

Psychoanalytic Criticism
and
Hamlet

Janet Adelman

“ Man and Wife Is One Flesh “ :
Hamlet and the Confrontation
With the Maternal Body

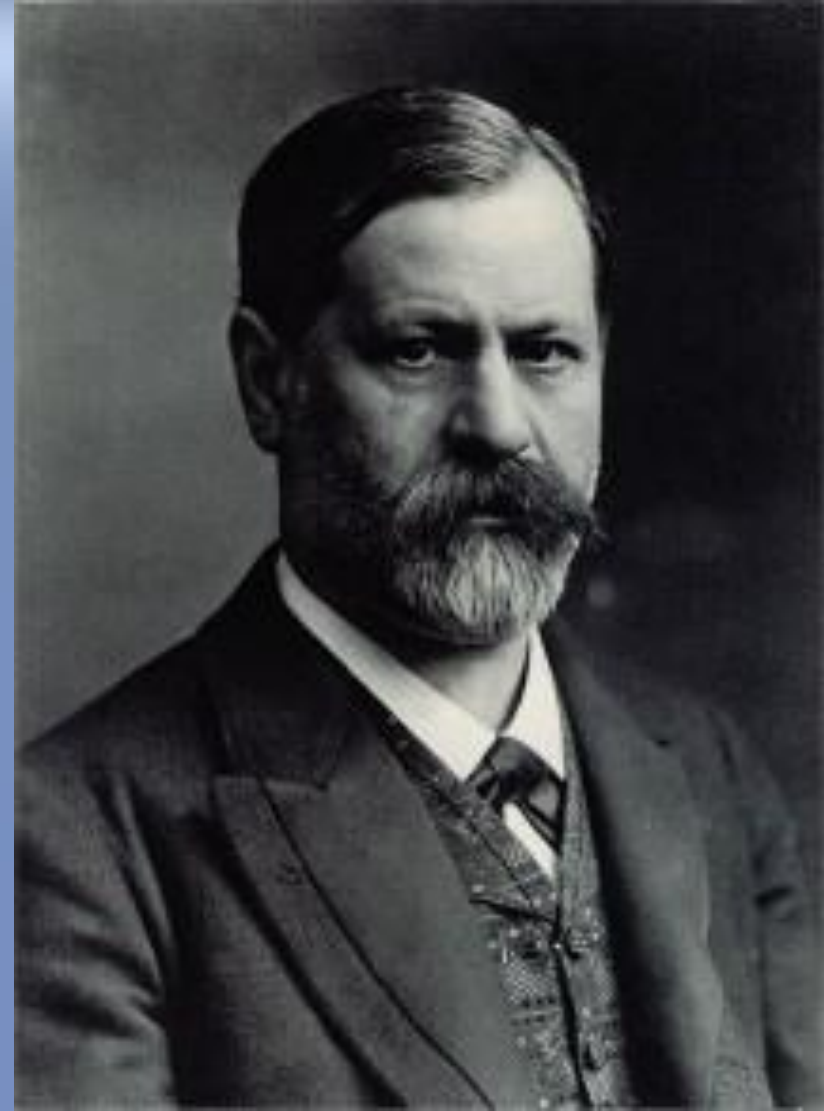
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Introduction



- In 1900 the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud published a seminal book entitled « The Interpretation of Dreams» paving the way to the notion of dreams as one way to psychic exploration and ,hence, allowing for the analogy between literary works and dreams,given that both are inventions of the mind through what is known as psychoanalytic criticism.

Psychoanalytic criticism



- Like a **play**, a **dream** may have some truth to tell, but it may need to be interpreted before that truth can be grasped.
- **Psychoanalytic literary criticism** refers to the literary theory which, in method, concept, or form, is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis begun by Sigmund Freud to interpret texts. It argues that literary texts, like dreams, express the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author, that a literary work is a manifestation of the author's own neuroses.
- One may psychoanalyze a particular character within a literary work, but it is usually assumed that all such characters are projections of the author's psyche.

The Three Levels of the Psyche



- Freud himself says, “The poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied.”
- He suggested that the powers motivating both man and woman are mainly unconscious and he developed the idea that the human mind is dual in nature . He divided the human psyche into three main parts .

The Three Levels of the Psyche



The Id

The Ego

The Super-Ego



Sigmund Freud
(1923)



The Id

- It is the passionate, irrational, disorganized, and unconscious part of the psyche. It contains the human's basic and instinctual drives. It is the only component of personality that is present from birth. It is the source of our bodily needs, wants, desires, and impulses, particularly our sexual and aggressive drives .



The Ego



- It is the rational, logical, organized and the conscious part. It includes defensive, perceptual, intellectual-cognitive, and executive functions. Its task is to organize our thoughts and find a balance between primitive drives and reality .
- The ego employs defense mechanisms which reduce the tension of our impulses . They are often used by the ego when id behaviour conflicts with reality and society's morals, norms, and taboos .



The Super - Ego



- It is the projection of Ego , it is a symbolic internalization of the father figure and cultural regulations.
 - It is a type of conscience that punishes misbehaviour with feelings of guilt. It controls our sense of right and wrong and guilt. It helps us fit into society by getting us to act in socially acceptable ways.
- The super-ego's demands often oppose the id's.



