Twain," pp. 209-10, n. 11; and Frye, *The Renaissance "Hamlet",* p. 323). But the definitions Joseph cites all seem to add a more inclusive definition to a word more commonly-—or, as the homily *Against Whoredom and Uncleanness* puts it, "properly"—understood in the narrower sense (Joseph, p. 17); and the ghost's emphasis on the marriage vow (1.5.49) suggests that Gertrude's crime was specifically against marriage. As usual with Gertrude, the matter is far from settled.

[8] See Smith's fine discussion of the discrepancy between the monstrously sensual Gertrude portrayed by Hamlet, the ghost, and many critics, and the "careful mother and wife" Gertrude appears to be in her brief appearances on stage ("A Heart Cleft in Twain," pp. 194-201); R. A. Foakes notes specifically that Hamlet's attack in 3.4 "proceeds more from his imagination than from anything the audience has seen or heard" ("Character and Speech in 'Hamlet,'" in *Shakespeare Institute Studies: Hamlet,* ed. John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris [New York: Schocken Books, 1963], p. 158). For G. Wilson Knight, this discrepancy illustrates the degree to which our judgment is independent of Hamlet's ("The Embassy of Death," in *The Wheel of Fire* [New York: Meridian Books, 1957], pp. 32, 43-44). But in Linda Bamber's reading of misogyny as a consequence of the tragic hero's decentering confrontation with the Other, Gertrude is simply "a vessel for Hamlet's feelings," not an independent character in whom we have an investment; since we "adopt his feelings as long as he displays them," we think of her as vaguely redeemed once he has given up his sexual disgust (*Comic Women, Tragic Men,* pp. 72-83). While I largely concur in Bamber's assessment, I note that the generations of critics who have struggled to define Gertrude suggest that the play promotes some

investment in her; her ambiguous status as Other seems to me the mark of Shakespeare's ambiguous investment in the fantasies localized in Hamlet.

[9] Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy,* p. 137), Joseph (*Conscience and the King,* pp. 96-97), and Putzel ("Queen Gertrude's Crime," p. 43) think that Gertrude repents and gives her allegiance to Hamlet; Eleanor Prosser (*Hamlet and Revenge* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1967], p. 196), Baldwin Maxwell ("Hamlet's Mother," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15 [1964]: 242), and Smith ("A Heart Cleft in Twain," p. 205) think that she is unchanged.

[10] Gertrude drinks the cup knowingly in Olivier's *Hamlet.*

[11] T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet," *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), p. 124. In Eliot's view, the discrepancy between Gertrude and the disgust she arouses in Hamlet is the mark of "some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art" (p. 123) and hence of artistic failure; but, in concluding that Gertrude needs to be insignificant to arouse in Hamlet "the feeling which she is incapable of representing" (p. 125), he inadvertently suggests the aesthetic power of fantasy disengaged from its adequate representation in a single character. For a brilliant analysis of the way in which the feminine stands for the failure of all kinds of representational stability in Eliot's aesthetic, in various psychoanalytic attempts to master the play, and in *Hamlet* itself as the representative of Western tradition, see Jacqueline Rose, "Hamlet—the *Mona Lisa* of Literature," *Critical Quarterly* 28 (1986): 35-49.

[12] Critics of all sorts agree that Gertrude's remarriage disturbs Hamlet more profoundly than his father's death: in addition to the "Orestes" and preoedipal critics cited in note 4, see, for example, Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy,* p. 101), Eliot ("Hamlet," p. 123), Wilson (*What Happens in Hamlet?,* pp. 42-43), Jones (*Hamlet and Oedipus,* p. 68), Granville-Barker (*Prefaces to Shakespeare,* pp. 94-95), Flatter (*Hamlet's Father,* pp. 62-63), and Smith ("A Heart Cleft in Twain," p. 197). For the opposing point of view, see, e.g., Arthur Kirsch's account of Hamlet's impeded work of mourning, in which Hamlet's father's death has explanatory primacy ("Hamlet's Grief," *English Literary History* 48 [1981]: 17-36). Though Kirsch refers to Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," he does not foreground the ambivalence toward the lost and introjected object that is the crux of that essay; this ambivalence toward the father is at the center of Barber and Wheeler's account of the play (*The Whole Journey,* p. 254).

[13] *Rank* is evocative of sexual disgust in *Hamlet* and elsewhere in Shakespeare: Claudius's offense is "rank" (3.3.36); he and Gertrude live "in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, / Stew'd in corruption" (3.4.92-93). For other uses of *rank,* see, for example, Desdemona's "will most rank" (*Othello,* 3.3.236) or Posthumus's description of the woman's part ("lust, and rank thoughts, hers, hers," *Cymbeline,* 2.4.176). Burgundy describes a France "corrupting in it own fertility," in which "the even mead . . . / Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank, / Conceives by idleness" (*Henry V,* 5.2.40, 48-51); in its depiction of a monstrous female fecundity that is out of control, his "rank" is very close to Hamlet's unweeded garden. In his fine early discussion of the stench of corrupting flesh pervasive in *Hamlet,* Richard D. Altick notes the association of *rank* specifically with the smell of sexuality ("*Hamlet* and the Odor of Mortality," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5 [1954]: 173-4).

[14] Hamlet's sexual disgust and allied hatred of the flesh have been widely recognized; see, for example, Knight (*The Wheel of Fire,* p. 23), Prosser (*Hamlet and Revenge,* p. 175), and especially L. C. Knights ("Prince Hamlet," *Scrutiny* 9 [1940-41]: 151; *An Approach to "Hamlet"* [London: Chatto and Windus, 1960], esp. pp. 50-60). Most trace his recoil from the flesh to his shock at his mother's sensuality: "Is he not . . . her very flesh and blood?" Granville-Barker asks (*Prefaces to Shakespeare,* p. 235; see also, e.g., Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet?,* p. 42; Knights, *An Approach to "Hamlet",* p. 60; and Karl P. Wentersdorf, "Animal Symbolism in Shakespeare's *Hamlet:* The Imagery of Sex Nausea," *Comparative Drama* 17 [1983-84]: 375); in some ways my reading of *Hamlet* is an attempt to unfold the implications of Granville-Barker's question.

For Jones, as for most oedipal critics, this recoil comes more indirectly from his mother: it is Hamlet's defensive response to the incestuous desire her remarriage fosters in him (*Hamlet and Oedipus,* pp. 88-89, 95). But John Hunt sees the source of Hamlet's contempt for the body not in his mother but in the ghost, the "memento of all that rots" ("A Thing of Nothing: The Catastrophic Body in *Hamlet," Shakespeare Quarterly* 39 [1988]: 32-35).

[15] After giving the reasons for preferring Quarto 1 and 2's "sallied" (= sullied) to Folio's "solid," Jenkins concedes that Shakespeare may have intended a pun (see Arden *Hamlet,* pp. 436-37).

[16] In Bamber's formulation, "What we see in Hamlet is not the Oedipal drama itself but the unraveling of the resolution to the Oedipus complex" (*Comic Women, Tragic Men,* p. 156); Rose understands femininity as the scapegoated sign of this unraveling ("Hamlet—the *Mona Lisa* of Literature," esp. pp. 40-41, 46-47). Traditional Freudian theory locates the father's protective function at the point of this resolution (see, for example, Erlich's account of Hamlet's fantasy-search for the father who can protect him from his own incestuous impulses [*Hamlet's Absent Father,* esp. pp. 23-37, 185-94]). But in object-relations theory, the father's protective role comes much earlier, when he helps the son in the process of differentiation from the potentially overwhelming mother of infancy (see, e.g., Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978], pp. 71, 79-82; the father's role in the process of individuation was first pointed out to me by Dr. Malcolm Pines at a meeting of the British Psychoanalytical Society in 1977). Both sorts of paternal protection seem to me to be lost at the beginning of *Hamlet;* but the distinctly oral valence of the unraveling of the oedipal resolution here (see note 4, above) suggests the primacy of the earlier crisis in the play's structuring fantasy.

