



Protestant and Psychoanalytic Reflections on Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

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1. INTRODUCTION

About human matters, in the breadth, depth, detail and substantiality of his vision, Shakespeare has been called inconceivably wise. With words of such sweet breath as to make the things more rich, Shakespeare reflects human nature in all its interwoven, multi-determined, ambiguous and self-contradictory complexity.

Hamlet's father, the King of Denmark, has been secretly murdered by his brother, Claudius, who thereby has gained not only the throne, but also Gertrude, the queen. Prompted by his father's ghost to avenge this villainy, Hamlet yet cannot bring himself to act. In seeking to understand Hamlet's depression and paralysis, we will begin by reviewing the play from a Biblical perspective: First, we'll review very generally the theology of the tumultuous Protestant Reformation, the context in which Hamlet's awareness of his situation became paralyzing. Next, we'll review in greater detail his dark meditations on the corruptibility of the body, the fallen world, and the fallen souls therein. We'll consider the nature of Hamlet's inward consciousness as he strives to adapt to an impossibly ambiguous situation for which he is quite unsuited. Finally, we'll trace how Hamlet's experience and behaviors may be in part determined by personal meanings and motives for him which are largely unconscious. That is, we will interpret them psychoanalytically.

2. THE TRAGEDY OF INWARDNESS: LUTHER AND CALVIN

By way of introduction, I want to mention that Hamlet was written about 1600, and ask that we reflect on this detail: Prince Hamlet has been a student at Wittenberg. At that university, in 1517, the professor and preacher Martin Luther had posted on the door of the Church his Ninety-five Theses, initiating the turbulent, world-shifting Protestant Reformation, which challenged the universal, supposedly infallible authority of the Catholic Church, and is considered to have lasted until the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648. To further reflect on the temper of the time, we note that Copernicus had published his work presenting the heliocentric solar system in 1543. Galileo was to turn his first telescope upon the planets in roughly 1609. Shakespeare thus lived and wrote in the midst of a crucial revolution in Western thinking on religion and science, throwing into question literally man's place in the universe, and thus also upending traditional assumptions regarding human beings, society, morality, and politics. Unable to fall back on supposedly fixed moral certainties, Hamlet will remark that "Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Deprived of the reassuring beliefs of "sweet religion", which he says has been made a mere "rhapsody of words" (3.4.48-49) we are thrown back upon our frail power of reason alone to make our way.

Hamlet thus appeared at the cusp of what we call modernity, characterized not by faith in divinely-given truths, but by doubt. Descartes wrote his Meditations in 1641, in which he came to doubt even the existence of his own body. Resonating with the prevailing cognitive disorientation and unsettledness of mankind at the time, Hamlet writes to Ophelia, "Doubt thou the stars are fire, Doubt that the sun doth move. Doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt I love." This now seems perhaps a rebuke to modernists, yet another profound if indirect commentary by Shakespeare, not only regarding the Copernican Revolution, but also regarding what still can remain true even amidst the deconstruction of all external reality: "I love, therefore I am."

Placing Hamlet at Wittenberg hints at meanings and paradoxes within which the entire tragedy may be framed.

It's worth also noting, as Hannibal Hamlin writes, that "Shakespeare was born into a Biblical culture." We might add, a Christian culture. From common turns of speech ("s'blood", s' wounds", "a fault to heaven"...) to the deepest themes and meanings, allusions to Biblical stories and questions of faith are pervasive in Hamlet, so much so that we wonder if Shakespeare intended the whole tragedy not as a parable, but as an ironic commentary on, or even a reversal of what would be the Christian allegory conventionally expected.

Here is my chief thesis: Luther's Reformation, having overturned the unitary infallibility of the Catholic Church, left each person to contemplate the Word of God (the Bible), and to wrestle with his personal salvation, ultimately alone as an individual. Exuberantly intelligent but abandoned to his solitary reasoning, caught in an impossible dilemma, Hamlet realizes the pervasive sin in himself and all about him, but is skeptical that there is any salvation to be found. Grappling with this tormenting reality expands his inward awareness of himself and of human nature in general.

In 1520, Luther wrote *The Freedom of a Christian*, the first section of which is entitled, "The Human Being as Inner and Outer Person". There, he posited that one can achieve grace, justification and inner transformation by faith alone. "The commands (of the Old Testament) show us what we ought to do, but they do not give us the power to do it." The commandments thus teach us to know ourselves. "We recognize our inability to do the good, and they cause us to despair of our own powers... If you wish to fulfill the law...(then one should have faith, since) one thing alone leads to Christian life, righteousness, and freedom," and that is the word of God. Moreover, Luther holds that "Nothing external can produce Christian righteousness or freedom...The soul receives no help from any work connected with the body."

Note the parallel: Hamlet receives a commandment from his Father, but recognizes his powerlessness to fulfill it. His situation, though ambiguous, can be seen as the negative of Luther's Christian ideal. Just as Christ was sent, so also is Hamlet tasked to reconcile the world with his Father: "O, cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right!" His revelation, however, hardly comes from a Holy Ghost. This Father whom he is commanded to avenge is of questionable shape. Young Hamlet admits immediately upon first seeing him that he can't tell whether the ghost is "a spirit of health or a goblin damned",...from heaven or hell, with "intents wicked or charitable."(1.4.40-42) The restless ghost having burst out of his sepulcher signifies not only something rotten in the state of Denmark, but an encompassing ambiguity and uncertainty in the moral frame within which all of Denmark functions: Is there a life after death with a concrete Heaven, Hell and Purgatory, or is Earthly death the final end? What is the operative morality: revenge, or forgiveness?

Rather than dismissing works, the ghost demands one, a revenge killing. The great irony is that, as opposed to the Biblical commandments of the Old Testament God, what the ghost demands of Hamlet is not clearly a good. He demands bloody revolution, the murder of the accepted King, portending outer consequences bound to be uncertain, dangerous, and perhaps immoral. Horatio sees this immediately in the first appearance of the ghost: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state." (1.1.73)

Marcellus remarks reassuringly that upon "that season wherein our Savior's birth is celebrated,...no spirit dare stir abroad; The nights are wholesome...so hallowed and gracious is that time." (1.1.163-170) For Hamlet, however, the time is not "hallowed and gracious", but "out of joint". The ghost's commandments, rather than being the enriching source of inner salvation, are words poured like poison into Hamlet's ears. Rather than enhancing autonomy, Hamlet's father intrudes on the Prince's internal freedom, alienating him from the developmental path by which he was next in line to the throne. In urgently accepting and seeking to fulfill the ghost's command, Hamlet in fact risks violating and degrading his own mind and character.