Theory of Repression



Repression is one of the central defense mechanisms by which the ego seeks to avoid internal conflict and pain, and to reconcile reality with the demands of both *id* and *super-ego* .

Repression does not mean annihilation . The repressed things continue to exist in the unconscious, from where it exerts a determining force upon the conscious mind, and can give rise to the dysfunctional behaviour characteristic of neuroses. This is one reason why dreams and slips of the tongue possess such a strong symbolic significance for Freud .





THE DREAM WORK



THE FOUR ASPECTS OF THE DREAM WORK ARE :

- **CONDENSATION** : It means condensing many different ideas into one.
- **DISPLACEMENT** : Replaces a latent element by a well-concealed allusion to it, so the psychical emphasis is shifted from important to an unimportant element to a relatively trivial one .
- **CONSIDERATION OF REPRESENTABILITY** : transforms thoughts into visual elements eg: I was in a tower above the audience → I towered above the audience intellectually



THE DREAM WORK



- **SECONDARY REVISION** : makes something whole and more or less coherent of the distorted product of the dream work
- These aspects of the dream –work transform a latent set of thoughts into the manifest content which is a disguised version of these thoughts

Ψ CONDENSATION IN DREAMS



- One of the most interesting features of dreams is their wonderful condensation of persons, places, and things. For example, a dream scene may really be made up of several places we have seen: a dream person may have traits or features or manners that belong to two or more persons. For this reason we may doubt that dreams are founded on actual experiences, since the dream characters or scenes are not to be found in real life in exactly the same form as in the dreams.



CONDENSATION IN DREAMS



The condensation of dreams is sometimes explained due to fusion of two or more images coming to sleeping consciousness at about the same time. Most of us are probably familiar with dream objects which change as we look at them .

Ψ CONDENSATION IN DREAMS



- Condensation may occur with places: also with animals and things. A scene, really a condensation of many places, may result from the mind's having noted a resemblance between the places, or in which certain related incidents occurred. Similarly, animals and things may be composed of various likenesses which the mind has noted.
- A condensation may even take place of animals and humans. For instance, a dream image may have a pig's head, the body of a certain man, or other combinations. This might have resulted from the thought that this man was a pig, - a squealer, a boarish sort of a person. The condensation of dreams is the dream's effort at brevity, to combine things which have a likeness.

Ψ CONDENSATION IN DREAMS



Condensation may also occur with words, and this is what makes some dream words sound like gibberish. However, they can with study often be separated into their component parts. For example, in a dream studied by Dr. Brill, the dreamer sees a man pointing to a sign, which reads, Uclamparia, wet. Uclamparia was found to be a condensation of eucalyptus and malaria. Such word-condensations or fusions are often called neologisms.



DISPLACEMENT



In freudian psychology , displacement means shift or move. It is an unconscious defense mechanism wherby the mind substitutes either a new aim or a new object for goals felt in their original form to be dangerous or unacceptable.

Oedipus complex



- Sigmund Freud argued that sexuality begins in the infant stages of life and that a young boy experiences sexual desires for his mother, which causes the boy to see his father as a rival for his mother's affection. This desire for his mother will eventually become part of the boy's subconscious when he becomes an adult,
- The Oedipus complex occurs in the third — phallic stage (ages 3–6) — of the five **psychosexual development** stages: (i) the **oral**, (ii) the **anal**, (iii) the **phallic**, (iv) the **latent**, and (v) the **genital**. Freud called it the oedipal complex after the **Greek myth**.



Oedipus in mythology



- Oedipus was the son of the **King Laius** and the **Queen Jocasta** of Thebes. A curse on the Laius foretold that any son born of Jocasta would kill him. When Jocasta did bear a son, the child's feet were pierced and he was left to bleed to death. However, a shepherd found Oedipus and took him to King **Polybus** of Corinth, who adopted Oedipus. He named the child Oedipus, which means "**swelled foot**".
- When Oedipus grew older, he sought advice from an oracle. The oracle told him that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Fearing that he would harm Polybus, Oedipus fled the kingdom. As he left, he found Laius travelling. The charioteer treated him rudely, so Oedipus killed him and his entire party.

Oedipus in mythology



- Oedipus arrived in Thebes he found the people troubled with Laius' death, and plagued by a monster, **the Sphinx**. Oedipus managed to outwit the Sphinx and kill it. Fulfilling his destiny, Oedipus then took the throne of Thebes, marrying his mother, Jocasta.
- **Sophocles** retold this famous myth in his tragic play, **Oedipus Rex** (*Oedipus the King*)



Hamlet as Oedipus



- The critical applications of the famous theory of the Oedipus complex to the tragedy of Hamlet are innumerable. It was **Freud** himself who, in an essay published in **1905**, was the first to try and resolve in psychoanalytical terms the enigma offered by Hamlet's behavior. According to Freud, the personal crisis undergone by Hamlet awakens his repressed incestuous and parricidal desires. The disgust which the remarriage of his mother arouses in him, as well as the violent behaviour during their confrontation in the queen's bedroom, are signs of the jealousy which he constantly experiences, even if unconsciously.
- Hamlet is absolutely horrified by the thought that his mother could feel desire for Claudius, whom he describes as a 'murderer and villain,/ A slave that is not twentieth part the tithe/ Of your precedent lord'.