[17] The sense that Old Hamlet is somehow guilty has been most vigorously registered through the suspicion that the ghost is up to no good, that he is—as Protestant theology would insist and as Hamlet himself suspects when it is convenient for him to do so—a diabolic agent conducing to damnation. (The classic account of this view is Prosser's *Hamlet and Revenge;* in my view, it has been largely refuted by those who insist on the ghost's mixed nature [e.g., Charles A. Hallet and Elaine S. Hallet, *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 184-89] and on the extent to which his nature is deliberately left ambiguous [e.g., Robert H. West, *Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1968), pp. 56-68] and Frye, *The Renaissance "Hamlet",* pp. 14-29).

[18] See Erlich's similar reading of this passage as expressing the wish for a nonsexual birth that can defend against female danger (*Hamlet's Absent Father,* pp. 201-4). Though they do not specifically allude to this passage, Barber's and Wheeler's comments on the transformation of religious need into tragic theater are, I think, especially pertinent to the filial identity imaged through it: "The play is a version of the family romance of which Jesus's conviction that he is the son of God, that 'My father and I are one,' is the ultimate extreme" (*The Whole Journey,* p. 29).

[19] The place of this dream-technique in the creation of Old Hamlet and Claudius was identified by Jones (*Hamlet and Oedipus,* p. 138) and Maud Bodkin (*Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], pp. 13-14) and has since been widely accepted by psychoanalytic critics; see especially Barber and Wheeler's account of its devastating effects on the son who thus loses the capacity to move toward independent selfhood by coming to terms with his father's imperfections (*The Whole Journey,* pp. 249, 254-55). The over-idealized father must be destructive to Hamlet's own selfhood (see Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development,* pp. 143, 193-94); in discussing Hamlet's need to escape "from the shade of the dead hero," Levin strikingly anticipates more recent formulations of the problem (*The Question of Hamlet,* pp. 57-58).

[20] Critics often note that Old Hamlet's crimes seem to be of the same kind as Claudius's (see, for example, Rebecca West, *The Court and the Castle* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957], pp. 27-28; P. J. Aldus, *Mousetrap: Structure and Meaning in "Hamlet"* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977], pp.

47-48; David Leverenz, "The Woman in Hamlet: An Interpersonal View," in *Representing Shakespeare,* p. 117; and Margaret W. Ferguson, "Hamlet: Letters and Spirits," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory,* ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman [New York: Methuen, 1985], pp. 296-97); the recent mini-tradition of doubling the roles of Claudius and the ghost seems to respond to this likeness (see Ralph Berry, "Hamlet's Doubles," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 [1986]: 209-10). But critics like West or Girard (see note 3, above) who begin by noting the likeness seem to me to obscure its force: the shock of noticing the likeness works on us, I think, only if we have first accepted the difference between them; the play thus replicates in its audience the disillusionment Hamlet continually tries to defer.

[21] Elizabeth Abel first called my attention to the implicit presence of a controlling male gardener in Hamlet's image; since she has been a great help to me at virtually every stage of this book, it is a particular pleasure to record this specific debt to her. The father's place in controlling the mother's sexuality for the (oedipal) son is familiar in psychoanalysis; see, e.g., Lidz (*Hamlet's Enemy,* pp. 54, 83). Rose forcefully poses the broader social question this formulation partly occludes: "What happens . . . to the sexuality of the woman, when the husband dies, who is there to hold its potentially dangerous excess within the bounds of a fully social constraint?" ("Hamlet—the *Mona Lisa* of Literature," pp. 38-39).

[22] When "grossly" is glossed, editors generally apply it to Old Hamlet's spiritual state; see, e.g., Jenkins (Arden edition), Willard Farnham (in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works,* gen. ed. Alfred Harbage [Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1969]), and G. R. Hibbard (*The Oxford Shakespeare: Hamlet* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987]). But "grossly" modifies Claudius's action before it modifies Old Hamlet's state; in virtually all Shakespeare's other uses of it, it describes an action both bodily and palpable (see, e.g., *All's Well,* 1.3.173; *Measure,* 5.1.470; *Othello,* 3.3.401).

[23] Given my reading of this passage, Warburton's famous emendation of *good* to *god* is nearly irresistible; but I have nonetheless resisted it, staying with the Arden's *good* on the grounds that the word does not, strictly speaking, require emendation.

[24] According to John E. Hankins, Hamlet is quite orthodox here; see his account of the Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian theories that made generation of all kinds dependent on putrifying matter ("Hamlet's 'God Kissing Carrion': A Theory of the Generation of Life," *PMLA* 64 [1949]: 507-16).

[25] "Marrow" is unusual in Shakespeare; three of its four other occurrences are in a sexual context (see *All's Well,* where Parolles cautions Bertram against "spending his manly marrow" in the arms of his kickywicky [2.3.276-77]; see also "Venus and Adonis," 1. 142, and *3 Henry VI,* 3.2.125).

[26] See John H. Astington, "'Fault' in Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36 (1985): 330-4, for *fault* as a slang term for the female genitals; he does not note its use in this passage. But *fault* could apparently carry the more general suggestion of sexual intercourse as well: as the language lesson in *Henry V* makes clear, French *foutre* was available to corrupt good English words (3.4.47-49), and Shakespeare routinely takes advantage of this potentiality in his use of *fault.* Among many instances, see especially Sonnet 138 ("Therefore I lie with her and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be"), *Othello* ("oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not," 3.3.151-52), *Measure* ("some condemned for a fault alone," 2.1.40), and *The Winter's Tale* ("Th' offenses we have made you do, we'll answer, / If you first sinn'd with us, and that with us / You did continue fault," 1.2.83-85). Stephen Booth hears *false* in the *faults* of Sonnet 138 and cites an apparent faults/fall echo (*Othello,* 4.3.86-87); see his note on the complex issue of pronunciation (*Shakespeare's Sonnets* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977], p. 481). Whether or not the "1" was audible in *faults,* the word could clearly serve as a nexus for the sense of sexual corruption.

[27] Critics often portray Hamlet's world as infected by original sin (see, e.g., West, *The Court and the Castle,* p. 28; Levin, *The Question of Hamlet,* p. 58; Robert B. Bennett, "Hamlet and the Burden of Knowledge,"

Shakespeare Studies 15 [1982]: 77-97; Donald V. Stump, "Hamlet, Cain and Abel, and the Pattern of Divine Providence," *Renaissance Papers 1985* [The Southern Renaissance Conference], pp. 29-30). Hankins associates original sin generally with the flesh of Hamlet's "good kissing carrion" ("Hamlet's 'God Kissing Carrion,'" pp. 515-16), Walter N. King specifically with Hamlet's own sullied flesh (*Hamlet's Search for Meaning* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1982], p. 44); but Hamlet's anatomy of original sin is more precise than they suggest. And it is also accepted orthodoxy: see Marina Warner (*Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* [New York: Random House, 1983], pp. 54, 57) for the Augustinian view that original sin was transmitted in the womb through the act of conception. Hence the logic that led eventually to the doctrine of Immaculate Conception for the Virgin (Warner, pp. 236-54) and also to her exemption from death (Warner, pp. 97-98; see also Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *The Female Body in Western Culture,* ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986], p. 102).

[28] Without noting the pun on *fault* or the allusion to original sin, Erlich comes to a similar conclusion about this passage; see his use of it to explicate the "to be or not to be" soliloquy as a meditation on whether or not to be born (*Hamlet's Absent Father,* esp. pp. 182-85). Erlich understands the play's emphasis on birth primarily in relation to the oedipally castrating mother (e.g., p. 187); I am nonetheless indebted to his explication of the various forms of *bear* in the soliloquy and elsewhere (see esp. p. 183). The soliloquy similarly asks "how he or anyone lets himself be born as the one he is" in Stanley Cavell's meditation on Hamlet's refusal to accept his birth, which means his refusal "to take [his] existence upon [him]" ("Hamlet's Burden of Proof," *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987], p. 187). In Cavell's complex account, acceptance of one's birth is acceptance of one's own separateness, hence acceptance of the sexually independent mother and the sexually dependent father shadowed in the fantasy of the primal scene; I locate the problematics of birth in more specifically preoedipal and gendered terms, as a register of fears of male contamination by the female at the point of origin of subjectivity as well as in the primal scene.

