

3.1 Hamlet, Masculinity and the Nineteenth Century Nationalism—Magda Romanska

Wake in our breast the living fires,
The holy faith that warmed our sires;
Thy hand hath made our nation free;
To die for her is serving Thee.

Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894)

“I have sworn’t”: The Covenant Pattern in Hamlet

In 1971, Fisch has suggested that the narrative structure of *Hamlet* is that of a patriarchal covenant: the story has a biblical quality insofar as it is framed by the father-son dialectic that stands as a nexus of the law. As in biblical story of Abraham, in *Hamlet*, the word of the Father is a standpoint on which all ethical considerations subsequently depend. The paternal authority is the source of truth; the Ghost is “the obscene, uncanny, shadowy double of the Law of the Father”—“*the father who knows*” (Žižek 1989, 158–59). The Father embodies the unalienable law of the symbolic order, “the Law of the Father [...] the fundamental law of our social system” (Braidotti 1994, 82). Like in a biblical story, in *Hamlet*, the “gift of death” is a price of patriarchal order, validating the Law of the Father, who, with god-like authority, gives command to kill in his name. The Father’s ghostly presence literally dominates the entire play: the word “father” is pronounced seventy-two times on different occasions. The Ghost represents the patriarchal order on multiple levels; it signifies the divine right of kingship and patrilinear kinship, but also, the state and the law as such. As Derrida (1994) rightly pointed out, the Ghost is represented in full armor, covering

“from head to foot, in Hamlet’s eyes, the supposed body of the father. [...] The armor lets one see nothing of the spectral body we do see [...] since the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction [...] since we do not see the one who orders ‘swear,’ we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice. The one who says ‘I am thy Fathers Spirit’ can only be taken at his word” (Derrida 1996 7-8).¹

¹ Derrida suggests that “Hamlet gets to the head, to the face, and especially the look beneath the visor. As if he had been hoping that, beneath an armor that hides and protects from head

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Like God, the Ghost exists only as the voice, which must be obeyed with “blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin” (Derrida 1994, 7). Derrida describes the Ghost/the Father as an “apparition of a specter” who “makes the law, who delivers the injunction” and from whom “everything begins:” “The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing (“this thing”) will end up coming” (7, 4).² Hamlet is in awe and eagerly follows the Ghost to swear himself in “blind submission” (7). In nineteenth-century Europe (particularly in Germany, Poland, England, and France), the sacred dimension of the story’s patriarchal underpinnings have been a foreground for the nationalization of the gender difference that *Hamlet* came to denote. The Ghost represented the nation as Father/land, and the patriarchy and masculinity as the foundation of society, nation, and ethics: “State, Emperor, Nation, Fatherland, and so on” (Derrida 1994, 142). He symbolized ancestral continuity and patriarchal loyalty as the guarantor of the future of the nation.³ Vis-à-vis such an idea of the Ghost, Hamlet became the embodiment of nationalized masculinity, driven and defined by its allegiance to the Ghost/Father/land. The circulation of *Hamlet* as text and

to foot, the ghost would have shown neither his face, nor his look, nor therefore his identity” (8).

² Spivak (1995) suggest that Derrida’s “reading of Hamlet – the visor-effect of history as the face of the ghostly father (an entire Derrida-Lévinasian cluster there), the irreducible ‘out-of-joint’-ness of time, the rehearsal of justice as relation to the other, and, the peculiar predications of ghostliness – is perhaps the best part of the book” (66).

³ In both *German Ideology* and *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx uses the metaphor of *Hamlet*’s Ghost to make a point about the old socio-economic order. In *German Ideology*, the Ghost appears as a symbol of the nation, or as Derrida (1994) put it: the “founder of the spirit of the people (Volkgeist),” the spirit of “national-populisms” (146). Marx saw *Hamlet* as belonging to the dark past of feudal Europe: the image of the ghost of the father blending patriarchal duty with mysticism of the supernatural. Derrida says, “Marx does not like ghosts. . . . He believes he can oppose them, like life to death, like vain appearances of the simulacrum to real presence” (47). For Marx, the allegiance to the ghost of the past was a reflection of the nationalist and, thereof, irrational and anti-revolutionary impulse; he opposed it to the *transnational* struggle of the proletariat, whose allegiance should be only to its own struggles of the present. In *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx (1852) writes: “They [*idees napoleoniennes*] are only the hallucinations of its death struggle, words are transformed into phrases, spirits transformed into ghosts” (9). He continues: “The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. . . . The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (11). For Marx, as Harries (2000) put it, “The Ghost [of Hamlet] is an archaic face for a nascent world of economic exchange” (97). *Hamlet* was a symbolic narrative of the past patriarchal order, which must be buried if the world is to move onto the next stage of socio-economic development.