Hamlet as Oedipus



- The bedroom scene is one example amongst many of Hamlet's aversion to sexuality, which he more often than not associates with vulgarity and sickness. Despite his violent reactions, he is nonetheless fundamentally incapable of acting, Freud tells us, because he cannot bring himself to avenge himself on the man who has killed his father and taken his place at the side of his mother. Given that Claudius does no more than reproduce the repressed fantasies of childhood, the hatred Hamlet feels for him is progressively replaced by a feeling of guilt which constantly reminds him that he is no better than the man he is supposed to punish.

critical analysis



- **Ernest Jones** addresses the strange conduct of Hamlet and explains his behavior using Freudian psychoanalysis. He suggests that Hamlet's oedipal complex is the cause of his erratic behavior and is the explanation for the reason why Hamlet has such a difficult time avenging his father's murder. Hamlet's subconscious sexual desire for his mother has prevented him from doing the deed.
- Schematizing Jones' argument :
 - E1: Hamlet's inability to avenge his father
 - E2: Hamlet's close relationship with his mother
 - E3: Shakespeare's sensual characterization of Gertrude
 - E4: Hamlet's behavior toward Ophelia

Jacques Lacan

The three orders of human mental disposition

The real

The imaginary order

The symbolic order



The imaginary order



It is a pre-Oedipal phase where an infant is yet unable to distinguish itself from its mother's body or to recognize the lines of demarcation between itself and objects in the world; indeed, it does not yet know itself as a coherent entity or self. Hence, the imaginary phase is one of unity (between the child and its surroundings), as well as of immediate possession (of the mother and objects), a condition of reassuring plenitude, a world consisting wholly of images (hence "imaginary") that is not fragmented or mediated by difference, by categories, in a word, by language and signs.

The symbolic order



It is the social world of linguistic communication, intersubjective relations, knowledge of ideological conventions, and the acceptance of the law (also called the "big Other"). Once a child enters into language and accepts the rules and dictates of society, it is able to deal with others. The acceptance of language's rules is aligned with the Oedipus complex, according to Lacan. The symbolic is made possible because of your acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father, those laws and restrictions that control both your desire and the rules of communication. Through recognition of the Name-of-the-Father, you are able to enter into a community of others. The symbolic, through language, is "the pact which links... subjects together in one action. The human action *par excellence* is originally founded on the existence of the world of the symbol, namely on laws and contracts".The symbolic order works in tension with the imaginary order and the Real.

The Real

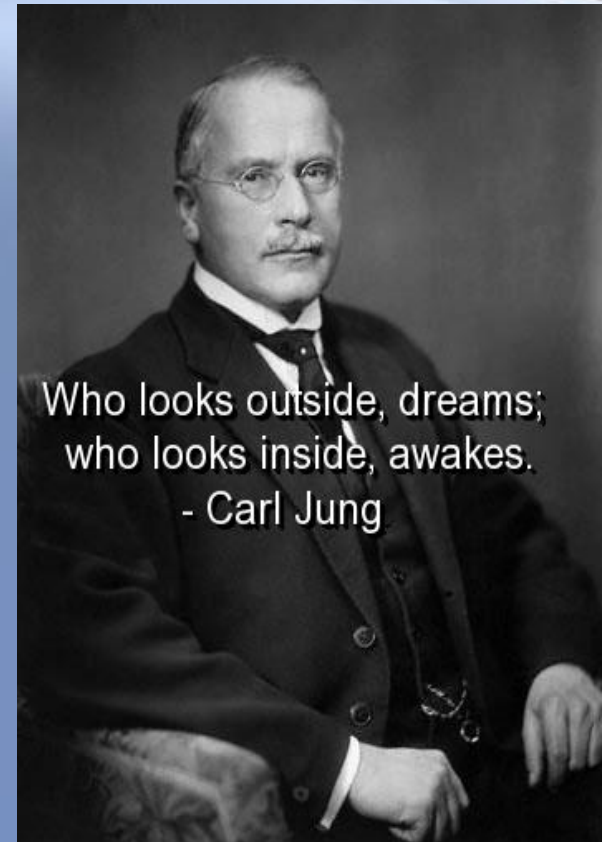


Lacan never accurately describes the “real”: he seems to think of it as what lies beyond the world of signification, perhaps a primordial immediacy of experience prior to language or a chaotic condition of mere thinghood prior to objectivity. For Lacan, the real is the impossible. Lacan rejects any notion that the mind of either child or adult has any intrinsic psychological unity; it is merely a “subject” rather than a self or ego, merely the occupant of an always moving position in the networks of signification; hence, for Lacan, as he indicates in a famous statement, even **“the unconscious is structured like a language.”**

Carl Gustav Jung



- Jungian criticism attempts to explore the connection between literature and what Carl Jung called the “collective unconscious” of the human race.
- All stories and symbols are based on mythic models from mankind’s past.



Jung's archetypes



The Anima/ Animus

- personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche," and is represented by a member of the opposite sex.
- the male tendencies represented in a female character

The Shadow

- represents little known attributes about a person, and is usually personified by a same sex figure that employs many characteristics opposite of the main character.

