

sides, protects Hamlet and acts in confidence with Horatio. In Saxo her attitude is as ambiguous as in the later *Hamlet*; she is friendly to Hamlet and does not betray him, yet does not turn against Feng either.

A wife who loves her husband and bears him children, and then is wedded to his slayer and equally loves him, and does it all in a natural and unemotional manner: somewhat unusual.

And one's surprise is a little increased to find that in Saxo Amloði's wife, Hermutrude, does the same as his mother has done. On Amloði's death she marries his slayer, Wiglek. Again, there is an Irish king, historical to a great degree, who has got deeply entangled with the Hamlet story. His name is Anlaf Curan. Now his wife, Gormflaith, carried this practice so far that the chronicler comments on it. After Anlaf's defeat at Tara she marries his conqueror Malachy, and on Malachy's defeat marries Malachy's conqueror Brian. We will consider later the Greek parallels to this enigmatic lady. For the present we must admit that she is very unlike the Clytemnestra of Greek tragedy, whose motives are studied in every detail, who boldly hates her husband and murders him. There are traces in Homer of a far less passionate Clytemnestra.

ERNEST JONES

repression A Psycho-analytic Study of *Hamlet* (1922)[†]

The complete expression of the "repressed" wish is not only that the father should die but that the son should then espouse the mother. This was openly expressed by Diderot in speaking of boys: "If we were left to ourselves and if our bodily strength only came up to that of our phantasy we would wring our fathers' necks and sleep with our mothers." The attitude of son to parents is so transpicuously illustrated in the Oedipus legend,¹ as developed for instance in Sophocles' tragedy, that the group of mental processes in question is generally known under the name of the "Oedipus-complex."

[†] Jones, *A Psycho-analytic Study of Hamlet* (London: The International Psycho-analytic P, 1922), 50–59. Following Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones (1879–1958) wrote a classical psychoanalysis of Hamlet as an illustration of the Oedipus complex, the unconscious desire to possess the parent of the child's same sex. According to this reading, Claudius has acted out Hamlet's repressed desires and thereby caused Hamlet's turmoil, cruelty to Ophelia, and delay in revenge. See Olivier, "The Actors Gallery," p. 168.

¹ See Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 1900, S. 181. Valuable expositions, of the mythological aspects of the subject are given by Abraham, *Traum und Mythos*, 1909, and Rank, *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, 1909. Rank has also worked through in great detail the various ways in which the same theme is made use of in literature: *Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage*, 1912, especially Kap. VIII which contains an excellent analysis of the Oedipus legend.



Laurence Olivier (Hamlet) and Eileen Herlie (Gertrude) in Oedipal embrace, film, 1948

We are now in a position to expand and complete the suggestions offered above in connection with the Hamlet problem.² The story thus interpreted would run somewhat as follows.

As a child Hamlet had experienced the warmest affection for his mother, and this, as is always so, had contained elements of a disguised erotic quality. The presence of two traits in the Queen's character go to corroborate this assumption, namely her markedly sensual nature and her passionate fondness for her son. The former is indicated in too many places in the play to need specific reference, and is generally recognised. The latter is also manifest; Claudius says, for instance "The Queen his mother lives almost by his looks" [4.7.12–13]. Nevertheless Hamlet seems to have with more or less success weaned himself from her and to have fallen in love with Ophelia. The precise nature of his original feeling for Ophelia is a little obscure. We may assume that at least in part it was composed of a normal love for a prospective bride, though the extravagance of the language used (the passionate need for absolute certainty, etc.)

² Here, as throughout this essay, I closely follow Freud's interpretation given in the footnote previously referred to. He there points out the inadequacy of the earlier explanations, deals with Hamlet's feelings toward his mother, father, and uncle, and mentions two other matters that will presently be discussed, the significance of Hamlet's reaction against Ophelia and of the probability that the play was written immediately after the death of Shakespeare's own father.

suggests a somewhat morbid frame of mind. There are indications that even here the influence of the old attraction for the mother is still exerting itself.