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performance provided a larger socio-political blueprint for the patriarchal foundation of the emerging nation-state.

The patriarchal exchange that's at the center of the play is framed by what Derrida calls the 'gift of death,' the call for and the willingness to kill as a sign of patriarchal belonging.⁴ The 'gift of death' binds the giver and the receiver in sacred bonds of the law.⁵ *Hamlet's* underlying theme of the "gift of death" is "inscribed by the law itself: in its murderous, bruising origin" (Derrida 1994, 21). "The gift of death" creates the dramatic tension of the story: the question of whether the hero will deliver the death that his Father demands is a source of moral dilemma and, eventually, of the story's sacrificial crisis. The economy of Hamlet's "gift of death" is connected to the well-being of the state and to the socio-political code that manifestly demands it. The Ghost returns because "something is rotten in the state of Denmark"—the rights of the king have been dishonored and the future of the state, usurped by an impostor. "The time is out of joint," and Hamlet is asked to "set it right," "to turn it over to the law," as Derrida put it (20). He is asked to make "of rectitude and right ('to set it right') movement of correction, reparation, restitution, vengeance, revenge, punishment" (Derrida 1994, 20). "Ghost emerges as a symptom of the play's skewed or 'rotten' logic of succession, indicating that the state of the monarchy—and temporality in general—are 'out of joint'" (Lehman 2002, 92). What is out of joint is the patriarchal order in which power is passed along the paternal lineage.⁶ To "set the time right" means, foremost, to reestablish the proper order, and the proper order is reestablished when Hamlet

⁴ In the religious context, Derrida (1996) writes, by remaining beyond grasp, God calls one to the responsibility: "The gift made to me by God as he holds me in his gaze and in his hand while remaining inaccessible to me, the terrible dissymmetrical gift of the *mysterium tremendum* only allows me to respond and only rouses me to the responsibility it gives me by making a gift of death, giving the secret of death, a new experience of death" (33).

⁵ Derrida's discussion of the "gift" follows from a reading of Mauss' theory of the potlatch: the gift-giving always functions under the assumption of reciprocity: "the potlatch must be returned with interests like all other gifts. . . . The sanction for the obligation to repay is enslavement for debt" (Mauss 1969: 42–43). According to Mauss, there is no gift as such in itself: there is only the meaning of the gift, its symbolic function that binds the giver and the receiver in the bonds of reciprocity. The gift is what the gift does; it is the impossible, "the secret . . . that there is no Secret" (Caputo 2001: 19). A gift veils its own negativity in the rhetoric of mutuality. In the economy of self-sacrifice, the symbolic enslavement to the terms of reciprocity of these *for* whom the suicide dies is the measure of the power of his death: the degree of his posthumous veneration. The gift of death is given with the presumption that the recipient will be forced to accept it and, thus, will be forced to repay it.

⁶ Hamlet obsesses about Gertrude's guilt because any indication that she participated in the King's murder renders the patriarchal order even more "out of joint." As a woman, she has no right to meddle in the affairs of the state, and her participation would imply that she played a role more significant than she should have in redefining the power structure.

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proves himself capable of honoring the word of his father, that is, when he is able to deliver “the gift of death” that the Father asks for.

The “gift of death” is a proof of Hamlet’s filial devotion and a condition of the order of the state. It is also a prerequisite of Hamlet’s very sense of masculinity and political identity: killing Claudius proves him man, worthy of his father and of the kingdom. Like Abraham, who detaches himself from everything but God, Hamlet too erases all past experiences and attachments in order to follow patriarchal orders. Edwards (2000) points out that Hamlet’s “reaction to the Ghost is like a religious conversion. He wipes away all previous knowledge, all previous values, and baptizes himself as a new man” (45). Hamlet treats the Ghost with god-like veneration and even refers to his demand as a commandment:

Yea, from the table of my memory
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there.
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
unmixed with baser matter: yes, by heaven! (1.5.95–104)

The Father commands Hamlet “to act as an agent appointed by God” (McCullen 1956, 5). The covenant pattern of their exchange is framed by the aura of the sacred: it exerts a spell-like power over Hamlet. In nineteenth-century lithographs and engravings, Hamlet is often represented on his knees, as if praying to the Ghost of his Father (see Fig. 1-7). Greenblatt (2001) notices that Hamlet “has made [the Ghost’s request] into an oath upon which he can swear and a watchword that he will daily reiterate. [...] Hamlet submits to an uncanny and yet actual link between himself and his dead father, a link manifested in terror, commandment, and the inescapable obligation to remember” (Greenblatt 2001, 217–218). The Father’s commandment becomes a source of Hamlet’s new self-definition: from now on, he sees himself through the prism of his mission, determining his self-worth exclusively in terms of its success. “Am I a coward?” he asks himself shamefully after yet another failed attempt to kill Claudius. Because the Father’s commandment is binding, there is no alternative; he either kills Claudius or he is less than a man in his own eyes: “I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall / To make oppression bitter”(2.2.529–30)—he laments in a display of futile self-recrimination, “Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave, / That I, the son of the dear murdered, / Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, / Must like a whore unpack my heart with words” (2.2.535–39). Only when he finally kills Claudius and is ready to die himself for the “cause” does he regain his self-esteem: now when he sets the time “right,” his life, his character, and his “cause” are worth