[29] The allusion to the fall in garden and serpent is commonly recognized (see, e.g., Arthur M. Eastman, *"Hamlet* in the Light of the Shakespearean Canon," in *Perspectives on Hamlet,* ed. William G. Holzberger and Peter B. Waldeck [Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1975], p. 53; Kirsch, "Hamlet's Grief," p. 25; and Stump, "Hamlet, Cain and Abel," p. 29); the anomalous position of Eve in this version of the fall is not.

[30] Few critics share Flatter's conviction that Gertrude was literally complicit in Old Hamlet's murder (see note 6), but some note the sense of murderous culpability nonetheless associated with her; they attribute it to her (naturalistically conceived) failure to love her husband enough (Lora Heller and Abraham Heller, "Hamlet's Parents: The Dynamic Formulation of A Tragedy," *American Imago* 17 [1960]: 417-20), to the specifically male fantasies that equate female betrayal with death (Madelon [Sprengnether] Gohlke, "'I wooed thee with my sword': Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms," in *Representing Shakespeare,* p. 173; A. Andre Glaz, *"Hamlet,* Or the Tragedy of Shakespeare," *American Imago* 18 [1961]: 139) or to fantasies of the primal scene in which the mother damages the father (Erlich, *Hamlet's Absent Father,* pp. 62-63, 115; Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge,* pp. 183-85). Others note the more generalized nexus of sexuality and death without addressing the specific issue of Gertrude's culpability (e.g., Levin, *The Question of Hamlet,* pp. 59, 64; Moloney and Rockelein, "A New Interpretation of *Hamlet"* p. 94; Aldus, *Mousetrap,* pp. 108-13). In thinking of the story of fratricidal rivalry in effect as a cover for the more primary story of male subjection to the female, I am implicitly quarreling with the assumptions of Girard and others, for whom woman takes on meaning only insofar as she functions as a sign of differentiation between men; Girardian No-Difference seems to me at its most dangerous—at least to the Shakespearean (male) subject—when it threatens to obliterate the difference between male and female on which manhood is founded.

[31] The shift of blame from male to female that is the subtext of *Hamlet* is modeled in little by the Player's speech on the death of Priam, where the strumpet Fortune stands in for Pyrrhus at the crucial moment of the murder (2.2.488-89); see Erlich, *Hamlet's Absent Father,* p. 118, and Chapter 3, p. 43, above.

[32] See Kay Stockholder (*Dream Works: Lovers and Families in Shakespeare's Plays* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987], pp. 52-53) for a similar formulation. *OED* 1 (e) gives "sexual intercourse" as one of the meanings for *mixture.* Holland cites several psychoanalytic critics who see the poisoning "as a childishly confused account of the sexual act" (*Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare,* p. 194); see also Erlich (*Hamlet's Absent Father,* p. 93), and especially Cavell, who reads the dumb-show poisoning as Hamlet's dream-version of a primal scene fantasy (*Disowning Knowledge,* p. 185).

[33] Skin eruptions of the sort the ghost describes were one of the symptoms of syphilis (see James Cleugh, *Secret Enemy: The Story of a Disease* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1954], pp. 46-50); Thersites wishes "tetter" on the "masculine whore" Patroclus (*Troilus and Cressida,* 5.1.16, 22). Both the ghost's "crust" and his odd "bark'd about" are anticipated in early descriptions of the disease: Francisco Lopez de Villalobos notes the "very ugly eruption of crusts upon the face and body," Josef Grunbeck the wrinkled black scabs, "harder than bark" (cited in English translation in Cleugh, pp. 48, 49). The description of the poison as a "leperous distilment" that courses through his body like "quicksilver" (1.5.64, 66) might also further the association of the poison with syphilis, since quicksilver was a routine treatment for syphilis (Cleugh, pp. 59, 61) and leprosy itself was associated with venereal disease (see Cleugh, pp. 53-55, and Charles Clayton Dennie, *A History of Syphilis* [Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1962], pp. 13, 32; for Shakespearean uses of this association, see Timon's punning "Make the hoar leprosy ador'd" [*Timon,* 4.3.36] and Antony's wishing leprosy on "you ribbaudred nag of Egypt," *Antony,* 3.10.10).

[34] See Erlich's similar speculations on this pun (*Hamlet's Absent Father,* pp. 62-63).

[35] The descriptions of hell and of Gertrude's body coalesce in the burning characteristic of venereal disease; see Timon ("Be strong in whore, allure him, burn him up" [4.3.143]) and especially Thersites ("Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery! . . . A burning devil take them!" [*Troilus,* 5.2.193-95]). For the female genitals as burning hell, see Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* pp. 499-500.

[36] An incipient pun on matter and *mater* seems to run just below the surface of *Hamlet,* emerging only when Hamlet wittily asks his mother, "Now, mother, what's the matter?" (3.4.7) and perhaps in the "baser matter" of 1.5.104 (Fred Crews long ago electrified a Berkeley colloquium by speculating on this latter possibility after a talk by Avi Erlich). For extended commentary on the pun, see Erlich (*Hamlet's Absent Father,* p. 215) and Ferguson (*"Hamlet:* Letters and Spirits," p. 295); for the anatomical association of matter and *mater,* see Chapter 1, p. 6. Shakespeare toys with this association even in casual use: see, for example, *Twelfth Night,* where Sebastian's proclamation that he is a spirit indeed, "but . . . in that dimension grossly clad / Which from the womb I did participate" (5.1.229-30) anticipates *Hamlet's* genesis of gross flesh. Given this association, even the gravedigger's reference to a corpse as "your whoreson dead body" (5.1.166) may not be wholly casual.

[37] Hamlet's famous pun to Ophelia—"Do you think I meant country matters?" (3.2.115)—clarifies the use of "country" here. Erlich first called my attention to this pun in the soliloquy (see *Hamlet's Absent Father,*p. 188; and see the same page, and Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* p. 526, for the possibility that the *conscience* that makes cowards of us all (3.1.83) similarly puns on the female genitals.

[38] The pun associating the poison with marriage and sexual union has been noted at least since Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy,* p. 126); Faber sees in Hamlet's forcing Claudius to drink his "union" specifically the playing out of Hamlet's oral aggression ("Hamlet, Sarcasm and Psychoanalysis," p. 89).

[39] See note 36 for the pun on *mater*/matter.

[40] In this paragraph, as elsewhere, I am drawing on ideas expressed by D. W. Winnicott in a series of essays on the interface between inner and outer in earliest infantile development, especially on the ways in which a

developing core of selfhood can meet with a reliable world in a transitional zone that makes creative interaction between inner and outer possible, and on the ways in which this zone can be destroyed (see especially "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* [London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1975], pp. 229-42; "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self," *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment* [London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1972], pp. 140-52; and "Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites," *The Maturational Processes,* pp. 179-92; and see Chapter 8, notes 83, 84, and 90, for further discussion of Winnicott). See also Wheeler on Hamlet's "excruciating efforts to establish a self while hiding it from others" for a similarly Winnicottian account (*Shakespeare's Development,* p. 198). Many have noted the troubled relationship between inner and outer in Hamlet: for particularly interesting accounts, see, e.g, Marvin Spevack on Hamlet's "self-conceived inner realm" ("Hamlet and Imagery: The Mind's Eye," *Die Neueren Sprachem* n.s.25 [1966]: 203-12), David Pirie on Hamlet's retreat into soliloquy (*"Hamlet* without the Prince," *Critical Quarterly* 14 (1972): 293-314), and Holland on Hamlet's "tendency to turn inner life into outward" (*Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare,* p. 204); Brent Cohen notes the extent to which even the distinction between inner and outer is problematized as Hamlet's claims to interiority become merely another role ("'What is it you would see?': *Hamlet* and the Conscience of the Theatre," *ELH* 40 [1977]: 240-42). The vexed relationship between inner and outer in *Hamlet* makes for some odd readings of the play, in which anything distantly resembling plot or character is dissolved. For extreme instances, see Glaz, for whom the whole play acts out a conversation between Gertrude and Hamlet confirming Hamlet's—or maybe Shakespeare's—illegitimacy (*"Hamlet,* Or the Tragedy of Shakespeare," pp. 129-58), and Aldus, who sees in all the male characters a single mythic man encountering sex and death in a single woman (*The Mousetrap,* e.g., pp. 115, 146, and 159); for a less extreme instance, see Stockholder, for whom plays are always the dreams of their protagonists, in this case the oedipally tinged dream of Hamlet's conflicted move toward maturity (*Dream Works,* pp. 12-16, 40-64). The entire collapse of what he dismisses as the literal perspective on the play is especially frustrating in Aldus's account, since it prevents his sometimes fascinating intuitions from becoming fully coherent.

