

dust" and the "Moon is his sister, the stars his brethren." He swings the earth "a trinket at his wrist." His outward life expresses not only, as we have seen, an endless yielding up of all to the relentless pursuer, but it has this other significance too—a deep-seated infantile omnipotence. The evidences of this unconscious infantile omnipotence are to be seen in his timelessness, his neglect of all ties and obligations, his disregard of health, his dependence upon others for food and shelter, and that immunity in spirit that enabled him to live under such dire conditions. All alike point to a fundamental desolation of spirit when confronted by the limitations of time and space in a reality world. He died with the toy theatre near him.

We might formulate much of Freud's theory of infantile sexuality from Tompson's poetry so direct is the transcript from the unconscious mind to great verse. The world will accept its poets if not its scientists, and the poets know, although they do not know they know.

- (Z) "We speak a lesson taught we know not how,
And what it is that from us flows
The hearer better than the utterer knows."

QUOTATIONS FROM:

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|------------------------------------|--|
| (A) <i>To My Godchild.</i> | (N) <i>The Singer Saith of his Song.</i> |
| (B) <i>The Hound of Heaven.</i> | (O) "Manus Animam Pinxet." |
| (C) <i>Ode to the Setting Sun.</i> | (P) <i>An Anthem of Earth.</i> |
| (D) <i>Orient Ode.</i> | (Q) <i>The Mistress of Vision.</i> |
| (E) <i>Heaven and Hell.</i> | (R) <i>Sonnet IV: Ad Amicam.</i> |
| (F) <i>A Narrow Vessel.</i> | (S) <i>From the Night of Forebeing.</i> |
| (G) <i>Carmen Genesis.</i> | (T) <i>Of Nature: Laud and Plaint.</i> |
| (H) <i>The English Martyrs.</i> | (U) <i>Love's Almsman Plaineth His Fare.</i> |
| (I) <i>Laus Amara Doloris.</i> | (V) <i>Hermes.</i> |
| (J) <i>Assumpta Maria.</i> | (W) <i>New Year's Chimes.</i> |
| (K) <i>Contemplation.</i> | (X) <i>A Corymbus for Autumn.</i> |
| (L) <i>Daphne.</i> | (Y) <i>Essay on Health and Holiness.</i> |
| (M) <i>The After Woman.</i> | (Z) <i>Sister Songs.</i> |

X

THE IMPATIENCE OF HAMLET

(1929) *

ONE can, perhaps, best pay tribute to the strenuous labours of the leader of the psycho-analytical movement in England by following a path where he has led. In the field of applied psycho-analysis, Ernest Jones has made works of creative art yield up significances inaccessible before the advent of psycho-analysis. His essay upon the tragedy of *Hamlet* lucidly and comprehensively makes clear the unresolved Œdipus conflict which is the fundamental problem in the play.

There is nothing further to contribute to this theme; but this having been so clearly elucidated, one is left free to gather from the play the lighting-up of the regressive movement of the libido due to the retreat from the central Œdipus difficulty. The study of the particular nature of the regression gives us an understanding of that *Hamlet* quality which makes the Œdipus situation in his case so peculiarly fascinating and individual. The problem of his procrastination receives further elucidation in the light of evidence of pre-genital fixations, and the subtlety of his behaviour becomes more understandable.

The tragedy of *Hamlet*, I submit, is not a tragedy of procrastination, but, on the contrary, a tragedy of impatience. This is true, at least in varying ways, in varying circumstances, of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*. At crucial moments in these plays the heroes exhibit an impatience, a precipitation of action, that brings life tumbling about their ears like a pack of cards. They cannot wait. This seems paradoxical in the case of *Hamlet*, for the play is one long-drawn-out delay in doing a deed for which the stage is set at the beginning. Yet blind, impetuous action betrays Hamlet in the end, not procrastination. The following is an attempt to unravel the meaning of this.

Hamlet is presented to us at the beginning of the tragedy as the son who has been bereaved of his father, the King. He has lost a loved object by death. He has experienced an emotional trauma in his mother's speedy marriage. (Impatience is to be

* Reprinted from *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.*, 1929, Vol. X, p. 270.

noted at the outset). At this juncture, or shortly afterwards, Ophelia refuses Hamlet audience at her father's bidding. Hamlet then has lost his father, his mother and his lover. He is rebuffed by Ophelia when he most needed a stronghold in the reality-world. She fails him too.

The death of a beloved father alone would mean a natural withdrawal from the world and a period of mourning. The emotional loss due to his mother's immediate re-marriage, the withdrawal of Ophelia, immensely complicate the task of mourning. To this must be added the knowledge he has gained that his father was murdered.