reporting “aright” for posterity, and thus, his last words are a request for Horatio to “tell [his] story.”

“Aroused Vengeance”: Masculinity and Revenge as the “Gift of Death”

Hamlet is considered a “revenge tragedy,” one of many in a series that followed the Renaissance revenge convention; among them, *The Spanish Tragedy* (1588, printed 1592), and *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1607) are most noteworthy. In his book on revenge tragedy, Kerrigan points out that the reciprocity of revenge “creates violent equality, correcting A’s oppression of B by striking back and leveling the odds. The ironies of vengeful equivalences have always been potentially more interesting than the injuries which generate them,” and they have often provided abundant material for dramatic plots (1996, 249).⁷ Revenge is a peculiar form of the “gift of death”: it is death given for death, repayment of death with death. It is based on “duty” and “right” and given “by means of punishment” (Derrida 1994, 25). It is a code of honor without conclusion, unraveling itself in its own *ad absurdum*. Girard (1972) argues that the circle of revenge signifies a sacrificial crisis that can be only solved by displacement of death onto a scapegoat: “Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached” (26). That is why, Girard suggests, in some primitive societies it is not a culprit himself who must repay his crimes but a member of his family.⁸ The purpose of this transference is no other but to break the circle of revenge, not to appear as an act of vengeance: “By killing, not the murdered himself, but someone close to him an act of reciprocity is avoided and the necessity for revenge by-passed” (26).⁹ In *Hamlet*, the economy of revenge

⁷ See also F. Barker (1993). *The Culture of Violence: Tragedy and History*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

⁸ Girard (1972) suggests that our judicial system takes the act of vengeance from the private sphere and makes it a public, institutionally and state-sanctioned affair. In this context, the one upon whom the act of vengeance is being executed can never truly locate the power that strikes him. In primitive societies, the vengeance is always in private hands, and that is why, to prevent the outburst of violence that would lead to a total annihilation of society, the laws regulating the acts of reprisal must be more subtle. “The injured parties must be accorded a careful measure of satisfaction, just enough to appease their own desire for revenge but not so much as to awaken the desire elsewhere. It is not a question of codifying good and evil or of inspiring respect for some abstract concept of justice; rather, it is a question of securing the safety of the group by checking the impulse for revenge” (21).

⁹ Often, the guilty party is expunged from the community and left to himself. “To do violence to a violent person is to be contaminated by his violence. It is best, therefore, to

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supplies the dramatic tension, the motive, and the philosophical background of the story. It also functions as a condition of the patriarchal covenant: “law stems from vengeance” (Derrida 1994, 21). Foakes notices that Hamlet models his Father (who challenged Fortinbras) on the ancient heroes whose code of revenge “made courage a prime virtue and courting death in war” a mode of existence (2003, 122). In those heroic stories, revenge is a masculine affair: it is a performative act, a “compulsory practice,” as Butler (1999) would say, reenacting the heteronormative claims of masculinity.¹⁰ Revenge is a “repetition and recitation” of masculinity: “If someone kills you, my friend or brother, I owe you their death and when I have paid my debt to you their friend or brother owes them my death” (MacIntyre 1981, 115). Girard notes that “brotherhood is almost invariably associated with the reciprocity of revenge. [...] [it] stands for this reciprocity rather than for the specific family relationship it designates” (1991, 274). Revenge binds past to future in the narrative continuity of patriarchal order.¹¹ Or as Derrida put it: “it dooms someone to be a man of right and law only by becoming an inheritor, redressed of wrongs, that is, only by castigating, punishing, killing” (1994, 21). The code of revenge, with its “gift of death,” is passed along the patriarchal line “that marks the history of the law or history as law” (Derrida 1994, 21). Thus, because it is the foundation of the very norms of masculinity and its claims to authority, in the “world of masculine values, revenge could be seen as virtuous act” (Foakes 2003, 122). In *Hamlet*, the function of revenge is a symbolic restitution of patriarchal order, but is also the restitution of Hamlet’s male identity: to be able to kill is to prove oneself as a man, to take back an honor lost with the death of one’s father. “O proud death,” Fortinbras exclaims upon seeing Hamlet’s corpse, implying that for man, it is better to die a proud death than to live as a coward (Benson 1989).¹²

arrange matters so that nobody, except perhaps the culprit himself, is directly responsible for his death, so that nobody is obliged to raise a finger against him” (Girard 1972: 27).