[41] See Erickson's account of Horatio's defensive function for Hamlet (*Patriarchal Structures,* pp. 66-80); in his account, the imperviousness of Horatio helps Hamlet to ward off the psychic demands of his overwhelming father (pp. 68-69) and allows Hamlet safely to replicate the affectionate bond he cannot have with his mother or Ophelia (pp. 74-78).

[42] Critics who use the model of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (see note 12, above) generally assume that the lost object is Hamlet's father; but Ham let's discovery of the whore inside himself suggests that the lost, introjected, and then berated object is his mother (see, e.g., Paul A. Jorgensen, "Hamlet's Therapy," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 27 [1964]: 254-55, and Stephen A. Reid, "Hamlet's Melancholia," *American Imago* 31 [1974]: 389-92). Psychoanalytic critics sometimes note Hamlet's difficulty in reconciling what they see as the masculine and feminine elements within him; see, for example, Murray M. Schwartz ("Shakespeare through Contemporary Psychoanalysis," in *Representing Shakespeare,* p. 27) and especially Winnicott, in his not wholly successful attempt to gender the development of the objective subject ("Creativity and its Origins," in *Playing and Reality* [London: Tavistock Publications, 1971], esp. pp. 79-84; see also Rose's critique of Winnicott, "Hamlet—the *Mona Lisa* of Literature," p. 45). Holland points toward the same difficulty in Shakespeare (*Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare,* p. 142). The fullest account of Hamlet's relation to his own "femaleness" is David Leverenz's "The Woman in Hamlet: An Interpersonal View" (in *Representing Shakespeare,* pp. 110-28). Despite its suggestive use of double-bind theory and its wonderful account of Ophelia as an empty repository for other people's voices, this essay seems to me to some extent vitiated by its attempt to locate the female as a positive source of value within Shakespeare's text; it is much more successful in demonstrating Hamlet's revulsion against the female than in suggesting Shakespeare's critique of his revulsion. In *Macbeth* and *Coriolanus,* Shakespeare will foreground the consequences of constructing masculinity as the not-female; here he seems to me largely to replicate Hamlet's sense of the female as the source of weakness and contamination. For the basis of this construction of the masculine self in the theories

of object-relations psychoanalysis, see Chapter 1, p. 7; for *Hamlet* specifically, see Madelon Gohlke, "'I wooed thee with my sword': Shakespeare's Tragic Paradigms," in *Representing Shakespeare,* pp. 172-73.

[43] In an attempt to preserve Hamlet's nobility, several critics have attributed his behavior in 3.4 to his high-minded and altogether selfless reformist impulses toward his mother (see, for example, Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy,* p. 115; Joseph, *Conscience and the King,* pp. 95-97; Frye, *The Renaissance "Hamlet",* pp. 152, 162); but Knights notes that he "seems intent not so much on exposing lust as on indulging an uncontrollable spite against the flesh" ("Prince Hamlet," p. 151). I would add that he shows very few signs of interest in his mother as a real person who might be won to repentance; in my view, she remains almost entirely a fantasy-object for him in this scene.

[44] As Charney notes, "Hamlet characteristically displaces the expected plot interest from the king . . . to his mother" in the middle of the play; the "crucial prayer scene occurs, as it were, in passing" ("The 'Now Could I Drink Hot Blood' Soliloquy," pp. 82-83).

[45] Although Barber does not specifically discuss this moment in *Hamlet,* my sense of the importance of the sacred as a psychic category in Shakespeare is greatly indebted to him. His work—which I first saw in 1976—locates the tragic need to find the sacred in familial relationships in the context of the Protestant dismantling of the Holy Family, especially of the Holy Mother "whose worship could help meet the profound need for relationship to an ideal feminine figure, unsullied either by her own sexuality or by the sexual insecurities of men and unlimited in maternal solace and generosity" (Barber and Wheeler, *The Whole Journey,* p. 32; see also "On Christianity and the Family: Tragedy of the Sacred," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "King Lear",* ed. Janet Adelman [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978], pp. 117-19, and "The Family in Shakespeare's Development: Tragedy and Sacredness," in *Representing Shakespeare,* pp. 188-202, for earlier formulations of these ideas). Although Barber and Wheeler's full discussion of *Hamlet* in *The Whole Journey* foregrounds the father-son relationship, they characterize relationship to the mother as the "anguished center of Hamlet's experience" in discussing the needs the Holy Mother is no longer available to fulfill (p. 31). Wheeler's earlier account of *Hamlet* in *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies* powerfully foregrounds this anguished center: in it, he draws on the work of Erik Erikson (especially pp. 82-83, 161) and Winnicott (especially pp. 195-99) to explicate Hamlet's "need to repurify and rediscover himself in the trustworthy, internalized maternal presence that Gertrude has contaminated" (p. 196); in his view, Hamlet can begin to imagine that blessed presence only after his matricidal impulse is "released and deflected onto Polonius" (p. 197).

[46] See Meredith Skura's account of the ways in which Hamlet's world embodies (and hence justifies) what he feels (*The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981], p. 47). Though she seems to me too quick to dismiss the locus of fantasy in the character of Hamlet—*"Hamlet* recreates the fantasy, not the fantasizer" (p. 48)—and though she stresses oedipal to the exclusion of preoedipal fantasy, her account of the presence and status of fantasy in *Hamlet* and in other literary works seems to me extraordinarily rich and compelling (see the whole of Chapter 3, "Literature as Fantasy," pp. 58-124; and see especially pp. 47-50, 97-98, for *Hamlet*).

[47] See Eastman, *'Hamlet* in the Light of the Shakespearean Canon," for a striking explication of *Hamlet* via its exfoliations in *Othello* and *King Lear;* this essay anticipates my own formulations at several points (see esp. pp. 55-56, on Lear's vagina/hell-mouth, and p. 65, on the "deep desire for spiritual rapprochement" in the blessing of parent and child).

Joanna Montgomery Byles (essay date 1994)

SOURCE: "'Tragic Alternatives: Eros and Superego Revenge in *Hamlet'," in *The Hamlet Collection: New*

Essays on Hamlet, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett and John Manning, AMS Press, 1994, pp. 117-34.

[*In the following essay, Byles examines the psychological origins of revenge in* Hamlet, *arguing that for Hamlet, the demands of his ego and superego conflict, leaving him ashamed of his father's command to revenge as well as ashamed of his inability to fulfill his father's command.*]

Hamlet tells us, he has 'that within which passes show' (I. ii. 85). We become intensely aware of Hamlet's inner life through his soliloquies, which externalize and dramatize his inner conflicts so powerfully. How to denote these inner tensions, and his all-pervasive feelings of powerlessness and rage, and to express them truly is Hamlet's problem throughout the play.

In this essay I should like to focus on some of the psychological origins of revenge in *Hamlet.* I acknowledge that what I have to say leaves out many other problems, but from the perspective of psychoanalysis we might pose the following questions: what is the psychological object of mimesis in revenge tragedies, particularly in *Hamlet?* Why are many of Hamlet's actions motivated by impulse rather than reason? What is being represented? What role do destructive and self-destructive impulses play in Hamlet's destiny? What part does the socialized and / or individual superego play in creating the revenge tragedy in *Hamlet?* Is tragic revenge different from tragi-comic revenge? Is there some basic dynamic pattern of psychic action that Shakespearean tragedy dramatizes as revenge? How can Freud and other theorists help us to understand this dynamic pattern?