Although some writers, following Goethe,³ see in Ophelia many traits of resemblance to the Queen, surely more striking are the traits contrasting with those of the Queen. Whatever truth there may be in the many German conceptions of Ophelia as a sensual wanton⁴—misconceptions that have been confuted by Loening⁵ and others—still the very fact that it needed what Goethe happily called the "innocence of insanity" to reveal the presence of any such libidinous thoughts demonstrates in itself the modesty and chasteness of her habitual demeanour. Her naive piety, her obedient resignation and her unreflecting simplicity sharply contrast with the Queen's character, and seem to indicate that Hamlet by a characteristic reaction towards the opposite extreme had unknowingly been impelled to choose a woman who should least remind him of his mother. A case might even be made out for the view that part of his courtship originated not so much in direct attraction for Ophelia as in an unconscious desire to play her off against his mother, just as a disappointed and piqued lover so often has resort to the arms of a more willing rival. It would be hard otherwise to understand the readiness with which he later throws himself into this part. When, for instance, in the play scene he replies to his mother's request to sit by her with the words "No, good mother, here's metal more attractive" [3.2.101-02] and proceeds to lie at Ophelia's feet, we seem to have a direct indication of this attitude; and his coarse familiarity and bandying of ambiguous jests with the woman he has recently so ruthlessly jilted are hardly intelligible unless we bear in mind that they were carried out under the heedful gaze of the Queen. It is as though his unconscious were trying to convey to her the following thought: "You give yourself to other men whom you prefer to me. Let me assure you that I can dispense with your favours and even prefer those of a woman whom I no longer love." His extraordinary outburst of bawdiness on this occasion, so unexpected in a man of obviously fine feeling, points unequivocally to the sexual nature of the underlying turmoil.

3. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, IV, 14. "Her whole being hovers in ripe, sweet voluptuousness." "Her fancy is moved, her quiet modesty breathes loving desire, and should the gentle Goddess Opportunity shake the tree the fruit would at once fall."
4. For instance, Storrfrich, *Psychologische Aufschlüsse über Shakespeares Hamlet*, 1859, S. 131; Dietrich, *Hamlet, Der Konstel der Vorsehung, Shakespeare-Studie*, 1883, S. 129; Tieck, *Dramatargische Blätter*, II, S. 85, etc.
5. Loening, *Die Hamlet-Tragödie Shakespeares*, 1893, Cap. XIII. "'Charakter' und Liebe Ophelias."

Now comes the father's death and the mother's second marriage. The association of the idea of sexuality with his mother, buried since infancy, can no longer be concealed from his consciousness. As Bradley⁶ well says: "Her son was forced to see in her action not only an astounding shallowness of feeling, but an eruption of coarse sensuality, 'rank and gross,' speeding post-haste to its horrible delight." Feelings which once, in the infancy of long ago, were pleasurable desires can now, because of his repressions, only fill him with repulsion. The long "repressed" desire to take his father's place in his mother's affection is stimulated to unconscious activity by the sight of someone usurping this place exactly as he himself had once longed to do. More, this someone was a member of the same family, so that the actual usurpation further resembled the imaginary one in being incestuous. Without his being in the least aware of it these ancient desires are ringing in his mind, are once more struggling to find conscious expression, and need such an expenditure of energy again to "repress" them that he is reduced to the deplorable mental state he himself so vividly depicts.

There follows the Ghost's announcement that the father's death was a willed one, was due to murder. Hamlet, having at the moment his mind filled with natural indignation at the news, answers normally enough with the cry:

Haste me to know 't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge. [1.5.29-31]

The momentous words follow revealing who was the guilty person, namely a relative who had committed the deed at the bidding of lust.⁷ Hamlet's second guilty wish had thus also been realised by his uncle, namely to procure the fulfilment of the first—the possession of the mother—by a personal deed, in fact by murder of the father. The two recent events, the father's death and the mother's second marriage, seemed to the world to have no inner causal relation to each other, but they represented ideas which in Hamlet's unconscious fantasy had for many years been closely associated. These ideas now in a moment forced their way to conscious recognition in spite of all "repressing forces," and found immediate expression in his almost reflex cry: "O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" The frightful truth his unconscious had already intuitively divined his consciousness had now to assimilate, as best it could. For the rest of the interview Hamlet is stunned by the effect of the internal conflict

6. Bradley, [*Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed., 1905,] p. 118.

7. It is not maintained that this was by any means Claudius' whole motive, but it was evidently a powerful one and the one that most impressed Hamlet.

thus re-awakened, which from now on never ceases, and into the essential nature of which he never penetrates.