The Spirit

- is "the innermost nucleus of the psyche," (Thury 481) and is only realized when the character undergoes a process called individuation.

Winnicott's theory:



- Donald Winnicott (1896-1971) was a London pediatrician from the 1920s to the 1980s, and also a thinker who revised Freud significantly. He is an object-relations psychoanalyst who had significant impact on literary criticism.
- He studied psychoanalysis with Melanie Klein. Although accepting Klein, he viewed the key aspect of healthy development as rooted in relationships and micro-interactions with other people, thus taking particular interest in Object Relations Theory. He is well-known partly because he used everyday language, and also from his BBC broadcasts.

Some of his main concepts:



- The Transition Object
For comfort and not-me identification.
- The good-enough mother
Providing the 'holding environment' and facilitating transition.
 - True self, false self
Integrity and growth.
 - Winnicott's development stages
Unity, transition, independence.
 - Play
Development and learning.

- The space between:
- Rather than considering the outer and inner worlds, Winnicott was more interested in the 'transition space' between these domains.
- As a virtual world, it is ideal for play and creativity.

Object Relations Theory



Object Relations Theory is a theory of relationships between people, in particular within a family and especially between the mother and her child. A basic tenet is that we are driven to form relationships with others and that failure to form successful early relationships leads to later problems.

- It is also concerned with the relation between the subject and their internalized objects, as well as with external objects. Thus we have a relationship with the internal mother as well as an external one.
- The development of male gender identity is seen as more difficult as the first person with whom the infant identifies is female.

Discussion:



- The idea of object relations was invented and developed in a paper by Karl Abraham (1927), however Melanie Klein is largely credited with developing the modern theory, particularly with the mother as the principal object.
- Unlike Freud, who focused on introjection of same-sex parents, Object Relations Theory considers the child having multiple internal objects.



- Klein saw relations with the breast as significant. As the child feeds, it feels gratified and satiated when the breast produces sufficient milk, in which case it is loved and cherished. When the child is prematurely withdrawn or the breast does not provide sufficient food, the child is frustrated and the breast is hated and the recipient of hostile thoughts. The mother thus receives love or destructive attack depending on this.
- The baby experiences extremes of feeling. When he is angry, it is total anger and rejects and thrusts away the mother. When he is happy, he loves and adores her. He projects his bad feeling and associates her with it.

Phantasy vs. Fantasy



- Phantasy is a state of mind of an infant child during the early stages of development.
- They are largely unconscious in that they are not differentiated from conscious reality. In their early, pre-linguistic existence, infants differentiate little, if at all, between reality and imagination.
- Phantasies stem from genetic needs, drives and instincts. They appear in symbolic form in dreams, play and neuroses.
- They are constructed from internal and external reality, modified by feelings, and emotions, and then projected into both real and imaginary objects.
- Phantasies are the means by which infants make sense of the external world and hence relate to it through Projection and Introjection.



- In Klein's concept, phantasy emanates from within and imagines what is without, it offers an unconscious commentary on instinctual life and links feelings to objects and creates a new amalgam: the world of imagination. Through its ability to phantasize the baby tests out, primitively 'thinks' about, its experiences of inside and outside. (Mitchell, 1986)

Fantasy:



- Fantasy is a reverie, a daydream, an imagined unreality that anyone can create.
- We fantasize consciously about future possibilities and fulfillment of our basic needs and wishes.
- Fantasies may well include elements of the deeper unconscious phantasies.
- [Klein](#) was particularly interested in the early psychological development. She saws phantasies as prime motivators and thus as important forces for development.
- For Klein, unconscious phantasies underlie not only dreams but all thought and activity, both creative and destructive, including the expression of internal [object relations](#). They modify external events, investing them with significance.



- Phantasy enables the ego to perform its most basic function of establishing object relations. A world of good and bad objects are thus constructed through a process of projection and introjection between the external and internal worlds. Phantasy thus allows us to construct both our own identity and also, through projection, the construction of Others.
- Phantasies develop in and into play, and Klein used 'play therapy' to learn about the early development of infants as a more effective method than Freud's use of free association.
- Phantasies continue through childhood and into adult life.
- Freud recognized phantasies, but looked to the unconscious wish as the prime mover. He saw phantasies as imagined fulfillments of frustrated wishes. Klein puts phantasies beneath unconscious wishes, rather than alongside them.

Play



- As a pediatrician and student of [Melanie Klein](#), [Winnicott](#) found play to be an important part of the child's [development](#) process.
- **Fort! Da!** : In [Freud](#)'s *Fort! Da!* game ('Gone! Here!'), the 15 month child throws a cotton reel from its cot and pulls it back into sight. This symbolizes the mother, disappearing and reappearing. The child is reassuring itself by showing that something that disappears can be brought back at will.
- For [Klein](#), the reel is a symbolization of an internal [object](#) that is the mother who has, in [phantasy](#), been harmed by the child which leads to her absence and is an anxiety of the [depressive position](#). The child's actions involve [projective identification](#) towards the reel-mother.
- For [Winnicott](#), the reel acts as a [transition object](#), representing



- For Klein, the reel is a symbolization of an internal object that is the mother who has, in phantasy, been harmed by the child which leads to her absence and is an anxiety of the depressive position. The child's actions involve projective identification towards the reel-mother.
- For Winnicott, the reel acts as a transition object, representing the mother and aiding the transition to independence.