Let's return to Luther's account of the effects of having accepted the Word in faith: "Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day," he wrote. The true Christian finds himself by looking within, at "the spiritual, new, and inner person." For Luther's new Christian, freedom involves radical independence from external works, events and their

consequences, because a person's true home, his true self, activity, and being is in his mind. If salvation depends strictly on faith, then one's liberation, consciousness, and fate are ultimately determined within oneself alone, (though perhaps with some necessary help from grace).

Even those of us who have no religious conviction can see how this constitutes a momentous turn toward human inwardness, which I define as the site of self-reflection. External, physical circumstances, events, possessions and works are of secondary importance. Expanded inwardness, by contrast, newly actualizes what had been only a latent potentiality in the self. Luther's view honors self-experience, and prompts a major expansion of consciousness. As John Bailey put it, "Consciousness becomes fully aware." What Marjorie Garber said about Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be" might be said instead of Luther's revolution: It was the "birth of the modern subject, of modern subjectivity itself."

Consider the opposition between the outwardly-facing external man who seems to be such and such to his fellows, vs the private inner man, known only to himself: Even Claudius accepts the distinction, remarking of Hamlet's transformation that neither "the exterior nor the inward man resembles what it was." (2.2.6-7) Hamlet knows not "seems", disparaging external affectation, mere "actions that a man might play," honoring instead "that within which passeth show." The true alignment of an individual's internal with his external expressions constitutes honesty, which Hamlet despairs may be found in but one man in ten thousand. (2.2.178-9). He is disillusioned not merely by the pervasive deception by which he is surrounded, but also by his own need to adapt to this reality, which inevitably forces him also to act outwardly differently than his true self. For his very survival, he must hold his tongue and put an antic disposition on. With pretended madness and brilliant irony, he keeps his adversaries distant, and masters them. As Janet Adelman put it, he withdraws to within himself to disengage from the corrupting and degenerate world.

Nevertheless, Hamlet cannot stop himself from roaming freely in thought, from perceiving nuances, paradoxes and perplexities. He honors the independence of inward thought over dogma, though he may regret his insight, when he says that "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." (2.2.253) He admires our being not merely a beast that eats and sleeps, but a creature possessing "godlike reason and discourse, looking before and after," giving us the capability of understanding.

Hamlet never stops reflecting on his situation, on the condition of Denmark, on the characters about him, on himself, on the nature of Man. Confronted with play-acting and pretense all about him, he is forced to interpret what may be the real meaning behind the dissembling. What is the "truth at the center"? Through this necessary exercise, he is, in Bailey's words, "emancipated into a fuller range of human experience," gradually climbing toward greater depth of objective self-awareness, detachment, and acceptance if not submission to his fate ("the readiness is all"). Though objective self-awareness may seem a good, however, Garber nevertheless suggests that Hamlet may represent the tragedy of modernity, the torment of consciousness that is too full.

Too full of what? Hamlet's tragedy is further illuminated by the work of another founder of Protestantism, John Calvin, who in 1541 published the Institutes of the Christian Religion, and who played a primary role in the printing of the Geneva Bible, whose translation into English preceded the King James Bible by 51 years. Its first complete printing in England occurred in 1576, twenty-four years before the writing of *Hamlet*. This was the Bible familiar to Shakespeare. Again, the entire tragedy can be seen in the light of Hamlet's ambivalent allusions to the prevalent teachings of this seminal figure in the Protestant Revolution.

For Calvin, the Fall essentially consisted not in sensual intemperance, but in disobedience to God, who warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Infidelity and ingratitude, turning away from God, had given rise to disobedience, and from disobedience arose ambition and pride, the beginning of all evil. (Institutes, Bk 2 Ch 1) Deriving from the Fall of Adam and Eve, the parents of all humanity, the sinfulness of mankind has been passed down through procreation, and thus is inherent in all flesh, inextricable from our human nature. No human faculty, no reasoning, intelligence, nor choice escapes the pervasive taint of sin. Not merely the will, but perception, emotion, desire, understanding, and judgement, literally every aspect of the mental functioning of human beings, is perverted by the sin "that flesh is heir to." As St Augustine put it, "Free will is held captive and is powerless to do good." As Chrysostom said, "Every man is not only a sinner, but is wholly sin."

(Much as they were opposite with regard to belief in God, Freud and Calvin here were remarkably agreed on the nature of the human psyche. Psychoanalysis also teaches that reliably objective perception and rational free will is an illusion, for it inescapably is pervaded and corrupted by wishes, agendas, urges, and fantasies, including those selfish, sexual, hateful, aggressive, shameful and guilty, that are kept unconscious because of their unacceptability.)

Here is Hamlet's "vicious mole of nature", the "dram of evil" that casts "all the noble substance" of man into doubt. Hamlet, though, takes issue with these theologians: the "vicious mole of nature" does not prove guilt, he says, "since nature cannot choose his origin." (1.4.23-26) Still, he admits, "Use every man after his dessert, and who shall 'scape whipping?'" (2.2.340-341)

Seeking to escape the helplessness and anguish of our actual situation, we deceive ourselves constantly. Calvin disparages our "vainly trusting in our ability to plan, order, undertake, and implement our cherished schemes. Yet we stubbornly insist on going our own way until we come to utter ruin." Both Hamlet and Claudius fall into this trap, believing they can control events, when in fact no one has any control over the unfolding of events in life.

The very purpose of self-knowledge, then, is to "show us our weakness, misery, vanity and vileness, to fill us with despair, distrust, and hatred of ourselves, (so as to) rekindle in us the desire to seek God." "Man first begins to profit in the knowledge of himself when he becomes sensible of his ruined condition." (Bk 2, Ch 2)... "Realizing his calamity, poverty, nakedness and shame, he is humbled and appalled." (p. 50)... Becoming aware not only of our duties to God, but also of our complete inability to fulfill those duties, makes self-observation excruciating.

We therefore resist self-knowledge with vain self-love, blinding ourselves to our depravity, convincing ourselves that we are self-sufficient for a good and happy life. As Polonius put it, "With devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself." (3.1.47-9).

Yet, Calvin writes, "He who is most deeply abased and alarmed by the consciousness of his disgrace, nakedness, want and misery has made the greatest progress in the knowledge of himself." Difficult as it is to achieve, we might expect that one having arrived at this self-realization would be most likely to be humble, not vain, and least likely to throw the first stone.