One of the first manifestations of the awakening of the old conflict in Hamlet's mind is his reaction against Ophelia. This is doubly conditioned, by the two opposing attitudes in his own mind. In the first place, there is a complex reaction in regard to his mother. As was explained above, the being forced to connect the thought of his mother with sensuality leads to an intense sexual revulsion, one that is only temporarily broken down by the coarse outburst discussed above. Combined with this is a fierce jealousy, unconscious because of its forbidden origin, at the sight of her giving herself to another man, a man whom he had no reason whatever either to love or to respect. Consciously this is allowed to express itself, for instance after the prayer scene, only in the form of extreme resentment and bitter reproaches against her. His resentment against women is still further inflamed by the hypocritical prudishness with which Ophelia follows her father and brother in seeing evil in his natural affection, an attitude which poisons his love in exactly the same way that the love of his childhood, like that of all children, must have been poisoned. He can forgive a woman neither her rejection of his sexual advances nor, still less, her alliance with another man. Most intolerable of all to him, as Bradley well remarks, is the sight of sensuality in a quarter from which he had trained himself ever since infancy rigorously to exclude it. The total reaction culminates in the bitter misogyny of his outburst against Ophelia, who is devastated at having to bear a reaction so wholly out of proportion to her own offence and has no idea that in reviling her Hamlet is really expressing his bitter resentment against his mother.⁸ "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another; you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad." [3.1.137-40] On only one occasion does he for a moment escape from the sordid implication with which his love has been impregnated and achieve a healthier attitude toward Ophelia, namely at the open grave when in remorse he breaks out at Laertes for presuming to pretend that his feeling for her could ever equal that of her lover.

8. His similar tone and advice to the two women show plainly how closely they are identified in his mind. Cp. "Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners" [3.1.122-23] with "Refrain tonight; And that shall lend a kind of easiness To the next abstinence" [3.4.168-70]. The identification is further demonstrated in the course of the play by Hamlet's killing the men who stand between him and these women (Claudius and Polonius).

The intensity of Hamlet's repulsion against woman in general, and Ophelia in particular, is a measure of the powerful "repression" to which his sexual feelings are being subjected. The outlet for those feelings in the direction of his mother has always been firmly dammed, and now that the narrower channel in Ophelia's direction has also been closed the increase in the original direction consequent on the awakening of early memories tasks all his energy to maintain the "repression." His pent up feelings find a partial vent in other directions. The petulant irascibility and explosive outbursts called forth by his vexation at the hands of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, and especially of Polonius, are evidently to be interpreted in this way, as also is in part the burning nature of his reproaches to his mother. Indeed towards the end of his interview with his mother the thought of her misconduct expresses itself in that almost physical disgust which is so characteristic a manifestation of intensely "repressed" sexual feeling.

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 . . . [3.4.185-89]

Hamlet's attitude towards Polonius is highly instructive. Here the absence of family tie and of other similar influences enables him to indulge to a relatively unrestrained extent his hostility towards the prating and sententious dotard. The analogy he effects between Polonius and Jephthah⁹ is in this connection especially pointed. It is here that we see his fundamental attitude towards moralising elders who use their power to thwart the happiness of the young, and not in the over-drawn and melodramatic portrait in which he delineates his father: "A combination and a form indeed, where every god did seem to set his seal to give the world assurance of a man." [3.4.61-63]

It will be seen from the foregoing that Hamlet's attitude towards his uncle-father is far more complex than is generally supposed. He of course detests him, but it is the jealous detestation of one evil-doer towards his successful fellow. Much as he hates him, he can never denounce him with the ardent indignation that boils straight from his blood when he reproaches his mother, for the more vigorously he denounces his uncle the more powerfully does he stimulate to activity his own unconscious and "repressed" complexes. He is therefore in a dilemma between on the one hand allowing his natural

9. What Shakespeare thought of Jephthah's behaviour towards his daughter may be gathered from a reference in *Henry VI, Part III, Act V, Sc. 1*. See also on this subject Wordsworth, *On Shakespeare's Knowledge and Use of the Bible*, 1864, p. 67.