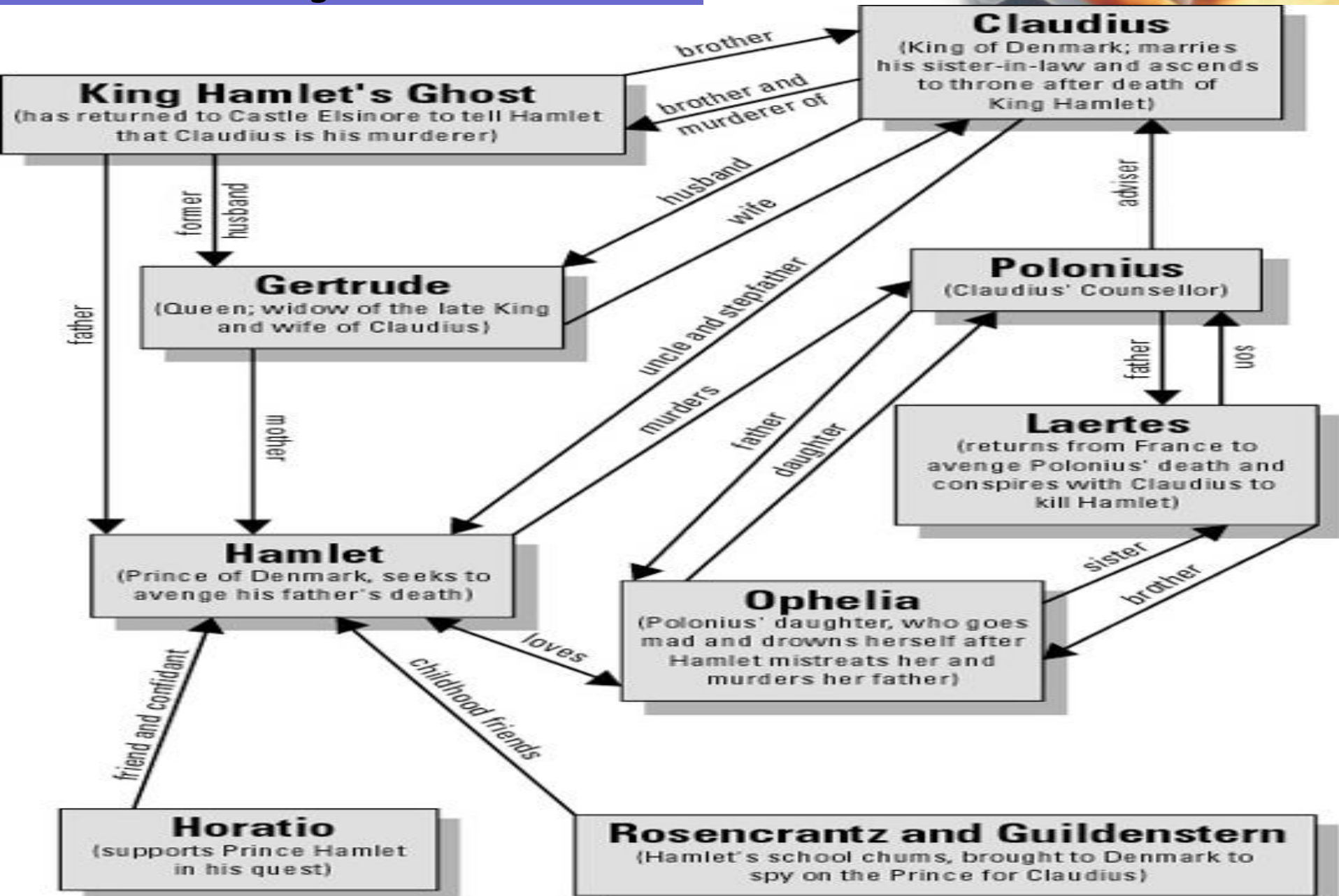
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Maternal Body



Summary of Hamlet



The Triangulated Relationship



**THE
MOTHER**



**THE
FATHER**

**THE
SON**

The Triangulated Relationship



- Adelman perceives *Hamlet* not in oedipal terms « as a young man consumed by repressed passion for the mother »
- She focuses on the play's psychological drama as being about Hamlet complex relationships to several characters. These relationships ultimately involve fear of the mother's sexuality, idealization of the father's masculinity and the consequent struggle to free the masculine identity of both father and son from the contaminated maternal body.

The Problem of Identity



- The whole weight of the play creates two fathers one true and one false .Despite their differences, they keep threatening to collapse into one another, annihilating the son's assumption of his father's identity. The main cause of this collapse is Gertrude who :
 - ❖ Fails to be a repository of the father's ideal image by mourning him appropriately.
 - ❖ Fails to distinguish properly between Hamlet's father and his father's brother.
 - ❖ Follows her indiscriminating sexuality .

“Adieu, Adieu, remember me“



- After Gertrude failure of memory, Hamlet bears alone the burden of remembering . He lets the father ghost embody him and spread his commandments over his brain. This burden of memory pushes Hamlet to over idealizing his father , and he becomes aware of his own distance from the idealized father and of his likeness to Claudius. So Claudius represents the deepest and the hidden part of Hamlet ‘s personality .