Here then is the situation of Hamlet: Though confused, erratic, paralyzed, self-hating, sometimes self-deluding, he generally avoids the trap of excessive pride. Quite to the contrary, he excoriates himself repeatedly. Though Hamlet exalts, "What a piece of work is man," noble in reason, infinite in faculties, "in apprehension how like a god..." he yet realizes that man is but a "quintessence of dust." (Genesis 2:7, 18:27; 2.2.312-318) , As such, our flesh is heir to a thousand natural shocks, be they of love, lust, or ambition. Hamlet in effect laments the fall of man, who impresses him not.

In the nunnery scene, Hamlet confronts Ophelia for her beauty corrupting honesty (chastity). The two traits are at war, and honesty does not stand a chance. The power of beauty will sooner transform honesty to a bawd, than could honesty make beauty like itself... "Virtue cannot... inoculate" male flesh against its lustful response to female charms. Flesh is too, too sullied. Ophelia, like any woman, can breed only sinners. Hamlet immediately goes on to list his own faults: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in." It would have been better if his mother had never borne him. "We are arrant (unmitigatedly criminal) knaves all." (3.1.121-129) This sounds remarkably like St Paul, who said, "There is no one righteous... All have fallen away, all are worthless, there is none that does good, not one." (Romans, 3:10-12)

3. FALLEN WORLDS AND FALLEN SOULS

Even before learning from his father's ghost of Claudius' crime, Hamlet is undoubtedly depressed. By his own description he wears black, sighs, gives forth "fruitful river of the eye," and is dejected in mood and behavior, showing, "all forms, moods and shapes of grief." (1.2.77-82) All the uses of this world to him seem "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable." (1.2.133-134) He depicts himself as weak, as distant from Hercules as Claudius is from his father. (1.2.152-153) He's lost all his mirth, and given up his habits of exercise. (2.2.297) His heart breaks. (1.2.159) He wishes for suicide, if only God had not forbidden it. (1.2.132) He values his life no more than he does a pin. (1.4.65). The encounter with

his father's spirit hardly lifts his own spirits. Soon after, he tells Polonius he will walk into his grave (2.2.207), and that Polonius can take his life, with which he would part willingly. (2.2.217) He calls himself a rogue, a peasant slave, a coward, an ass, and a whore. (2.2.549-585)

What is the cause of Hamlet's depression? Obviously, he has lost his father. Hamlet has not completed mourning for his father; he has not let father go. He repeatedly is confused about how long father has actually been dead, a duration he always underestimates. Moreover, his mother's behavior has disillusioned, tormented and infuriated him. Gertrude had made great show of her love for his father while he was alive, and of her grief for his death. Yet her tears in truth were "most unrighteous." (1.2.154) She is like Niobe (149) whose behavior led to the death of all her children; so also, Hamlet seems to predict, Gertrude's behavior will lead to his own death. She has permitted herself with indecent haste to be seduced by and to marry Claudius, her brother-in-law, incestuously. Hamlet, at times, seems even to suspect her of complicity in the murder (3.4.30). Flesh itself is sullied, defiled and debased; all frailty can be seen in woman.

This painful disorder and disappointment in his family has caused Hamlet to lose faith more generally. Pulled into his disillusionment are not only the key people around him, but also the state of Denmark, Majesty, men generally, women, beauty, love, words, the value of action, his self-worth, and the worth even of life itself. Despondent, betrayed, and aggrieved, Hamlet observes things rank and gross in nature possessing all the world. It is an unweeded garden grown to seed. (1.2.135-136), as if he could now see what has become of the Garden of Eden because of the original sins, Adam and Eve's sensual transgression. Claudius is the serpent who has tempted "Eve" and stung Hamlet's father's life. (1.5.40) Moreover, with regard to the deaths of fathers, the new King of Denmark refers nonchalantly to the first murder, telling Hamlet that, "from the first corpse (i.e., Abel's) till he that died today, 'this must be so.'" (1.1.101-106) Claudius later refers to his crime as having "the primal eldest curse upon't", i.e., the curse of Cain. (3.3.36-37; cf. 5.1.77) His rank offense and its effects rot in Denmark (1.4.90) and "smell to Heaven." (3.3.36)

Hamlet is appalled: Everywhere he sees mere seeming. All appearance is deceptive. Only one man in ten thousand is honest, (2.2.178) and the world will be honest only when Doomsday is near (2.2.237-238), i.e., never, or but very briefly. One may smile, smile, and be a villain. Consider how Claudius first appears, addressing the full court. About his grief and his marriage, his public statement is crafted for public purpose; he allows no candor. (1.2.1-13) Though just having achieved a new wife and Kingdom, he shows not full joy, but must pretend that it is "defeated". Discretion, he says, makes sorrow "wise", limiting grief and advising also to remember oneself, but it also makes joy wise, i.e., curtailed so as not to offend. "In equal scale weighing delight and dole," Claudius at every moment can be seen to be calculating, measured, his self-interest never forgotten.

Claudius advises Hamlet no longer to continue these "mourning duties" to his father (1.12.89), which he sees as issuing from mere "obligation". (1.2.91) He does not permit himself to recognize true or unadulterated grief within himself, nor to empathize with that suffered by Hamlet. Though he has just given the other youth, Laertes, leave to return to Paris, Claudius bids Hamlet to "remain here in the cheer and comfort of our eye," and opposes his returning to Wittenberg. (1.2.115-116) Perhaps suspecting already that Hamlet could become a threat, Claudius wants to keep an eye on him. In reality, Claudius subjects Hamlet to "the oppressor's wrong...the insolence of office." (3.1.72-74) Though he courts the Prince with expressions of fatherly love, Claudius is manifestly the bad father, who fears, suspects, needs to watch and to control Hamlet, and who is ready to turn against him murderously. Hamlet suspects his villainy even before meeting the ghost: ("Oh, my prophetic soul!" 1.5.42)

Likewise, Polonius, the King's most trusted advisor, also lives by scheming. He dissembles constantly, and even advises his son, Laertes, against being direct, telling him to keep his true self internally hidden, in reserve: "Give thy thoughts no tongue." (1.3.59) The outward show is what is important: "The apparel oft proclaims the man." (72) So also does he hide himself externally, in order to observe others in secret. He is willing to contrive even to sully his own son's reputation in order to spy on him. (2.1.22-63) In his loyal service to the King, he will sacrifice even his daughter, using her as bait. He admits, "With devotion's visage and pious action we do sugar o'er the devil himself." (3.1.47-49)

Like his son, Laertes, Polonius at first mistakes Hamlet's character and intentions with regard to Ophelia, expressing great concern about his daughter's honor and sexual vulnerability. (1.3.97-125) He assumes that, driven by sexual desire, Hamlet "fashions" mere pretense in order to beguile her, as one would trap a bird. (116) Polonius considers it natural and inevitable in young men to manifest wanton savageness of untamed blood. (2.1.22-35) Even after he's convinced that Hamlet's love has been real, Polonius considers Hamlet's phrase, "Most beautified Ophelia," to be vile. Unable to comprehend honestly express sexual love that is restrained and sublimated, Polonius cynically rejects Hamlet's idealization of Ophelia. In short, Polonius assumes that Hamlet is like himself, dishonest, cunning, opportunistic. He commands Ophelia to have no more to do with Hamlet.