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 he must strive to ignore, to condone, and if possible even to forget the latter; 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 own personality, so that he cannot kill him without also killing himself. This solution, one closely akin to what Freud¹ has shown to be the motive of suicide in melancholia, is actually the one that Hamlet finally adopts. The course of alternate action and inaction that he embarks on, and the provocations he gives to his suspicious uncle, can lead to no other end than to his own ruin and, incidentally, to that of his uncle. Only when he has made the final sacrifice and brought himself to the door of death is he free to fulfil his duty, to avenge his father, and to slay his other self—his uncle.

There is a second reason why the call of duty to kill his step-father cannot be obeyed, and that is because it links itself with the unconscious call of his nature to kill his mother's husband, whether this is the first or the second; the absolute "repression" of the former impulse involves the inner prohibition of the latter also. It is no chance that Hamlet says of himself that he is prompted to his revenge "by heaven and hell."

In this discussion of the motives that move or restrain Hamlet we have purposely depreciated the subsidiary ones, which also play a part, so as to bring out in greater relief the deeper and effective ones that are of preponderating importance. These, as we have seen, spring from sources of which he is quite unaware, and we might summarise the internal conflict of which he is the victim as consisting in a struggle of the "repressed" mental processes to become conscious. The call of duty, which automatically arouses to activity these unconscious processes, conflicts with the necessity of "repressing" them still more strongly; for the more urgent is the need for external action the greater is the effort demanded of the "repressing" forces. Action is paralysed at its very inception, and there is thus produced the picture of apparently causeless inhibition which is so inexplicable both to Hamlet² and to readers of the play. This

paralysis arises, however, not from physical or moral cowardice, but from that intellectual cowardice, that reluctance to dare the exploration of his inner soul, which Hamlet shares with the rest of the human race. "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all."

HARRY LEVIN

[Irony in Hamlet] (1959)[†]

Our third trope, *ironia*, is more than a figure of speech or even of thought; it may be a point of view, a view of life, and—as such—a resolvent for contrarities. Its most clear-cut form, designated in Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* as "the drye mock," is a statement which means the contrary of what it purports to say. Caesar was ambitious; Brutus was honorable; yet Antony contrives, by his mocking inflection, to carry the opposite impression in both regards. Dubious statements could be reversed by simply adding the Elizabethan interjection *quotha*. Hamlet makes the controversy explicit, when his mother asks him, "What shall I do?" [3.4.183]. He has just told her, directly, "go not to my uncle's bed." Now he elaborates, "Not this, by no means, that I bid you do." In other words, what follows is to be taken ironically: "Let the bloat King tempt you again to bed . . ." And Hamlet dwells, with ambivalent detail, on the endearments he would have her avoid. Given the hypocrisy of the court, where one may not say what one means, honesty must either hold its tongue or express itself through indirection. When Polonius begs to take his leave, Hamlet's tone of politeness thinly disguises his eagerness to confer the favor begged: "You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal—" Whereupon his dry mock deepens into a thrice-uttered heartcry: "except my life, except my life, except my life" [2.2.211–12]. To the initial queries of Claudius and Gertrude, his hedging answers are verbal ironies. Gertrude's naïve reaction to the Play-Queen—"The lady doth protest too much, methinks"—unconsciously lays bare her own standards of conduct. Hamlet's double-edged comment, "O, but she'll keep her word," is ostensibly another bit of polite conversation [3.2.217–18]. Actually, he is distorting the play-within-the-play in order to drive home an invidious contrast. The Play-Queen

1. Freud, "Trauer und Melancholie," *Vierte Sammlung kleiner Schriften*, 1918, Kap. XX.

2. The situation is perfectly depicted by Hamlet in his cry: "I do not know / Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,' / Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means, / To do't" [4.4.44–47]. With greater insight he could have replaced the word "will" by "pious wish," which as Loening (op. cit., S. 246) points out, it obviously means. Curiously enough, Rolfe (Introduction to Werder, *The Heart of Hamlet's Mystery*, trans. E. Wilder, 1907, p. 23) quotes this very passage in support of Werder's hypothesis that Hamlet was inhibited by the thought of the external difficulties of the situation, which shows the straits the supporters of this untenable hypothesis are driven to.

[†] Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet*, paper (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 80–92, 103–106. After exploring *interrogation* and *doubt*, Harry Levin (1912–1994), a founder of comparative literature studies, here explores *irony* in the language, action, and characters of *Hamlet*. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.