Hamlet wants his father back



- Janet Adelman concentrates on the maternal point of the triangle between Hamlet, his father and his mother.
- Father's funeral and mother's remarriage tells us that the idealized father's absence releases the threat of maternal sexuality, which is subjecting the son to her annihilating power .
- So Hamlet needs a strong father to protect him from his own impulses towards his own mother.

Contaminated Relationships



- Adelman explores the way in which Gertrude disrupts the familial and sexual relationships in *Hamlet*. She argues that her presence disables the son's relationship with the father and with Ophelia too.
- Gertrude's fantasies of maternal malevolence contaminate the idea of "marriage" and "the father figure" for Hamlet and make him see the whole world as "unweeded garden" which reflects his view of his mother's body which has been contaminated by an adulterous relationship.

Contaminated Relationships



- The father's death is difficult to Hamlet since it returns him to the maternal contaminated body:
 - ❖ The father's death leads to the mother's sexualized body =
the idealized father's absence leaves Hamlet subject to his mother overwhelming power.
 - ❖ The discovery of his mother's sexuality kills his idealized father for him.
- Janet Adelman is giving a feminist psychoanalytic reading of *Hamlet* , she combines gender studies with psychoanalytic criticism.

The spoiling of the male body



Adelman argues that the son is spoiled by his origin in the rank flesh of the maternal body. At first, Hamlet fixes blame on Claudius for the sense of contamination he feels, but as he continues, he relocates it in the maternal body.

The role of spoiler is not taken by Claudius but by Hamlet's mother, Gertrude.

For Hamlet, man , formed and deformed in his mother's womb takes his corruption from that particular fault.

The Subjection of Male to Female



Adelman thinks that the subjection of male to female is the buried fantasy of *Hamlet*.

The poisoning of old Hamlet is modelled on Cain's killing of Abel, but this version of Cain and Abel turns out to be a cover for the more primal story of Adam and Eve.

The murder here turns not on the winning of a father's favour but on the body of a woman.

Gertrude's resemblance to Eve



Adelman thinks that Eve is conspicuously absent from the Cain and Abel version of the fall. But if the plot rewrites the fall as a story of fratricidal rivalry, locating literal agency for the murder in Claudius, a whole network of images and associations replaces his literal agency with Gertrude's by making her both the agent and the locus of death.



Old Hamlet is
poisoned by the
“serpent” who wears
his crown’



- Old Hamlet has fallen not through his brother's treachery but through his subjection to Gertrude.
- Despite Gertrude's conspicuous absence from the scene in the garden, the vulnerability of the father, and hence of the son , to her poison turns out to be the whole story.

Transfer of agency



- The transfer of agency shifts from **male** to **female**
- The malevolent power and blame for the murder shift from Claudius to Gertrude
- The shift starts first with the ghost's account of the murder when Hamlet transfers the exorcism for the murder to powerful condemnation of Gertrude's sexuality .
- In « **the murder of Gonzago** » (Hamlet's version of his father's tale) the murderer's role is given less emphasis than the queen's. Her protestations locate psychic blame for the murder. Remarriage is a form of murder «**a second time i kill my husband dead when second husband kisses me in bed**»
- When Hamlet confronts his mother in her closet after the play, the transfer of agency to her is then **confirmed.**

Transfer of agency



- He says « **a bloody deed, almost as bad, good mother, as kill a king and marry his brother** »
- Given this parallel :Claudius' crime is nearly absent, he rather becomes a passive victim of Gertrude's sexual will, by saying « **marry his brother** » not « **marry his wife** » .
- In « **muder of Gonzago** » **Lucianus** carries the poison on stage and addresses it in association to the weeds of the garden: « **Thou mixed rank, of midnight weeds collected With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected thy natural magic and dire property on wholesome life usurps immediatly** » (3.2.251-54)

Transfer of agency



- Even though the act of poisoning is **done** by **Lucianus**, the language insists on « the poison is **hers** not his », hence, the usurpation of wholesome life derives from the weeds of Gertrude's body not Claudius' political ambitions.
- The effects of poison on the body are the same as the effects of venereal disease, Syphilis, '**vile, loathsome crust**'

The Maternal Body



- The **night witch** against whom **Marcellus** had protected the saviour born from a virgin birth, is the essence of midnight itself, for night is the « witching time », a time when « **hell itself breaths out** », contagion to this world, it invokes the presence of a night body breathing out the contagion of her body (poison).
 - **Horatio** tells **hamlet** it appeared in « **the dead waste and middle of the night** » and hamlet answers « **then, thou live about her waist or in the middle of her favours** »
 - In this parallel of **waste** and **waist**, Gertdude, in fantasy, becomes this night body, she is the embodiment of **hell** and **death** causing Claudius to end up as a vulnerable creature
- « **the strong men are all slayne by her, her house is the waie unto the grave, which goeth downe to the chambers of death** » (The Geneva Bible 22:18-19, 7:26-27)



- Female sexuality in hamlet is always **maternal**;the mother's body is already sexually corrupted by definition and brings death to the world.
- In this respect death (**the Earth's womb**) and sexuality (**the mother's womb**) are interchangeable.
- As asserted by the deadly woman of proverbs « **thei that go unto her,returne not again** »
- The maternal body is always threatening to swallow up her children back to her womb,undoing them.
- Death is hell's mouth and Gertrude is death's mouth devouring her husband « **As if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on** » and the return to females' body is to the maternal womb with incestuous nightmare



- For Hamlet, there is a confusion of death with eating and sex that is seen beneath his wit « **the funeral baked meat that did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables** »
- An alternative name of the poison that killed old hamlet is « **union** » instead of « **mixed rank** », for the sexual union of Gertrude and Claudius is nothing but a « union » poison.