Despite his professions of finding the truth even if it be hidden in the center (2.2.157-159) and of offering, "policy most sure," Polonius is characteristically mistaken. He errs in saying that Hamlet only pretends love for Ophelia; then, when he believes that Hamlet does love Ophelia after all, he is mistaken that this alone is why Hamlet seems to have gone mad. Relentlessly superficial, Polonius fails to notice Hamlet's interest in Hecuba's witnessing the slaughter of her husband, King Priam, and fails to reflect on the relevance of that speech for his own King's concerns. Hearing that Norway apologizes for Fortinbras' aggressions and now asks only that rearm Fortinbras, supposedly on the way to attack Poland, be allowed to pass through Denmark quietly, Polonius says, "This business is well ended." (2.2.85) He completely misses the transparent likelihood of a ruse.

We recognize Shakespeare's irony as Polonius advises, "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, that thou canst not be false to any man." (1.3.78-80) Since Polonius so often is false to others, it must follow that he cannot be true to himself either. Not knowing himself, Polonius is pompous and ridiculous, for example, expostulating tediously on the need for brevity. As Socrates pointed out, the externally expressed lie is merely an imitation of that within, the lie to oneself.

Ophelia's attachment to and need to obey her father outweighs her affinity and love for Hamlet. Like Gertrude frail, she also is gullible, unable to discern the true penny from the counterfeit. Evidently she takes as true her father's view of Hamlet's attraction to her, for she refuses to see him, and returns to him his remembrances, saying, "Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind." (3.1.100-103) She permits herself to become the bait of falsehood by which Polonius and Claudius can observe the prince.

Hamlet still reeling from his mother's betrayal finds himself again rejected wounded disappointed and deceived by a woman he's loved. Reacting with anguish, bitterness, and rage, he takes his revenge on Ophelia, reversing his affection, denying he ever loved her. (3.4.116-120) Hamlet commits violence against Ophelia's ears, as later he will thrust words like daggers into his mother's ears. (3.4.98) She should keep her honesty and chastity separate from her beauty (3.1.109), because women's beauty overpowers and corrupts those virtues. (112-114) Women are literally two-faced, Hamlet says, painting over the true face nature has given them with another that is false. The pitfall of fools (3.1.139), love for women corrupts men also, making them monsters. (3.1.140)

Like the hot sun rotting the flesh of a dead dog, which then breeds maggots, Claudius's crime has radiated out to corrupt all upon whom he shines. (2.2.181-186, 3.1.123) Ophelia has permitted herself to be used against Hamlet by his enemy. For her sexual beauty he tells her to go to a nunnery, which refers to both a convent and also a brothel: Virtue corrupted.

The image of a prostitute recurs throughout the play, representing all former goodness that to Hamlet is now degraded and loathsome, mere impersonation and deceit. Fortune herself is a fickle strumpet (2.2.232-236, 493), who indiscriminately lets anyone partake of her favors, giving but just as quickly taking them away. Hamlet calls himself a whore (2.2.586-587), who merely has pretended at true passion. When Claudius, in an aside for the first time confesses his crime, he admits that he uses "painted words" to beautify what beneath is uglier than a harlot's cheek. (3.1.52-54). No appearance can be trusted.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern likewise sell their virtue, their longstanding friendship with Hamlet, "being of so young days brought up with him," (2.2.11-12), in order to serve the wishes of the King. Their friendship is corrupted, turned into its opposite, a pleasing outward disguise used to spy upon and betray their friend. Hamlet recognizes that the people closest to him present an outward

appearance which is masking, mere seeming, covering over an inner truth which in each case is malevolent or degenerate. Except for Horatio, all those he's trusted have repelled or deceived him. For Hamlet, love has collapsed into cynicism.

Similarly, the pervasive state of Hamlet's world is recurrently represented by the metaphor of hidden infection. Laertes warns Ophelia that "in the morn and liquid dew of youth contagious blastments are most imminent." (1.3.41-42) Claudius refers to his own hesitation in getting rid of Hamlet: "Like the owner of a foul disease, to keep it from divulging, let it feed even on the pith of life." (4.1.21-23) Later, plotting Hamlet's death, he'll say, "But, to the quick of the ulcer." (4.7.124) It is Shakespeare's irony that Claudius and Hamlet each sees the other as the hidden infection threatening the life of the state. To his mother, the Prince pleads that she not permit some rationalization of his seeming madness to cover over her crime, like skin over "an ulcerous place, whiles rank corruption, mining all within, infects unseen." (3.4.152-156) Hamlet accuses his mother of having replaced the rose of innocent love with a blister. (3.4.45) He later reflects that nations may go to war out of decadence, an inward abscess that, even when outwardly hidden, will collapse in on itself and be fatal to the one in whom it dwells. (4.4.28-30)

Used artfully for indirection and deception, words, words, words also are dislocated from their supposed meaning and emptied of their truth. (2.2.193) Previously, words could add to or enhance beauty and substance. Hamlet had given Ophelia's gifts "with words of so sweet breath composed as made the things more rich." Now, words provide merely a pleasing overlay to disguise truths that would be too disturbing. Courtiers speak with "candied tongues." Hamlet, himself, also utilizes words' ability to mislead, in his punning concreteness, satire, and seeming madness. He recognizes that this corruption of speech also manifests the general degeneracy. International treaties, "sealed compacts well ratified by law" (1.1.90-91) are empty of validity and authority if violated by brute force; they are mere illusions of statecraft. Likewise, only dumb animals would expect deeds of land ownership, written on perishable parchment, to provide real assurance of possession. (5.1.110-117)

In the bedroom scene, Hamlet berates his mother for such an act that makes marriage vows as false as gamblers' oaths, that from the marriage contact "plucks the very soul, and sweet religion makes a (mere) rhapsody of words." (3.4.45-49) The possible removal of the soul from speech we see in Ophelia's distracted madness: "Her speech is nothing," the gentleman says. (4.5.7) But one need not be psychotic for this hollowing effect: Claudius, who has admitted to "painted words," attempts to pray for mercy and forgiveness, though unwilling to relinquish the benefits he's derived from his crime. He realizes, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (3.3.97-98)