The concept of the superego, both individual and cultural, is important to our understanding of the dynamics of aggressive destruction in Shakespeare's tragedies involving revenge. The Freudian superego is usually thought of as heir to the Oedipus complex, the internalization of parental values and the source of punitive, approving and idealizing attitudes towards the self.[1] In drama, the tragic hero's superego is, of course, separate from the cultural superego. Superego aggression may be directed against the self or the external world; the operative feeling in this unconscious aggression is externalized and dramatized as revengeful hatred. Revenge is an important means of dramatizing this dynamic and its cultural significance within family relationships in the drama.

On one level, *Hamlet* is a play about conflict between the generations; within the play, parents and children are often enemies. All the younger generation are manipulated by the older generation for selfish ends. Clearly, *Hamlet* invites reflection on the proper relation between generations and the significance of inter-generational conflict.[2] After the death of his father, Hamlet cannot leave his family until he is forced into exile; he cannot separate from them, not just geographically but emotionally. Laertes is the only one to escape from Elsinore of his own free will. Ophelia is in much the same position as Hamlet until she takes her own life. Hamlet thinks constantly of suicide or murderous revenge; at times, he is totally absorbed by these deathly desires. Further, in this play two sons are slain, a daughter commits suicide, a mother and two fathers are murdered, and one, old Norway, is killed. The Pyrrhus speech with its arrested sword of vengeance first *'Repugnant to command'* (II. ii. 467) and then *'Aroused'* (II. ii. 484) falling on old Priam, whose sons had ambushed and murdered Pyrrhus' father, Achilles, extends this appalling pattern, metaphorically, to a fourth murdered father. The allusion looks back to the long ritual of revenge in literature. And, of course, it foreshadows Hamlet's own actions. Hamlet has already recalled the dire effect of this ancient revenge story on families in his earlier prompting of the chief Player: Pyrrhus is described as

horridly trick 'd

With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons

(II. ii. 453-4)

In *Hamlet,* Shakespeare subverts the essential logic of the revenge form by representing revenge as an inward tragic event, reinforced by destructive family relationships whose psychic energies violate and destroy the protagonist's psychic wholeness, fragmenting and ultimately dissolving the personality. In Hamlet himself, hate and destructiveness are consuming passions; the deep movement of superego aggression that motivates revenge carries him towards death.

I necessarily assume that tragic action directly links the protagonist's suffering and death to the vengeful destructiveness of his superego and that of the community he exists in, especially his family. Tragic revenge dramatizes qualitative differences between various forms of superego aggressiveness. Ultimately, it is the tragic revenge hero's fate to satisfy the conflicting demands of the socialized and his own superego; when these demands coalesce, we have a definitive tragic image: the destruction and self-sacrifice of the tragic hero.[3]

In *Hamlet,* Osric is the agent of this coalescence. The wager represents the poisonous revenge of both Laertes and Claudius; it is Hamlet's death warrant, but Hamlet has surrendered himself to its treachery and, more importantly, to his own death. The devoted Horatio guesses Hamlet's terrifying and deep resignation:

> If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither and say you are not fit.
>
> (V. ii. 213-14)

But Hamlet is ready to 'Let be' (V. ii. 220). At the end of the tragedy, there is a deathly co-operation between the protagonist and his environment in which destructive aggression is resolved and guilt atoned.

The theatre supplies the external frame onto which the internal struggle of the ego and superego is most commonly projected. The tragic hero involved in revenge acts out the inner conflict of the ego's struggle against the cruel demands of both his own and the socialized superego. The play represents the author's working out of this unconscious conflict which is transformed, with all its identifications into the play. The question of the socialized superego, or the communal or cultural superego, allows us to shift from the inner dynamics of the hero to those who surround him, the external figures in the social world of the play, who not only influence his inner life, but his entire tragic history, especially his family history. For example, at the beginning of the play Hamlet is mourning his lost father, and, in another sense his lost mother; what he needs to do is to refashion his emotional attachments to them. However, the circumstances of the play, the 'rottenness' in the State of Denmark and the crucial command to revenge, prevent Hamlet from identifying himself as the new heir; the demand to revenge intensifies his introjection of his father whose ideal he cannot live up to, and whose demands he cannot carry out. Instead of feeling the support and love of his father, he feels the fear, separation and anxiety of frustration and hostility. Added to all this is the general menacing atmosphere of the court, covered, of course, by a courtly show of good manners, in which nearly everyone seems to spy on him; the play is full of licit and illicit listening, secrecy and anxiety. The command to murderous revenge denies Hamlet the possibility of developing the healing processes of mourning whereby the lost loved one is internalized. Moreover, Hamlet's dead father's revelations cause Hamlet cruelly to reject Ophelia, who might have saved him from himself, and would, in fact, have prevented the separation of Eros and aggression in Hamlet's psychodynamic story.

Ophelia, too, is a victim of parental authority. She allows her father to deny what for her is her most crucial reality: her love for Hamlet and its history.[4] Although she is in love with Hamlet and has encouraged his intimacies, Ophelia allows her father to deny this emotional reality:

> OPHELIA: My lord, he hath importun'd me with love
> In honourable fashion.

POLONIUS: Ay, fashion you may call it. Go to, go to.
OPHELIA: And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.
POLONIUS: Ay, springes to catch woodcocks. I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows.

. . . . .

This is for all.
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth
Have you so slander any moment leisure
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to't, I charge you. Come your ways.
OPHELIA: I shall obey, my lord.

(I. iii. 110-36)

Polonius is clearly not at all interested in what Ophelia feels or how she perceives her relationship with Hamlet. Moreover, he forces her to be untrue to herself: to deny her love for Hamlet. He forces her into an invidious position and uses her to entrap Hamlet, so that he can prove himself right about Hamlet's 'madness', which then allows Claudius to take advantage of Hamlet's 'madness'.[5] But it is the poor, motherless Ophelia, who actually goes mad. All the fathers in the play, including the Ghost, without the slightest compunction gratify their own needs by manipulating their children.

Why, many critics have asked, does Hamlet accept the role of revenger?[6] Ethically and morally, it may be considered right or wrong; but, from a psychoanalytic perspective, it is the *only* thing he can do, mobilized as he is by the traumatic effects of his family predicament. He must identify with his dead father's outrage, and rescue his mother from her incestuous marriage, if he is to recover an integrated self and the integrity he needs to become his father's rightful heir:

Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
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
Unmix'd with baser matter.

(I. v. 95-104)

But all this unconsciously involves the murderous and self-murderous superego, dramatized as delay. The inward traumatic pressures of the past cannot so easily be wiped out.

In one sense, we might consider the characters in *Hamlet* as agents of the Ghost's hate. Or the Ghost may be a dramatic means of externalizing Hamlet's desire to kill Claudius, since the command to kill Claudius seems to come from outside himself. Daniel E. Schneider writes that a play is like a dream turned inside out—and an interpretation at the same time, the success and coherence depending upon the talents of the dramatist to

organize and interpret fantasies so that they resonate with the fantasies of the audience. The dream's conflicting pain / pleasure principle made paramount and explicit is the emotional force of the drama; and the interpretation subsidiary and implicit is in its action, in plot, the exposition and motivating force of the drama's story, the dynamic of the author's conflict as it is externalized and interpreted into the fully realized social world of the drama.[7] I find this idea interesting and useful because it unites three essentials: the dramatist's psychic conflicts, the drama itself in all its identifications and the psyche or psyches of the audience. It takes account of the complexity of the tragedy as a work of art and the variety of reactions it stimulates in its audience, from the release of passion under the protection of aesthetic illusion, to the highly complex process of recreation under the dramatist's guidance, of a series of processes of psychic discharge that take place in the audience, including pity and fear. The audience must be drawn into the drama and its resistances overcome; Shakespeare forces the audience to identify and act out in their minds his interpretation of inner conflict and disturbing fantasies that provide the unconscious dynamic as the action moves through conflict, crisis, climax and resolution. In Shakespeare's tragedies involving revenge, the action is nearly always fatal, and we, too, must experience this pressure, recognizing with terror the cruel power of superego aggression, of the dynamic that powers hateful revenge, in ourselves as well as in our representatives on stage, in life as well as in the drama. One reason why revenge tragedies were popular in Shakespeare's culture and are still popular in our own, is that revenge is profoundly disturbing; for an audience the projection of revenge is extremely therapeutic.[8]