Mother-father as one flesh



- Hamlet: **Farewell, dear mother**
- King: **The loving father Hamlet**
- Hamlet: **My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh; so my mother.** (4.3.52-55)
- By saying « **father and mother is man and wife** » instead of « **husband and wife** » Hamlet rejects the possibility that his mother could be married, or rather that there exists a rival for his mother's passion, which is a striking instance of Hamlet's **Oedipal complex**.
- Hence, for Hamlet sexuality whether licit or illicit it is and adulterating mixture, promiscuous mixture and boundary contamination fill the play everywhere from the invasion till the poisoned bodies.

Mother-father as one flesh



- Marcellous associates **invasion** with the **sweaty activity** as to symbolise that the female will always invade the male, she will always succeed to contaminate him and turn him into a version of hers)
- Hamlet is a psychich world where the self cannot hold, it is **invaded. Mothers, aunts; fathers uncles** become undistinguishably one flesh, identity is swallowed up.
- Hamlet is in panic for **his incestuous stand**, for the **mixed contamination** that can be transferred from his mother to him, and **his own selfhood** that he constructs as response to the threat of contamination. He, thus, creates a barrier between his inner and outer self and fantasizes to cross it through revenge.

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Women and Original Sin: Hamlet's fantasy of maternal malevolence



- Hamlet has the idea that corruption and contamination come solely from the female body, and that every man's downfall is his subjection to female desire.
- Hamlet also confronts the idea of original sin.
- The play displays before us a whole terrain of misogynist fantasies, for example female sexuality in Hamlet's psyche, seems to be that of corruption and disease. Hamlet even asks Ophelia "Wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners," as if he goes so far as to blame Gertrude for his birth, and his developing destructive persona.



- This goes further to suggest that after the death of her former husband, she has lost control over her sexual desires, referring to how women can't seem to cope without men by their side.
- This interpretation of his mother's sexuality enforces the **patriarchal** idea that women either come under the category of 'pure' or 'sinner.'
- To Hamlet the uncontrollable state of his mother's desires forever reminds him of his absent father, and a lack of paternal control, fuelling his anxieties over Claudius as his father's killer.



- The image of women being the breeders of maggots, a typical representation of death, anticipates the inevitable downfall of man, a fate made certain at conception.
- Janet Adelman in her essay "Hamlet' and the confrontation with the maternal body " (1994), argues that "original sin becomes literally the sin of origin, formed and deformed in his mother's womb, man takes his corruption from that particular fault."
- This belief and depiction of original sin illustrates the danger of a sexualised woman, as society's downfall it seems is initially concerned with man's subjection to women. Hamlet's father is deceived not by his brother's treachery, but by his initial alliance to Gertrude.



- Female writers as well as female fictional characters, concluding that the woman's position in history-- seen only in relation to men--is problematic because of the hierarchy implicit in the relationship
- The mother in this play is adulterous because it is seen as a betrayal of the both father and son.

The shift in Shakespeare's plays:



- Hamlet initiates the period of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies because from *Hamlet* on, the mother becomes the site for infantile fantasies of maternal power:

"Despite Shakespeare's sometimes astonishing moments of sympathetic engagement with his female characters, his ability to see the world from their point of view, his women will tend to be like Gertrude, more significant as screens for male fantasy than as independent characters making their own claim to dramatic reality; as they become fused with the mother of infantile need, even their fantasized gestures of independence will be read as the signs of adulterate betrayal."



- Shakespeare's women pay heavily for the fantasies invested in them. Even though the female sexual body is dangerous to the males, "the problematic maternal body can never quite be occluded or transformed: made into a monster or a saint, killed off or banished from the stage, it remains at the center of masculine subjectivity, marking its unstable origin. For the contaminated flesh of the maternal body is also home; the home Shakespeare's protagonists long to return to, the home they can never quite escape."

Gertrude different positions in the play:



- Gertrude has an odd position; the degree to which she is complicit in the murder.
- She is portrayed as innocent, but in play's deep fantasy, she plays out the role of the missing Eve:
 - « Her body is the garden in which her husband dies, and her sexuality is the poisonous weeds that kill him and poison her ».
- The garden metaphor, for Adelman, is a reference to 'the garden unpossessed' that is a traditional image of the Virgin Mother. The garden, however, has gone to seed, now it is filled with things 'rank and gross' and so Hamlet must attempt to remake the garden so that it can once again be 'unpossessed'—in effect Hamlet's ideal version of his mother's body is one that is a sexual.