Not only the appearance of health, friendship, beauty, words, law, marriage vows, and religion are emptied of their authenticity. Despite man's nobility in Godlike reason and infinite faculties, to Hamlet, man himself is still but a "quintessence of dust." (2.2.304.309) The soul plucked out, nothing remains of a human being but the dust from which he was made and to which we are akin. (4.2.6) Hamlet takes great interest in hearing from the grave-digger how long a man will lie in the earth before he rots. (5.1.163) He hears that tanners last longest because tanned hide keeps the water out. Soon will come Ophelia's water-logged body, about whom the greatest hope that can be uttered is that "from her fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring;" she has become mere soil. (5.1.239-240) With all our ambitions, achievements, and vanities, we are but fatted for worms. "Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay, might stop a hole to keep the wind away." (5.1.213-214)

Gertrude has pleaded with Hamlet no longer to "seek for thy noble father in the dust." (1.2.71) It is in the dust that he is later to find the skull of one who to him had been as a truly beloved father, Yorick, who had "bore (him) on his back a thousand times." In a movie version, Mel Gibson as Hamlet addresses and embraces the skull on the mound, as if Yorick were still present in the dirt, body ensouled. Yet he at the same time acknowledges that Yorick is no more. As bodies are mortal and deteriorate, our only means of holding loved ones present when they are inevitably gone is through memory. Memory unites us to them though they be separated in place and time. No overlay of mere appearance, however, can long forestall mankind's common fate, the inevitability of death and rot. (5.2.71-74)

Hamlet previously had idealized “The celestial and my soul’s idol, the most beautified Ophelia,” (2.2.109-110), in his love lifting up the flesh toward divinity. Yet, even then, he’d signed his letter to Ophelia, “Whilst this machine is to him, Hamlet.” (2.2.123-124) From a mechanistic understanding, though, how could a bodily “machine”, ultimately made of dirt, ever give rise to a perception of divine beauty? Saying, “Beautified is a vile phrase,” (2.2.111-112) Polonius, by contrast, pulls the divine back down to the base earth. He, for one, apparently believes religion to have become a mere rhapsody of words. Now, by this juncture having permitted himself to be ruthless, dispatching Rosencrantz and Guildenstern without pangs of conscience, (5.2.58), Hamlet seems less innocent, less believing in what after all may have been mere salutary illusions. He requests of Yorick, “Now get you to my lady’s chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come.” Meditating on our mortal baseness, infirmity, and corruptibility, both moral and physical, Shakespeare juxtaposes opposites, reflections on the Christian view of man’s double nature: we are deathless pure spirit capable of aspiring to and appreciating absolute beauty and goodness, yet breathed into mere dust. We are sinful in our flesh, in bondage to decay. (St Paul, Romans, Ch 8:4,13,21)

The priest’s cruel insensitivity at Ophelia’s funeral shows that even the authoritative church is corrupted. Blinded by formal rules and prescriptions, he uncharitably cares not a bit for the human pathos and dignity of Ophelia and Laertes (5.1.226-238). Religion gone, the soul has been plucked out of our vision of the world. Having attended Luther’s Wittenberg, being now a priest unto himself, and thus thrown back upon his frail powers of reason, by which he’s concluded that “nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so,” Hamlet has suffered an ongoing crisis of faith. As we have previously discussed, he confronts the issue of sin in the world, and in himself.

In begging the pardon of Laertes for having murdered Polonius, Hamlet says, “What I have done... I here proclaim was madness. Was’t Hamlet that wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet. If Hamlet...when he’s not himself does wrong Laertes, then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it. Who does it then? His madness.” (5.2.228-235) This sounds remarkably like the words of St Paul in Romans, Ch 7, 15-25. There, Paul says, “I do not understand my own actions... Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me.”

Likewise, when Claudius says, “Pray can I not, though inclination be as strong as will; My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,” (3.3. 38-40) he reflects Paul’s words, “I can will what is right, but cannot do it.” Claudius wails, “O wretched state! O bosom black as death!” and vainly implores his “stubborn knees,” and “heart with strings of steel.” (3.3.67,70). Paul says, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Nature itself (2.2.299-304), along with society and individuals, all show moral degradation. Disease has grown desperate (4.3.9-10)

Hamlet tells Claudius that in the end, Kings and beggars share a common fate, both becoming but two dishes at the same table, a meal for maggots. (4.3.21-25) This, of course, applies also to the King, his father, the “dead corpse” who by walking again has made the “night hideous.” (1.4.53-54) We will now argue that the Prince’s relationship to his dead father, riven with ambivalence, also is pivotal to understanding his behavior and the outcome of the tragedy.

4. A PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATION

Given the brevity required here, we will elaborate only one narrow perspective within the broad range offered by psychoanalysis, the “classical”, focusing on the character, Hamlet, intrapsychically, illustrating the power of unconscious, object-related fantasy. In testing our psychoanalytic hypothesis, we for direct evidence will rely closely and exclusively on the text itself. ,

We will interpret the play through the particular lens of Hamlet’s ambivalent, conflictual relationship with his father, the “negative-Oedipal relation”. We can conceive the entire tragedy as being encompassed by Hamlet’s uncertain struggle over how to respond to father’s expectations and commands, a choice between abject submission and determined rebellion. He arrives at a compromise, to resist passive-aggressively. Like Claudius when he is praying for forgiveness, Hamlet’s conscious will and intention to fulfill father’s demand are defeated by stronger conflicting factors within, and he is “like a man to double business bound,” standing in pause where he should first begin, neglecting both. (3.3.39-43) It is as if Hamlet unconsciously decides to rebel by procrastinating and failing at what father wants him to do.

We have seen that all the surface appearance would collude, if only Hamlet would let himself be deceived, at a charade that all is well. The dead King's ghost afoot, however, indicates ominously that something is amiss. Hamlet needs a sense of protection and righteousness in the midst of his treacherous, malignant interpersonal environment. His father's death has contributed to a depressing if not terrifying sense of helplessness, powerlessness, and victimization. He yearns and searches for the protective closeness, strength, and power of his real father, whom he has lost. His world now lacks his father's presence, guidance, and reassurance.

Father's absence has left Hamlet also without a key rival to buffer the potential for too intimate a relationship with Gertrude, who "lives almost by his looks." (4.7.13). Claudius cannot play that role, as Hamlet disdains him. Already, Hamlet has obeyed Gertrude's wish that he go not back to Wittenberg. Primarily through Polonius' interference, but also later with Gertrude's passive participation (3.1.28-42), he's been prevented from successfully establishing a firm tie to a woman of his own generation, Ophelia. He may need help to avoid a sense of maternal engulfment. To kill Claudius would leave him even more unprotected.