A definitive image of tragi-comedy is of forgiveness, reconciliation and regeneration. The endings of tragic revenges are quite otherwise, and perhaps relate to an earlier or more primitive form of psychic conflict (such as scapegoating) than to the life-asserting endings of many tragi-comedies, the underlying dynamic of which is shame, not guilt. Guilt, and the hateful destructiveness and rage which accompany it, are at the centre of Hamlet's experience. The superego is a highly important factor in illustrating the fate of the protagonist in revenge tragedy; he is one for whom the conscious and / or unconscious sense of guilt, with the corresponding need for punishment, satisfied through suffering and eventually through an honourable death, plays a decisive part in his will and willingness to die. In revenge tragedy, as opposed to tragi-comedy involving revenge, the protagonist's superego is a cruelly persecuting agency which his ego has good reason to dread, and much of the tragic hero's motivation, once he has renounced Eros (defusion), derives from the struggle either to avoid or to submit to its claims. When the hostile elements in the external world of the play are directed against Hamlet, he not only internalizes them, but they combine with his own self-destructive tendencies to produce a deep need for inner punishment: death. But this is the final dynamic of Hamlet's psychic journey; the dramatic action covers much ground before that ultimate act.

Tragic Alternatives: Eros and Superego Aggression

To some extent, it is the denial of Eros and the destructiveness of family attachments which largely contribute to the fate of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear. All these tragic figures make the initial mistake of rejecting a crucial and sustaining love relationship. These tragic heroes fail in love, are usually unsuccessful in their ambition, which often includes a powerful and fatal desire for revenge, and suffer from a highly developed superego, whose effect is to produce a pronounced sense of guilt. As I have already suggested, when this inner dynamic of guilt combines with the hostile tendencies of the cultural superego within the social world of the drama, we have a definitive generic marker of tragedy: the self-sacrifice of the tragic figure.

There are two Freudian concepts which might help us to understand these psychodynamics of tragic action and how Shakespeare dramatizes them in the revenge motif of *Hamlet* in particular:

1. Defusion of the dual instincts of Eros and Death, and
2. Superego aggression, which is one aspect of the death instinct.[9]

Freud employs the idea of Eros, from Plato's *Symposium,* in his final instinct theory (1930), to connote the whole of the life instincts, as opposed to the death instinct. According to Freud, the dual instincts are usually mingled with one another or fused. 'Normally,' Freud says, 'the two kinds of instincts seldom appear in isolation from each other, but are alloyed with each other in varying and different proportions, and so become unrecognizable to our judgment'.[10] It is important to understand that Eros neutralizes aggression, and that the ego must find objects for Eros and aggression. Usually, aggression is modified in its impact

1. by displacement to other object;
2. by restriction of its aim;
3. by the sublimation of the aggressive energy; and
4. through the influence of fusion.

Ultimately, none of these modifications applies to Hamlet.

The tragic process (which includes the total environment of the play, with all its hostilities and hatreds, its failures in loving, and its tremendous emphasis on guilt and the corresponding need for punishment and suffering), instead of strengthening the ego in its task of regulating Eros and aggression so that they do not clash with reality and defuse (separate), is one in which the ego is destroyed by the undermining of its total organization. Fusion represents an integrated ego, one which is functioning well, and, with the aid of Eros, able to modify aggression in the four normal ways just mentioned. The failure of Eros results in complete defusion (separation) of the dual instincts and the dominance of the aggressive death instinct, whose agency is the harsh, self-abusive superego. It is then the task of the ego to defend itself by keeping the aggression directed outward in the interests of self-preservation. According to Freud, 'It would seem that aggression when it is impeded entails serious injury, and that we have to destroy other things and other people in order not to destroy ourselves, in order to protect ourselves from the tendency to self-destruction.'[11] As long as the protagonist can displace his inner aggression onto others, usually through hating and revenging, he survives. After separation of the dual instincts (defusion), the erotic component no longer has the power to bind the whole of the destructiveness that was combined with it, and this releases much of the cruelty and violence that is so characteristic of superego aggression and of Shakespeare's tragedies involving revenge, as we see in *Hamlet.*

Sources, Formation and Function of Superego

The superego is the psychic agency that produces the sense of the ideal, of the way things ought to be, not the way they are, and so it is not always oriented towards reality. Freud thought the source of the superego was the internalization of the castrating Oedipal father. He also thought the superego was one aspect of the death instinct (thanatos) in its aggressive need for punishment. Freud theorized that the cruel superego was also the revengeful aggressor that produces not only the need to idealize, but also the need for aggressive self-abuse when the ideal fails: for suicide or murder.[12] Although the formation of the superego is grounded in hostile Oedipal wishes and in the renunciation of loving, it is subsequently refined, according to Freud, by the contributions of social and cultural requirements (education, religion, morality).[13]

In her chapter on superego formation, Edith Jacobson states that the core of the superego is 'the law against patricide and matricide and the incest taboo'; she then goes on to say that superego fear continues and replaces castration fear, but that some people may 'unconsciously equate the superego with the threatening paternal—or their own—phallus'. She also points out that 'there is a tremendous step between the simple moral logic of castration fear, fear of punishment and hope of reward, to the abstract moral level of a superego which has expanded from the taboo of incest and murder to a set of impersonal, ethical principles and regulations for human behaviour.'[14] Melanie Klein traces the beginning of the superego back to early (infant) oral fantasies of self-destruction, which is a direct manifestation of the death instinct.[15] In his reinterpretation of the death instinct, Jean Laplanche sees the death drive 'not as an element in conflict but as conflict itself substantialized,

an internal principle of strife and disunion.'[16] In his chapter on the death instinct, Paul Ricoeur sees the superego as an essential instinct problem for the philosophy of art.[17]

The death instinct is a useful concept in many ways: it represents a decomposition of the ego under attack by the superego; it tends to weaken object relations, and it tends to narcissistic withdrawal. In other words, the person in whom the aggressive tendencies of the death instinct are dominant over the life instincts has a weakened ego, and in an effort to regain the strength of self-esteem and self-confidence, he / she tries narcissistically to withdraw from persons and conflicts altogether. This is particularly true if the person's love relations have failed. If one thinks of Eros as a life-preserving force (the ego needs Eros to carry out its intricate life-preserving functions), and if one thinks of the idealistic superego as the self-aggressor, promoting life-denying tendencies, then the beloved may become a means whereby the ego is defeated. More often than not, Shakespeare dramatizes sexuality as a destructive force, and this is especially true of *Hamlet.*

One striking collusion between the dynamics of character and the universe of Shakespearean tragedy is that the protagonist chooses the wrong lover, or his perception of the loved one is disastrously flawed, or his family relationships are intimately destructive. The ability to relate to the other/s is an immense difficulty, if not to say impossibility for Hamlet. This may be because, as Richard P. Wheeler and others have suggested, men are less able to merge their identity with the other/s, than women are (i.e., men have more definite boundaries to the self than women), or because tragedy dramatizes the inability to steer a relationship through loving betrayal to survival.[18] D. W. Winnicott describes these phases in psychoanalytic object-relations terms as using, destroying and surviving.[19] Winnicott's idea applies more to tragicomedy than to tragedy. A definitive image of tragi-comedy is forgiveness, reconciliation and regeneration; that of tragedy is self-sacrifice and death.

Perhaps narcissism is relevant here.[20] The aim of the narcissist is to be loved, and the narcissistic lover is usually dangerously dependent on his beloved. One who loves in this way has 'expropriated' part of his narcissism, which can only be replaced by his being loved. There is a constant need to replenish the amount of self-love the narcissistic lover gives the other. If, instead of being loved, the narcissistic person is betrayed, it is as if he had betrayed himself; he feels a painful lowering of self-esteem and is full of self-pity. He does not, however, hate himself as the idealist does in similar circumstances. On the contrary, betrayal usually leads to a compensatory increase in narcissism; instead of being fixated on the loved one, the narcissist regresses to a previous point in his life when he loved only himself. In other words, a narcissistic lover who is betrayed is often sustained by his narcissism, whereas an idealistic lover feels utterly worthless and hates himself sometimes to the point of suicide. The idealist lover is driven by superego demands either to murder his beloved and / or himself.