Freud and Abraham have elucidated the work of natural mourning, and have correlated with this the mechanism of melancholia. The mourning of Hamlet was consequent on the loss of his father; the melancholic trends followed the loss of his mother and Ophelia. In mourning, the external world is robbed of interest.

"This goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory :"
"Man delights not me : no, nor woman neither." (Act ii, Sc. 2.)

In melancholia the feeling of loss becomes an internal experience. Self-depreciation and self-reproach impoverish the mind.

"I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me ;"
"What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?" (Act iii, Sc. 1.)

The play abounds with meditations of this type. We know from psycho-analytical researches what this mood means. It betokens a narcissistic withdrawal of libido from external objects. Hamlet's hold on reality remains in his narcissistic interests and affections. He lights up with eager interest at the coming of the players. He turns in his distress to Horatio.

*"Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath seal'd thee for herself ;"* (Act iii, Sc. 2.)

This narcissistic withdrawal, as we know, is consequent upon

the introjection of the lost love-objects. The accusations made against the self are really accusations meant for the lost love-objects. They have become identified with the ego. The ego, thus identified, becomes the object of the sadism of the super-ego, and peace will come when these introjections are cast out, ejected, killed. Then again the ego can be approved by the super-ego.

The interplay of these institutions in the mind becomes clearer if one reads the tragedy as a creation of Shakespeare's mind; if one views it, that is, as a projection of the *author's* conflict in dramatic form. One needs to think in terms of the creator, not in terms of Hamlet. From this point of view Hamlet himself is the focus of the play, but the other characters provide that dramatization of the conflicting institutions in the mind of the author. For Shakespeare dramatized in *Hamlet* his own regression after his father's death. Some authorities state that he lost Mary Fitton at the same time. In externalizing the introjected objects in dramatic form he delivered himself from "the something in his soul." He freed himself through a sublimation, in a way that bears analogy to the ejection, killing, of the introjections made into the ego.

The poet is not Hamlet. Hamlet is what he might have been if he had not written the play of *Hamlet*. The characters are all introjections thrown out again from his mind. He is the murdered majesty of Denmark, he is the murdered Claudius, he is the Queen, Gertrude, and Ophelia. He is Hamlet. He has killed them and himself by writing the play. He has ejected all of them symbolically and remains a sane man, through a sublimation that satisfies the demands of the super-ego and the impulses of the id.

The internal drama of the poet's mind seems to be externalized in the following way.

Ambivalence throughout the play is conveyed by the coupling or contrasting of characters.

The dead King is a foil to Claudius. The loving attitude to the father is direct in Hamlet's rapturous eulogy.

*"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."*
(Act iii, Sc. 4.)

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Claudius, this King's brother, represents the wicked aspect of the father, towards which Hamlet's hostility is directed.

"O villain, villain, smiling, damned, villain!" (Act i, Sc. 5.)

*"Like a mildew'd ear
Blasting his wholesome brother."* (Act iii, Sc. 4.)

The ghost that walks represents this ideal father-imago. Claudius is the embodiment of that wicked father who frustrates him and stands "between the election and his hopes."

When the ghost becomes a denizen of the nether world, he is "this fellow in the cellarage." There he is suffering for his sins, and the reproaches he makes against himself are in line with the self-reproaches that Claudius makes and are to be identified with Hamlet's own. Thus we have the entombed ghost, Hamlet and Claudius identified.

This is representative of the incorporation of the wicked father into the ego. The ghost that walked is symbolical of the super-ego whose sadism is directed against the ego, externalized for us as Claudius.

This theme repeats itself in another setting as the tension due to super-ego sadism increases. Laertes carries on this rôle. He has a father killed and sister lost. He represents the gathering urgency towards precipitate action in Hamlet's own mind.

*"The ocean, overpeering of his list,
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste
Than young Laertes."* (Act iv, Sc. 5.)

Hamlet says earlier:

*"With wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge."* (Act i, Sc. 5.)

Hamlet (in ego rôle) says to Laertes (in super-ego rôle):

*"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.
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."* (Act v, Sc. 2.)

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In the final débâcle Hamlet is killed by Laertes, that is, super-ego kills ego. He is hoodwinked to his death by Laertes, by his own super-ego. Here one remembers that Laertes acts on the suggestion of Claudius, and we see in dramatic form what Freud has formulated in psycho-analysis, that in the unconscious the super-ego and the id have their own alliances.

Punishment falls on Hamlet at last. He voices it as being the desert of every man.

"Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?"
(Act ii, Sc. 2.)

At that moment, he disentangles himself from the introduced object and kills Claudius.

The occasion of Hamlet's betrayal to death is the challenge to a duel with Laertes, a sadistic challenge that he cannot resist. He is at the mercy of his own super-ego sadism. He is unconscious of it. He is taken off his guard.