So vividly impressed into Hamlet's mind is his father's memory, so intense his wishful longing to be reunited with him again, that this wish can activate the internal representation almost to a vision, as it were, a momentary denial of father's death: "My father! Methinks I see my father," he says. (1.2.184-185)

Yet, speaking of how the funeral meats furnished leftovers for the marriage tables, Hamlet had just said, "Would I had met my dearest foe in Heaven or ever I had seen that day, Horatio." (1.2.182-183) The sequence of his thoughts, from meeting "his dearest foe in Heaven" immediately to seeing his father in his "mind's eye", suggests that, to Hamlet, his father is his dearest foe, whom he both dearly loves and with whom he could fight to the death. In this one phrase, Shakespeare captures the essence of Hamlet's ambivalence.

From the outset, Hamlet idealizes his father, speaking in terms that are laudatory and glowing: "So excellent a King... A Hyperion," (the Titan Sun-God). (1.2.139-140) Later, when confronting his mother, he will bestow upon his father the highest Olympian graces: "...the front of Jove himself, an eye like Mars, to threaten and command,... a combination and a form indeed where every God did seem to set his seal to give the world assurance of a man." (3.4.57-63) He has not permitted his image of his father to slip from divine perfection.

As no human being can have been so perfect, we must wonder, what would motivate such purity in idealization? What is its function? To relinquish the idealized image would require painful mourning, to accept father as imperfect, dead, and gone. The idealizing relationship in Hamlet's mind asserts a specific image not only of the dead King, but also of the son, as one whose attitude toward his father is adoring and devoted. This he achieves at the cost of remaining, in his own mind, young, small, and weak, far from Hercules. To let go of father's magnificence may be necessary, though, in order eventually to accept himself as having equal powers, assets, and prerogatives.

On the one hand, Hamlet maintains his father as the hero he would wish to emulate. He can share in his father's grandeur. Father's competence and perfections he can hope to borrow and incorporate. His questioning of Horatio when he first hears of the ghost ("armed, say you?...pale or red?...and fixed his eyes upon you?") (1.2.227-237) reflects, in the words of Peter Blos, the "charismatic quality to the (young) son of the father's physical presence." The internalized image of the potent and virtuous King offers the sense of righteousness and protection needed.

Yet, we may suspect that Hamlet's emphasizing at the outset perceptions of the father that are exclusively positive also serve to push out of awareness any that are negative, even if what is denied are traits or qualities that were real. Hamlet thus has protected father from any conscious criticism. This sacrifice of balanced objectivity in Hamlet's perception of his father may be necessary in order to avoid negative feelings and anxiety about conflicting wishes toward the father in Hamlet's mind.

Hamlet would not want to let himself be much aware of any hatred or aggression toward his father, newly deceased. Any directly angry or oppositional feelings would be too dangerous, e.g., conjuring too much guilt for being against a beloved family member who already has been manifestly a victim,

killed. Father, defeated, in the dust, leaves open the possibility that Hamlet, who still lives to see the majestic overhanging firmament, could surpass him. In surviving Father, Hamlet would not want to notice any sense of triumph. Hamlet at first cannot let himself de-idealize Father, and this may contribute to his being unable very well to tolerate the imperfections in himself and in others.

All this is brought violently to question when Hamlet first encounters his dead father's ghost. Whether or not he's driven to insanity, Hamlet is shaken and stirred to his very depths by the apparition, literally an epiphany. Indeed, the ghost is so ambiguous in his appearance, "in such questionable shape," that it is not clear whether it comes from Heaven or Hell. (1.4.41-43) On both occasions that Hamlet sees the ghost, his first words are not to the ghost itself, but to divine beings, asking for protection: He says, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" (1.4.39) and later, "Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings, you Heavenly guards!" (3.4.107-108) Hamlet, "waxing desperate with imagination," (1.4.87) both times by the ghost is filled with awe and terror. ,

The ghost speaks only to Hamlet, saying that he "could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up your soul," i.e., drive him into madness, and could literally "make your two eyes like stars start from their spheres," (1.5.16-18) i.e., become "out of joint." His father's ghost is no angel, admitting to "foul crimes done in my days of nature," needing to be "burnt and purged away." (1.5.13-14) He bitterly regrets having been sent to his account "with all (his) imperfections on (his) head," denied the last sacraments and opportunity to make reckonings with God. This is "horrible, most horrible!" (1.5.79-81) Hamlet thus has direct confession from the ghost himself, that he was far from merely the virtuous Hyperion.

Hamlet's first words to the ghost upon hearing of the foul and unnatural murder are: "Haste to me know't, that I with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love may sweep to my revenge." (1.5.30-32) He thus reveals his own unwarlike character: meditation and thoughts of love hardly connote sweeping ruthless vengeance. Hamlet is distinctly unsuited to the task. Yet, he is also eager to please his father and do his bidding, to get his approval, recognition, love, acceptance, and confirmation. He hopes to preserve harmony with his father's ghost, in order to avoid any displeasure from or friction with him.

The ghost's demanding blood revenge, however, does not speak for Hamlet's father having had a gentle virtuous nature. Appearing in "warlike form" ((1.1.51)"with martial stalk" (1.1.70), a "dreaded sight,"(1.1.29) he hardly inspires a sense of tolerance, reassurance, and peace. He commands Hamlet to murder a King, an act of political revolution, and seems unconcerned that, clearly this must mean that young Hamlet will be endangering, if not sacrificing, his own life. The father does not shy from coercing his son's compliance with admonition and the threat of guilt. He tells the Prince that he is bound to revenge, (1.5.8) "If thou didst ever thy dear Father love." (1.5.24)...If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not." (1.5.82) Thus Hamlet must act, or he will stand accused by his revered father of being unloving and unworthy, of dull forgetfulness.

Father's ghost acts the powerful compelling authority to the young college student, threatening that to not comply with his demand would prove the son unmanly. He is intrusive, manipulating, domineering, and overpowering. As this fateful encounter comes to a close, the ghost's last words are, "Remember me."