It is only fair to say that there has been enormous resistance to Freud's idea of a death instinct since he first formulated it. Perhaps this resistance has something to do with our unwillingness to accept the violence of self-destructive and revengeful tendencies within ourselves. It seems it is easier to bear punishment inflicted from the outside than to face internal self-destructive tendencies. Possibly the origin of the superego also represents a similar attempt at externalization. Ehrenzweig suggests that instead of being rent by internal tensions, it is as if the ego projects its self-destructive aggression onto a split-off part, the superego, and prefers to submit to its attacks which now come to it from outside.[21] Superego aggression also projects itself into the outside world and onto the figures of punishing parents, punitive laws, repressive political regimes, conquest and invasions.

The superego's function is to induce guilt and to repress; openness (not closure) requires a weakening of the superego power of repression. Yet a lifting of repression, or recognition of repressed material, may produce extreme anxiety, even panic. For example, on one level of interpretation, the Ghost represents the unrepressed hostility Hamlet feels for his father. The hostility Hamlet feels for his father is externalized as revengeful hatred not only for Claudius, his 'uncle-father', but also for Gertrude, his 'aunt-mother', and for Ophelia. These

internal processes are externalized and dramatized in the soliloquies, where the thought is frequently revengeful, sadistic and self-destructive. Hamlet's soliloquies are also expressions of superego conflict: to die or to live; to honour or to revenge; duty to oneself or to one's father. On one level, Hamlet is ashamed of his father's command to revenge, and, at the same time, ashamed of his inability to fulfil the command.

Eleanor Prosser suggests the Ghost is an idea Hamlet has long been waiting for.[22] It is possible that the Ghost is not only a projection of Hamlet's hostile feelings towards his father, but also serves as a projection of his murderous feelings about his mother's husband:

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O villain, villain, smiling damned villain!

.....

So, uncle, there you are.
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(I. v. 106-10)

If the command to murder Claudius is another instance of repressed wishes surfacing into conscious intention, then it is obviously less threatening that the revengeful need seems to come from outside, from the superego demands of authority, of the outraged father, husband and king. The Oedipal theory clearly works here. Hamlet has been thinking, on some pre-conscious level, about his uncle-father; and that is why at first he thrills to the command to revenge and murder: prophetic soul! My uncle!' (I. v. 41).

By creating the Ghost, Shakespeare creates a father-son-mother confrontation at the heart of the play. The play dramatizes a crisis in Hamlet's identification with his idealized, murdered, heroic father, who returns from the dead to demand Hamlet revenge his death, and in so doing, rescue his mother from her second, and incestuous marriage. At first Hamlet responds with alacrity to his ghostly father's demands; then with paralyzing reluctance: sed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right' (I. v. 196-7). Everything hinges on Hamlet's struggle to identify with his father's superego demands that he revenge; that is, after all, justice within the revenge genre, and it coincides with one aspect of the cultural superego—it is the right thing to do—but Shakespeare sets up the problem of revenge in such a disruptive way that the action on moral, ethical and psychic levels is blocked. The conflict of revenge engages the action on many levels, delaying revenge through ambiguities in psychological motivation, language and action.

The creation of the Ghost is itself a piece of theatrical aggression for it stops Hamlet's initial fierce self-restraint; allows him to express his deeply conflicted feelings about Claudius, and his desire to kill him. The Ghost's revelation of murder, incest and adultery—'Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast' (I. v. 42)—is a validation of Hamlet's suspicions and justification of his loathing of Claudius the man who, with 'traitorous gifts'(I. v. 43), seduced his mother, that'seeming-virtuous queen'(I. v. 46).'Seeming', as we learn earlier from Hamlet, can cover all kinds of deception and crime. The revelation is also conclusive and irreversible affirmation of his intense feelings about his mother: O'most pernicious woman!'(I. v. 105). The Ghost and Hamlet share the same obsession: Gertrude. Together they comprise an ancient and often cursed triangle. The acting of *The Mousetrap,* as arranged by Hamlet, is, in fact, a fantasized murder in which Hamlet revenges by doubling as'one Lucianus, nephew to the King'(III. ii. 239). As actor-manager, Hamlet externalizes or projects his inner conflict about revenge onto the directing and acting of the entire scene of his father's murder, which, by pure chance (or dramatic device!) parallels *The Murder of Gonzago:*

> I'll have these players
> Play something like the murder of my father
> Before mine uncle

(II. ii. 590-2)

The play reaches its climax with Hamlet ferociously urging Lucianus on:'Come, the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge'(III. ii. 247-8). As director, actor, chorus and audience, Hamlet is ecstatic at the end of this performance, because it is as if he *had* avenged his father. The successful displacement of inner aggression affords Hamlet immense relief. Moreover, he has made public the entire story, from known beginning to wished-for conclusion.

The Ghost is the means of dramatizing Hamlet's deep-seated inner fears and anxiety, his hatred of Claudius and his unconscious desire to kill the man who has'whor'd'(V. ii. 64) his mother, murdered his father and has

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Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes.
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(V. ii. 65)

The Ghost's foul imaginings about Gertrude's lustful sexuality anticipate Hamlet's own image of'incestuous sheets'(I. ii. 157). There is very little evidence in Gertrude's dialogue that she is as lustful as her first husband and Hamlet would have us suppose. Just as Iago voices Othello's disturbing, destructive, jealous fantasies, so the Ghost does Hamlet's. It may be objected that the Ghost tells Hamlet to leave his mother'to heaven'(I. v. 86). In the closet scene, he pleads with Hamlet to'step between her and her fighting soul'(III. iv. 113). But it is too late. And Hamlet's father knows it. He has timed his intervention perfectly; for, in his passionate and deeply conflicted interview with his mother, Hamlet has already used enough verbal daggers to cleave her'heart in twain'(III. iv. 158). It is needless to labour the Oedipal basis of the closet scene. It is a famous piece of psychoanalytic criticism frequently incorporated into contemporary productions.[23] It is clear that Hamlet is torn between love and loathing for his mother, and that the destructive impulses of his own superego are displaced temporarily in trying to be her conscience.[24] This affords him some relief from the intense anxiety and painful tension of inner aggressiveness, just as his cruel treatment of Ophelia did, and for similar reasons. But what chance does Hamlet have of keeping the crucial love of Ophelia, which might have sustained him? None. Hamlet is irretrievably trapped in a parental relationship involving murder, adultery and incest. What chance is there of detaching himself from this overwhelming guilt? None. He has been made responsible for wiping it out; moreover, he has promised to do so. And Hamlet is a responsible person; his superego sees to that, even if he curses his masculinity in being'born to set it right'(I. v. 197). Yet Hamlet cannot become his father's avenger because that would involve him and his mother still further in family guilt. His repudiation of her makes clear the powerful family knot of emotional attachments that ruin their relationship:

> You are the Queen, your husband's brother's wife,
> And, would it were not so, you are my mother.

(III. iv. 14-16)

The superego, then, is a revengeful force which seeks to punish. Hamlet tries to become his father's superego, but because he cannot act on it, his own superego takes revenge on him—tortures him, kills him eventually. He cannot consciously question the morality of avenging his father's murder, because that would be to challenge his father; moreover, part of him is torn by the moral discrepancy involved in committing murder as a solution to the problem of murder. In a conscious effort to gain control over the destructiveness of the superego, the tragic hero tries to project his sense of guilt, through his ambition or revenge, onto others. Hamlet channels his vengeful aggression in a variety of ways: through his constant cruelty to others, his verbal hostility and his'antic disposition'(I. v. 180).