*"He, being remiss,
Most generous and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils."* (Act iv, Sc. 7.)

It is this urgency of the sadism of the super-ego that leads me to assert that fundamentally the impatience of Hamlet, not procrastination, is the central problem of the play.

Mourning needs the factor of time. Melancholia needs longer still. Hamlet could not tolerate this waiting time, the self-depreciation, loss of love and impoverishment of spirit implicit in this state. To penetrate to the root of this fundamental impatience we must turn for help to the dramatic representations of the other love-objects, the mother and Ophelia.

Ophelia presents to us precisely the same problem as Hamlet. It is the same *motif* in the woman as in the man. She has a father killed. Hamlet's death is a dramatized suicide, super-ego and ego rôles being allotted to different characters. In Ophelia the different institutions of the mind are not separated out. We are given the facts. Her father is killed; she goes mad; she drowns herself. That is an epitome of the elaborated dramatized suicidal theme of the whole play. It implies what is explicit in the play, namely, a narcissistic withdrawal after the father's death, the incorporation of the lost love-object, the reproaches against this loved one directed to the self, and the

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swift nemesis brought about by the super-ego sadism turned against the ego. The reproach against the father (Polonius) was clearly that of frustration. The living person towards whom her suicide is a hostile act, the person from whose heart her death will wring pity and remorse, is the Queen (the mother-*imago*). To the Queen, Ophelia turns first in her madness.

"Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?"

The Queen says:

"I will not speak with her." (Act iv, Sc. 5.)

Ophelia puts on a garland of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,

*"That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them."*

In the water, symbolical of the mother's womb, she is

*"Like a creature native and indued
Unto that element . . ."* (Act iv, Sc. 7.)

Her garments are "heavy with their drink." She has returned to the mother, the separation from those breast was the pattern on which all later frustrations, with their unsolved problems of anxiety and hostility, were built.

The theme of "madness" in the Hamlet rôle is worked out completely in the Ophelia rôle. Hamlet assumes "an antic disposition." But there is no "assumption" of it when Hamlet speaks to Laertes; he confesses that he has partially lost control.

*"If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not."* (Act v, Sc. 2.)

In Ophelia the madness is manifest, whereas in Hamlet we see the struggle being waged. This madness is an urgency to self-destruction. Hamlet's procrastination is a vain endeavour to stem the tide of this urgency, an ekeing-out of time. It is an elaborate slowness to combat swiftness, against which he is

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battling for self-preservation. Ophelia is then the feminine aspect of Hamlet. Speaking of Hamlet, the Queen says:

*"Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets* are disclos'd
His silence will sit drooping."* (Act v, Sc. 1.)

Hamlet speaking of himself, says:

"Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice."
(Act iii, Sc. 2.)

The meaning of the feminine identification is clear in the text. The mother is the castrator. The play abounds in symbols of this type.

*"the sepulchre
Hath oped his ponderous and marble jaws,
To cast thee up again."* (Act i, Sc. 4.)

*"'Tis now the very witching time of night
When churchyards yawn."* (Act iii, Sc. 2.)

Queen Gertrude has a second husband. The player Queen says:

*"A second time I kill my husband dead,
When second husband kisses me in bed."*
(Act iii, Sc. 2.)

The feminine identification achieves the castration of the father in the feminine way. We have every evidence of this in the play. The theme of a "trap" occurs constantly. Polonius sets a trap to pry on his son. Hamlet catches Polonius in a trap, when he hides behind the arras. Claudius makes a trap for catching Hamlet in sending him to England. Hamlet is trapped into a duel with Laertes. "Springes to catch woodcocks," says Polonius to Ophelia, referring to Hamlet's overtures. "As a woodcock to mine own Springe," says the dying Laertes. Denmark is a prison. Hell is a trap. Death is "an eternal cell." Says Hamlet to Ophelia:

HAMLET: *That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs.*
OPHELIA: *What is, my lord?*
HAMLET: *Nothing.* (Act iii, Sc. 2.)

* Couplets—eggs.

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The climax of the play is the performance by the players of the Murder of Gonzalo. It is the quintessence of the story. Hamlet arranges for it to be played. He names it himself "The Mouse-Trap." It is designed to "catch the conscience of the King." That is, Hamlet in the feminine rôle plays the part of the entrapper, the castrator of the father. This brings us directly to the reproaches which he makes against his mother. The first of these is haste, urgency.

*"the funeral baked-meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables."* (Act i, Sc. 2.)

*"A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears . . ."* (Act i, Sc. 2.)

This reproach against his mother for the speed with which she married again is to be understood further in the light of the infantile phantasies of sexual intercourse that are revealed.

*"She would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on."* (Act i, Sc. 2.)

*"So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed
And prey on garbage."* (Act i, Sc. 5.)