Hamlet feels nearly physically torn apart by the encounter. After the ghost departs he must appeal to his heart to hold together (1.5.94), to his sinews to grow not instantly old, but to hold him still up. In the immediacy of the moment, instead of questioning or critiquing the ghost's demands, Hamlet turns to pity for the "poor ghost".(1.5.97) Consciously oppositional feelings would seem cruel and ungrateful. Instead, with regard to his own mind, the prince says, "Remember thee? Ay, 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, unmixed with baser matter." (1.5.96-105)

To his father's commandments, he commits his mind completely. He swears that he will give up all else that he has learned from any other source. Only the powerful urging of his father will be written into the pages of his brain; only it will live on within him. We might wonder if, in turning over his mind to his father alone, Hamlet is not for the moment expressing the submissive element which in part constitutes love for the father. He may need idealization also to defend against awareness of any

such potentially erotic aspect of his feelings toward him. With his father, he seeks union and oneness. Indeed, he seems at first to gain confidence and security in father's control and domination; we note that the ghost provides necessary assistance in convincing Horatio and the guards to "swear." Yet, we also notice that Hamlet in that interaction addresses the ghost as "boy", "truepenny", "old mole", and "pioner", ie, a foot soldier assigned to dig tunnels and excavations." Already, Hamlet expresses some disparaging challenge to the ghost's authority, but in his hypomanic excitement, he appears to believe these appellations are affectionate. (1.5.159,171-2)

To remember the ghost and carry out his purpose, Hamlet promises with intense passion. Yet it is striking how apt to Hamlet are the warnings of the Player King in the Mousetrap play. His wife has just promised, "In second husband, let me be accursed! None wed the second but who killed the first." (3.2.177-178) The Player King responds, "I do believe you think what now you speak, but what we do determine oft we break. Purpose is but the slave to memory, of violent birth, but poor validity (durability)...What to ourselves in passion we propose, the passion ending, doth the purpose lose." (3.2.184-194). Hamlet also has in violent emotion resolved to a purpose, faithfully to remember his father, to himself in passion proposing righteous revenge against Claudius.

We might view Hamlet as struggling against emotional bondage to Father, who requires that he submit to his will. To kill Claudius may please the ghost, but this unconsciously also may seem to Hamlet unacceptable weakness and submission. His position with his father is too much analogous to the passionately promising Player-Queen. After all, when he for the first time bitterly berates himself for not yet having acted, he calls himself a dull spirited rascal "unpregnant of my cause." (2.2.568) For Hamlet, to passionately and directly carry out the revenge might equate unconsciously with having been impregnated by his father. Likewise, he says he's "like a whore"...a very drab" (prostitute) (2.2.585-6). Though Hamlet attacks himself for having not yet acted, he unconsciously might fear that, in accepting his father's commandment, he has become his father's whore. Here is a powerful motive to neglect his promise. From this perspective we gain also another understanding of his bitterness toward Gertrude: Her abandoning her husband's memory has left him too much alone, burdened with the loving care for his father. Hamlet would be anxious about, need to rebel against, reject, and keep unconscious any such passive feminine self-image.

Instead, Hamlet identifies with the formidable dead King. He castigates the two women in his life, repeating his Father's complaints almost verbatim. His railing against Ophelia for her beauty corrupting honesty and for her feminine manners' making fools of men (3.1.144-150) sounds much like his Father's message about female lewdness, in the shape of Heaven, courting virtue. (1.5.55-58) Later, he assails his mother for falsifying marriage vows and leaving the "fair mountain" of love for his father in order to gorge on the lowly Claudius. This echoes the ghost telling how his "seeming virtuous Queen" abandoned the marital vow to "decline upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor" compared to his. "So lust, though to a radiant angel linked will...prey on garbage." (1.5.47-58) To decry women and their making fools of the opposite sex would reinforce the bond between Hamlet and his father. Like the idealization, taking on the ghost's views to the point of regurgitating them serves Hamlet's identification with father, a means of holding on to him.

When he comes upon Ophelia reading the book, Hamlet first asks her to remember his sins in her prayers. (3.1.90-91) He soon is confessing: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have...time to act them in." These self-accusations describe his having accepted his Father's exhortations and commands. To kill Claudius, Hamlet feels, will make him more sinful. When he adds, "What should such fellows as I do crawling between Heaven and Earth?" (3.1.124-130), it is clear that he again expresses his conflictual identification with just such a fellow crawling through Purgatory, his father. Hamlet does allow that his father died "with all his crimes" in full blossom and that his audit in Heaven probably goes heavily with him. (3.3.81-84) He now, at times, can permit himself to see his Father's imperfections.

As we have seen, as the initial passion of Hamlet's indoctrination by Father's ghost fades, his determination to that purpose also begins to vacillate. Some reasons for this are realistic. He notes that "The spirit I have seen may be the devil...and perhaps abuses me to damn me." (2.2.599-604) In his meditation, "To be or not to be...", Hamlet emphasizes the possibility that "To die, to sleep" could be to be "no more." (3.1.57-62) In effect, among other meanings, he implicitly considers the possibility

that the ghost may not really exist; perhaps after death, there is nothing. This represents, to say the least, a direct challenge to his father's command. He implicitly contemplates being in his mind rid of his father. Later, in the investigation of Claudius through the Mousetrap play, Hamlet is also putting his father's ghost to the test.

Yet, even after having caught the conscience of the King, saying joyfully to Horatio, "I'll take the ghost's words for a 1000 pounds!" (3.2.285), even immediately after saying, "Now I could drink hot blood," Hamlet delays wreaking his vengeance. At that pivotal moment, with Claudius praying for forgiveness, Hamlet hesitates to slay him, in order to wait for an even more perfect opportunity, wanting to deny Claudius the hope of going to Heaven. (3.3.84-88) He puts away his sword. (3.3.89) Yet, ironically, he needn't have worried; as soon as Hamlet departs for his mother's bedroom, Claudius confesses that his words of prayer have been empty of thoughts, and "words without thoughts never to Heaven go." (3.4.97-99) Hamlet could have had him descending to Hell even then. This delay has all the tragic consequences: were Hamlet to have killed Claudius then, the lives of Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia, Laertes, Gertrude, as well as his own, would all have been spared. Hamlet seems determined to defeat his father's purpose, yet in doing so, he must also defeat himself. In part, again, this could be from fear of and guilt at obtaining the prize of his victory.

Consciously, it is to defend his father's honor that Hamlet has decried the brevity of his mother's love. (1.2.145; 3.2.151-152) In sympathy for his dead father, he's felt her turn to Claudius as an affront almost to himself. Now in Gertrude's private chamber, he consciously strives to deny her sexuality and his own interest in it, saying, "You cannot call it love, for at your age the heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble." (3.4.69-70) Yet, his disgust helps him not notice his impassioned and intimate involvement with her carnal functioning, as, in a fevered pitch, he cries, "Nay, but to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love over the nasty sty!" (3.4.93-96)

It is at this exact moment that the ghost appears to him the second time. Gertrude sees it not; it may as well be an hallucination, again the internal representation of his father made perceptually active just then, we might suspect, specifically to interrupt the intimacy between mother and son. Abandoning his sexual fury, Hamlet acts quite meek and childlike, asking if father comes "your tardy son to chide, that lapsed in time and passion, let's go th'imimportant acting of your dread command?" (3.4.110-112) To be again the humble son, reminded of his "almost blunted purpose," sworn to avenge the father and be again his loyal ally, renounces and undoes any competitive wishes to be the one stealing father's wife.