Barber and Wheeler write of Hamlet's need to use his hostility to'protect his integrity against acquiescence in the corrupt world, on the one side, or acquiescence in self-loathing, on the other'.[25] These critics also see Hamlet's'need for revenge as the core of a need for expression and vindication'.[26] Certainly Hamlet's aggression finds frequent relief in his violent expressiveness, especially when he turns love into hateful violence in the nunnery and closet scenes. The command to revenge is itself a directive to transform love into violent and vengeful hatred. It is a superego command from the idealized father to his son to hate and destroy the bestial father-figure of Claudius, that heap of'garbage'(I. v. 57), that'nasty sty'(III. iv. 94). Initially, the command to revenge displaces some of Hamlet's superego aggression outward in his attempts to'catch the conscience of the King'(II. ii. 601) and to be his mother's conscience, but the failure to achieve revenge, to murder Claudius, and so be at one with his father, fills him with deep dismay and self-contempt, as his soliloquies reveal. Furthermore, his attempts to act out his inner conflicts, his desire to rescue his mother and kill Claudius, have resulted in the regrettable, accidental killing of Polonius and the devastating suicide of Ophelia. Moreover, his mother still shares his uncle's bed, continues to sleep between those'incestuous sheets'(I. ii. 157). He suffers acute mental agony for these blunders.

No wonder Hamlet seems resigned to his own death upon his return from England; all his displacements have failed; the immense energy attached to his sense of guilt turns inward, there is nowhere else for it to go. Hamlet becomes a victim of his own desire for punishment—his need to end his life. He takes revenge upon himself; he accepts the wager from the absurd Osric: ''Tis a chuff, but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt'(V. ii. 88). This is the same anguished, grief-stricken Hamlet who, standing in Ophelia's open grave, has willed'Millions of acres'to be thrown on him so that he may be buried quick with her (V. i. 276). His ego yields to his superego and takes on the suffering the self-abusive superego produces. In these circumstances, the ego collapses under the weight of so much revengeful self-hatred; the pain and anxiety produced by the murderous superego become unendurable. Hamlet submits his person to a duel arranged by one he knows to be his mortal enemy.

Freud's view of instinctual fusion between erotic and aggressive instincts suggests an admixture of erotic quantities even in destructive processes, and this may explain any masochism there might be in the tragic hero's self-sacrifice, as well as the sadism in superego aggression. In Shakespearean tragic drama, the protagonist's sense of guilt (superego aggression) and need for punishment are so pronounced that the ego is not strong enough to be independent of the superego, or to control it. In normal living, this unconscious aggressive energy is displaced or sublimated. In this kind of tragedy, the ego seems unable to defend itself from the severity of the revengeful demands of the superego by such normal activities as repression, denial or rationalization. The function of the plot is to make sure the protagonist's displacements eventually fail. The ultimate aim of the tragic hero is to act out the compulsive nature of his guilt, both the guilt he feels for his own personal wrong-doing, and the generalized guilt which the social demands represented by the drama have required him to internalize. He is compelled to submit to the deathly demands of his own superego and those of the community.

In dying, Hamlet's psyche is cleansed of the burden of failed love, familial outrage and grief. As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, in *Hamlet,* Shakespeare represents revenge as an inward tragic event which is externalized, dramatized, and then reinforced by destructive family relationships whose psychic energies violate and eventually destroy the psychic wholeness of the tragic person. The conflict between ego and superego constitutes the dynamic action of *Hamlet* on many levels, creating revenge and its delay through acute inner anxieties and mental anguish, as well as ambiguities in action, language and thought. But, in the end, although the superego wins, because Hamlet must die, it is with Hamlet's / Shakespeare's total acceptance, as long as revenge is revealed for what it is: a dynamically hostile, hateful, destructive force, and, in *Hamlet,* an unbeatable enemy, as well as an Oedipal foe.

Through his conscious articulation and dramatization of the unconscious dynamics which drive stories of poisonous revenge, Shakespeare invites our reflection, invites us to hold the mirror up to our own deepest

conflicts and desires. The resolution of *Hamlet* leaves us not only moved, but challenged and enlightened. Hamlet's fatal story is a lesson we must not ignore, but keep in our hearts, too:

> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story.

(V. ii. 351-4)

The mimetic power of violent revenge in *Hamlet* depends on the reality of those psychic conflicts Shakespeare dramatizes as revenge.

Notes

[1] See J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis,'The Oedipus complex plays a fundamental part in the structuring of the personality and in the orientation of human desire'(*The Language of Psycho-Analysis* [London: Hogarth Press, 1980], p. 283).

[2] Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 132-40.

[3] Montgomery Byles,'A Basic Pattern of Psychological Conflict in Shakespearean Tragic Drama', *University of Hartford Studies in Literature,* 11 (1979), 58-71.

[4] J. Montgomery Byles,'The Problem of Subjectivity in the Language of Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia', *Imago,* 46 (1989), 37-59.

[5] David Leverenz suggests that there is little sense in Ophelia's madness:'Not allowed to love and unable to be false, Ophelia breaks. She goes mad rather than gets mad'('The Woman in *Hamlet:* An Interpersonal View'in Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélla Kahn, eds, *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays* [Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980], p. 119). I would argue that there is much subject sense in her language when mad. See also Harry Morris,'Ophelia's "Bonny Sweet Robin"', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* 73 (1958), 601-3.

[6] Over the past twenty years or so, many feminist critics have identified the'man-honour-fight'content of revenge as'morally bankrupt'. See Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Summit Books, 1981); Coppélla Kahn, *Man's Estate;* Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely, eds, *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Marianne L. Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

[7] *The Psycho-Analyst and the Artist* (New York: Mentor Books, 1950), p. 164.

[8] Susan Jacoby asks how audience sympathy for the revenger is gained, lost or compromized, and also what dramatic and rhetorical techniques operate to affect sympathy, mostly in modern literature and film in *Wild Justice: The Evolution of Revenge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983). See also Linda Anderson's helpful introduction to the history of revenge in *A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies*

(Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987). See also Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), especially pp. 268-99.

[9] Sigmund Freud,'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works,* tr. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XIV;'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'in *Complete Works,* XVIII;'The Ego and the Id'in *Complete Works,* XIX; and'Civilization and its Discontents'in *Complete Works,* XXI.

[10] Freud,'The Ego and the Id'in *Complete Works,* XIX, 41-2; see also'Civilization and its Discontents'in *Complete Works,* XXI, 119.

[11] Freud, *Complete Works,* XXI, 107.

[12] Freud, *Complete Works,* XXI, 64-149.

[13] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis,* p. 437.

[14] *The Self and the Object World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 127.

[15] Juliet Mitchell, ed., *The Selected Melanie Klein* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 80-3.

[16] *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 122.

[17] *Freud and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 281-309.

[18] '"Since first we were dissevered": Trust and Autonomy in Shakespearean Tragedy and Romance'in Schwartz and Kahn, eds, *Representing Shakespeare,* pp. 150-69.

[19] *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

[20] Freud,'On Narcissism'in *Complete Works,* XIV, 73-105. See also Otto Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1975), and J. M. Byles, *'The Winter's Tale,, Othello,* and *Troilus and Cressida:* Narcissism and Sexual Betrayal', *Imago,* 36 (1979), 80-93.

[21] Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 192.

[22] *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 134.

[22] Although Freud related Hamlet to Oedipus in 1897, and subsequently published the idea in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, Ernest Jones developed it fully in *Hamlet:* The Psychoanalytic Solution'(1910). See M. D. Faber, ed., *The Design Within* (New York: Norton, 1970). See also in the same anthology, pp. 113-20, F. Wertham's'Critique of Freud's Interpretation of *Hamlet*'. For a comprehensive survey of the ramifications of the Freud-Jones view, see Norman Holland, *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976).

[23] Janet Adelman concentrates on the maternal point of the triangle between Hamlet, his father and his mother:'As in a dream, the plot-conjunction of father's funeral and mother's remarriage expresses this return: it tells us that the idealized father's absence releases the threat of maternal sexuality, in effect subjecting the son to her annihilating power'(*Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's*

[24] *Plays:'Hamlet'to'The Tempest'* [New York and London: Routledge, 1992], p. 18).

[25] C. L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 262.

[26] Barber and Wheeler, *The Whole Journey,* p. 263.

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