*"Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain have to feed
And batten on this moor?"* (Act iii, Sc. 4.)

Claudius is a drunkard.

*"The King doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail . . .
And, as he drinks his draughts of Rhenish down . . ."*
(Act i, Sc. 4.)

In the final scene the Queen precipitately drinks to Hamlet's fortune. Claudius tries to stop her.

"I will, my Lord. I pray you, pardon me." (Act v, Sc. 2.)

We reach along this route the furthest regression of the libido

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to the oral zone, to the phantasies of the relationship between the parents in the terms of the earliest Oedipus setting, that of mutual feeding. The frustration at the breast, the loss of love, the reproach against the mother lead to an identification with her, for she feeds on the father.

That the fundamental problem is the oral sadism attendant upon oral frustration is clear enough in the text of the play.

*"I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal."* (Act ii, Sc. 2.)

"Now could I drink hot blood." (Act iii, Sc. 2.)

"We fat all creatures, else to fat us." (Act iv, Sc. 3.)

*"The ocean
Eats not the flats with more impiteous haste
Than young Laertes."* (Act iv, Sc. 5.)

Oral frustration, oral impatience, oral sadism are inseparable.

The super-ego sadism turns upon the ego and destroys it when that ego is identified with the frustrating love-objects. Yet the sadistic super-ego, as we know, being unconscious, has its alliances with the destructive, hostile, aggressive id-impulses that in the oral stage manifest themselves in eating phantasies directed against the parents.

*"Woo't drink up Esill? eat a crocodile?"
"I'll do't."* (Act v, Sc. 1.)

In this oral stage the loved object is a property. The mother is a breast, the father a penis, both of them adjuncts only to the baby's need for food, love, protection. The necessity to keep them as personal property is rooted in the anxiety that hostility causes when frustration occurs.

The theme of personal property is not only to be found in the Hamlet theme, but we find that also for the murdered King and for Claudius, the Queen is a "possession."

*"Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand
Of life, of crown, of Queen, at once despatch'd."
"Since I am still possess'd."
(Act i, Sc. 5.)*

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*Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?"*

(Act iii, Sc. 3.)

There was a popular superstition in Shakespeare's time that spirits returned to earth to guard hidden treasure.

Horatio, in addressing the ghost, says:

*"If thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth
For which they say, you spirits oft walk in death,
Speak of it."* (Act i, Sc. 1.)

The "prostitute" theme swings to and fro between the man and woman. Claudius is "the bloated King" who "paddles in your neck with his damned fingers." The Queen "battens on this moor." Proud Death holds the final feast in her eternal cell.

The "prostitute," male and female, is rooted at the oral level, where mother and father are merged into one figure. "My mother: father and mother is man and wife: man and wife is one flesh: and so, my mother."

From this parasitic dependence we see the constant struggles towards freedom.

*"Duller should'st thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,
Would'st thou not stir in this?"* (Act i, Sc. 5.)

*"O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engag'd!"* (Act iii, Sc. 3.)

Hamlet's other self is Horatio. He is what Hamlet wishes to be.

"As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing."

He is not

*"a . . . pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please."* (Act iii, Sc. 2.)

As Horatio takes the poisoned cup to drink it, Hamlet dashes it from him.

*"As thou'rt a man
Give me the cup: let go: by heaven, I'll have't."*
(Act v, Sc. 2.)

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"As thou'rt a man." Horatio must speak for Hamlet; Horatio must do what Hamlet has not been able to do. The whole story of the tragedy lies in Hamlet's injunction to Horatio:

*"Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story."* (Act v, Sc. 2.)

This absence from felicity, the breath of pain in a harsh world, Hamlet could not bear.

*"Had I but time—as this fell sergeant, death,
Is strict in his arrest—O, I could tell you—
But let it be!"* (Act v, Sc. 2.)

The tragedy of Hamlet is one of impatience. Fortinbras takes the stage. He succeeds to the kingdom left by the deaths of Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet.

*"I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me."*
(Act 5, Sc. 2.)

So Shakespeare, having externalized and elaborated the inner conflict on his father's death, kept the course of sanity. It is perhaps the range and depth of this power to dramatize the inner forces of the soul that made him at once the world's greatest playwright and a simple normal man.

To read Freud and Abraham on the subject of mourning and melancholia alongside with *Hamlet* is to be impressed again with the majesty of human achievement. Science and art here fit exactly; they are completely wedded.

In the endeavour to probe the working of the human mind, science and art are both indispensable. Scientists will fail unless there is fused with science something of creative art; the artist will fail unless he has the detachment and objectivity of the scientist. Psycho-analysis is both science and art. Freud, and the followers of Freud with something of courage akin to his, lay bare in their own minds and the minds of others the dramas that the great poets project on to the world's stage.