Hamlet's unconscious resistance to his father's agenda is nicely revealed as he meets Fortinbras's army on his way to England. (4.4.33-67) Shakespeare has crafted also this soliloquy with silent irony. As Hamlet bitterly censures himself for "thinking too precisely on the event" and not yet having acted, he reveals his confusion and self-deception, disavowing awareness of his own good reasons.

Hamlet speaks as if he is guilty of not using his God-given capability for rationally "looking before and after." Yet, what has he been doing if not applying retrospective reconstruction of events and deliberative foresight in trying to determine the facts, and anticipate the unseen event yet to come? He accuses himself of bestial forgetfulness and cowardice, as if his having abstained from revenge thus far has had no justification whatsoever. He cannot express resistance to his father's demand for murder without condemning himself, even if unjustly.

Told that the tiny patch of land over which Norway and Poland supposedly were to fight was not worth five ducats, Hamlet exclaims that for thousands of men and ducats to be spent for this worthless straw indicates a fatal abscess of decadence. (4.4.28-30) Such war over nothing, to which men are fed as to a beast (cf. 1.1.103), is ridiculous. Nevertheless, he quite inconsistently goes on immediately to admire Fortinbras for taking this decisive action, fearlessly risking a massive and expensive army "even for an eggshell". Hamlet's praise for "greatly (finding) a quarrel in straw when honor's at the stake" could not be more ironical, an unconscious protest, a devastating if implicit critique of his father's command. Yet, what is striking is that Hamlet does not allow himself to realize that he is offering such a powerful rebuttal to his father.

King Hamlet is dead, yet Prince Hamlet "lacks advancement" (3.2.338) and cannot succeed. When he says, "conscience does make cowards of us all," (3.1.84-86), he expresses his "awareness" that

something dreadful may await us after death. That is frightening, however only if one has a bad conscience, and might suffer the horrible "bad dreams" described by his father's ghost. Is Hamlet intimating that he has been made a coward by a bad conscience? If so, for what crime?

Freud and Jones posited that in murdering the older King Hamlet and marrying Gertrude, Claudius has vicariously fulfilled the unconscious patricide and incestual wishes that Oedipal Hamlet had repressed. Seeing these realized has reactivated his unconscious conflicts. Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because he identifies with Claudius's pleasure in his successful crime. Conscience, guilt for his own patricidal wish come true, would make a coward of Hamlet, because he may feel that Claudius is no more guilty than he. As Jones put it, By refusing to abandon his own incestuous wishes, he perpetuates the sin and so must endure the stings of a torturing conscience.

In not killing Claudius outright, Hamlet disappoints and rebels against his father's ghost. In not killing Claudius, and not undoing the effects of the murder, Hamlet continues in effect to be practically an abettor to the crime, in effect endorsing his father's murder.

Letting Claudius live also serves as further self-punishment. Claudius can enjoy the fruits of the regicide, not Hamlet. Furthermore, focusing on Claudius, the "bad father," as the murderer who is evil and hated, displaces to some degree Hamlet's self-hatred, as well as any hostile wishes toward his own father, so he can consciously feel only loyal and loving.

For Hamlet to fully take responsibility for his own life and feel the autonomous author of his actions, i.e., with the freedom perhaps not to kill Claudius, would involve becoming aware of anger, resistance and criticism toward his father. He would be severing, renouncing, rejecting, and destroying the ties that defined him as the loyal son "bounds to revenge". In effect, he would have to acknowledge killing off his father, not only as a loved and compelling intimate figure, but also as an authority over his life. As Hans Loewald pointed out, the adolescent, or young adult, asserting his own responsibility over his life really does injure the parents, "usurping their power, their competence, their responsibility for us," taking away an important role with prerogatives that the parents have enjoyed. Unconsciously, full independence for the child means murder of the parents; in reality, they are killed off as parents, and become something less, "equals". By remaining loyal, by persisting unconsciously in maintaining his parents as incestuous loved ones, by submitting to father's commands even as he must thereby sacrifice himself, by belittling himself as he idealizes his father, by arranging his self-punishment, walking into the obvious traps which will mean his death, Hamlet in effect evades acknowledging his guilt for the unconscious wish to have committed emancipatory patricide. As Loewald put it, "Need for punishment tends to become inexhaustible if atonement and reconciliation are not eventually brought about by mourning," which when completed, leads to a mature, self-guiding, autonomous conscience, being one's own authority, and to non-incestuous love relationships.

We may note here yet another manner in which Hamlet can be seen to defeat his father's purpose. We know that, among his crimes, the dead King had killed the senior Fortinbras, King of Norway. The entire drama is framed by young Fortinbras' seeking and obtaining revenge upon Denmark for his father's death, a quest parallel to Hamlet's own. A special irony, however, as the grave digger will tell us, is that Fortinbras' father was slain by Hamlet's father on the very day that Prince Hamlet was born. This is yet another way in which the "time is out of joint," and throws another light on Hamlet's saying, "Oh cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right." (1.5.197-198) As if by a large plan of Providence, King Hamlet's son will restore honor to Norway's son, righting the wrong committed by his own father.

At the very end of the tragedy, aware that the potent poison is quite overcoming his spirit, Hamlet says not "I am dying," but, as if it's already an accomplished fact that he is a ghost, says, "I am dead Horatio." (5.2.335,340) He commands Horatio: "Thou livest. Report me and my cause aright...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." (5.2.340-350) Hamlet with Horatio thus very much reenacts the scenario occurring when the ghost so commanded him, with his now taking the imposing role, from beyond death saying, "Remember me." He thus ends with a restatement of his identification with his father, yet he also again opposes Father, for his last words are: "The rest is silence." This is

ambiguous. "Rest" may mean freedom from activity. If rest means "what remains", however, Hamlet is stating at his moment of death his realization that in fact, to die is "not to be", and there is nothing to fear. Of course, this would also constitute yet another repudiation of his father; how could he even exist, having been dead? We note that Stoic Horatio, who previously in his natural philosophy had been skeptical that the ghost even existed, now speaks as if he is a believer in the afterlife and its music, saying, "Good night sweet Prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!" (5.2.361-362).

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