Gertrude different positions in the play:



- Thus the power of the husband within the patriarchal structures of early modern marriage and family life was at least in part due to the husband's ability to establish the female body of his wife as his own—making her body, which is initially social and public, into something private and defined through the establishment of boundaries, like perhaps a garden .
- Therefore, when Old Hamlet, in the fantasy of Hamlet's memory, establishes the boundaries around Gertrude's body, whether he is tending to the 'garden' or protecting her face, he is enacting a specifically masculine role. In order to establish the proper marital relationship between husband and wife, Old Hamlet must maintain the boundaries in relation to Gertrude's body—he must control the instability of her body.

Gertrude different positions in the play:



- The absence of Old Hamlet, the ‘excellent king’, whose only concern seemed to be protecting Gertrude from the harshness of the elements, insignificant in the lines which immediately follow the ‘garden’ metaphor.
- For it seems to be the absence of the father, who cares for the mother (the garden), that allows the garden to become ‘unweeded’—for if it is ‘unweeded’ now, Hamlet seems to imply in this passage that it was weeded at one time. Thus the garden is ‘unweeded’ and ‘grows to seed’ because there is no one to tend to it, when left to its own devices it becomes a site of instability and disorder.
- In the end, it is not his uncle who restrains him from doing the right thing, it is the queen.
- Simple revenge is no longer the main psychological task for hamlet, but it is to remake his mother in the image of the Virgin Mother.



- For Adelman the ‘Closet’ scene is where Hamlet tries to save his mother—who ‘can be purified only by being separated from her sexuality’
- After all, Hamlet does not exactly suggest that Gertrude divorces Claudius, he is far more concerned with regulating her sexual body—he wants Gertrude to stop sleeping with Claudius, to play the role of chaste widow so as to perfectly preserve the memory of Old Hamlet ‘Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:/Let not the bloat King tempt you again to bed’ (3.4.183)
- For if Gertrude plays the role of chaste widow, staying faithful to her husband sexually even after he died, her identity remains stable—and provides a stable source from which Hamlet can seemingly derive his own identity, be it political or personal.

The restored mother's figure:



- In the play, Hamlet begins by wishing that Gertrude was not his mother and by the end, he is able to imagine her as the mother from whom he would beg and receive a blessing.
- Hamlet imagines something coming from outside himself that is not contaminating. All those terrors are gone, and his relationship with his mother is restored.
- Gertrude plays the role of the self-sacrificing mother Hamlet has always wanted her to be. But we're not convinced that the rest of the play has shown her to be self-sacrificing at all. If nothing else, this moment reminds us that Gertrude is much more complex than Hamlet understands; she's more than just morally "frail".

The restored mother's figure:



- In the end, Hamlet securely accepts her as a good mother, and this gives him a new calm about his place in the world and he can rebuild the masculine identity spoiled by her contamination.

Adelman's view on Hamlet:



- Adelman begins by discussing Hamlet in terms of the return of the mother and the mother's body into Shakespeare's plays.
- The mother who is sexualised is a false figure for Hamlet and a significant representative of women including Ophelia whom he sees as a potential threat.
- Hamlet still sees himself associated with his mother's body and his masculine identity is dependent upon it.
- Hamlet seeing his masculine identity as attached to his mother explains his virtual possession of her in creating his SELF.
- This treasured possession has a far more significant effect on the ego.

Adelman's view on Hamlet:



- In the comedies and histories that precede Hamlet, mothers are surprisingly absent. Shakespeare focuses instead on the father-son relationships in which the son attempts to become fully himself by identifying with the true father, but with Hamlet, things are much more complicated by presenting a mother who threatens to annihilate the distinction between the fathers by making, in Hamlet's view, no clear distinction between her husband and her husband's evil brother.
- That distinction which Gertrude fails to recognize results in Hamlet's madness which breaks down with the appearance of the ghost to Hamlet, Gertrude doesn't see the ghost. Hamlet's hallucination results also from Gertrude not asserting to Hamlet the difference between the two men.

Adelman's view on Hamlet:



- Adelman sees Hamlet not in oedipal terms i.e a young man consumed by repressed passion for the mother. But she sees the play's psychological drama as being about Hamlet complex relationships to several characters. These relationships ultimately involve fear of the mother's sexuality, idealization of the father's masculinity and the consequent struggle to free the masculine identity of both father and son from the contaminated maternal body.
- She also analyses the character of Hamlet through the text's language and its deep structures to reveal Hamlet's repressed infantile fantasies and fears (male subject to female i.e blurring of line between the sexes)

Adelman's view on Hamlet:



- She also analyses the character of Hamlet through the text's language and its deep structures to reveal Hamlet's repressed infantile fantasies and fears (male subject to female i.e blurring of line between the sexes)
- Moreover, she sees the text as a vehicle in which we explore the destructive prejudices and passions. Hamlet is a transitional space that remakes us through interepretive interplay and even as we remake it and give it sense at a given context.

Conclusion:



- Adelman sees Hamlet in terms of object relationship theory i.e the sexualised mother figure is a false one to Hamlet who wants the original one back. The father figure is Old Hamlet and not the false Claudius. Hamlet is dependent on these fantasies and cannot detach himself from them, his mother's quick remariage makes him live in depression and this results in psychological depression, unconscious hallucinations and eventually madness whether he is conscious about it or not, he intelligently uses this madness to cope with his bitter reality which he refuses and prefers to live in his fantasy.