¹⁰ See J. Butler’s (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge: New York; and “*Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler*” Interview by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, London, 1993. *Radical Philosophy* 67 (summer 1994).

¹¹ “Some commentators say that Hamlet’s tragedy lies in the conflict between pagan and Christian virtue—the one emphasizing pride, anger, ambition, and action; the other, humility, forgiveness, lowliness and patience. According to this view, while Hamlet tries to combine these two moralities, Shakespeare shows how they are in a fundamental tension with each other and that their attempted combination, by making conflicting demands upon Hamlet, ultimately paralyzes him” (Blits 2001: 5).

¹² Patrick Henry’s famous 1775 “Liberty or Death” speech reflects a familiar ideology of manliness defined as a struggle for liberty (or death). Henry’s speech starts with a challenge to the manhood of those who aren’t as eager as he to sacrifice themselves for their liberty: “No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very

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Like Hamlet, Laertes is obliged by the code of revenge to kill the one who killed his father. Thus, Hamlet understands and identifies with him, although it is he himself who is now the object of revenge. He says: "For by the image of my cause, I see / The portraiture of his" (5.2.98–99). Using Laertes as a tool of his own design, Claudius appeals to his masculine pride to spur him to avenge the death of his father and, thus, to kill Hamlet. He asks: "what would you undertake / To show yourself in deed your father's son / More than in words?" (4.7.123–124). To prove himself his father's son, Laertes, like Hamlet, must be willing to kill and to die. Manipulating Laertes' emotions and his sense of filial duty, Claudius puts his manliness, and his identity, in question, igniting his passions.¹³ "Revenge should have no bounds," he adds (4.7.127). According to Girard (1991), Laertes "can perform with the utmost sincerity all the actions his social milieu demands, even if they contradict each other. He can mourn the useless death of a human being at one minute, and at the next he can uselessly kill a dozen more if he is told that his honor is at stake" (277). Thus, it is Laertes' exalted grief and his call to revenge which eventually spur Hamlet to action: "[Laertes'] passionate stance [in defense of his honor] constitutes the most powerful challenge imaginable" (277). "Only I'll be reveng'd / Most thoroughly for my father" (4.5.106–7), he boasts.

Jenkins points out that structurally the doubling of the revenge plot of *Hamlet* unravels the very ethics behind it:

The revenge plot, like the marriage plot, is a double one. The destined avenger of a father's murder becomes by a secondary action, the killer of another's father and dies as the object of another son's revenge at the moment when he achieves his own.

worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the House. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope that it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen, if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without reserve." Next, Henry evokes God as one who validates the "cause" of the nation and guarantees the victory: "There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us." Finally, he separates *himself* from other men, the cowards who don't share his sentiments: "Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!" (Benson, 1989)

¹³ Similarly, in *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth appeals to Macbeth's masculinity to spur him on to murder Duncan:

Macbeth:

I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

Lady Macbeth:

When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. (Act I, Scene VII)

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This paradox in the action of the play gives great dramatic tension to its catastrophe; but it also enlarges the whole revenge situation to symbolize that mysterious duality in man's nature upon which Hamlet continually reflects. It reveals to us how the same man may fulfill both parts, how he who is called to right wrong is also capable of perpetrating it. (2001, 153)

Since Hamlet is both the object and the subject of revenge, he is caught in the double bind of obligations, accepting Laertes' obligation to revenge as much as his own.¹⁴ Reading *Hamlet* in terms of this aspect of the plot, Girard (1991) sees it as a sacrificial crisis in which the code of obligatory violence erases all ethical distinction: the economy of revenge has no closure, and the play has nowhere to go and must end with everyone eventually murdered. Girard writes: "If all characters are caught in a cycle of revenge that extends in all directions beyond the limits of its action, *Hamlet* has no beginning and no end. The play collapses" (274). The code of revenge unravels the masculine code of honor, the ethical order, and the law that propagates it. It also unravels the very economy of the "gift of death" that defined the patriarchal covenant: what the ghost of Hamlet's Father truly asks of him is nothing less than Hamlet's own death. To enact revenge implicitly means to be prepared to become an object of someone else's revenge; it means to be ready to die. In other words, because masculinity in this play is a performance, which must reenact itself through revenge, it necessarily leads to the dissolution of the male subject: Hamlet is caught in the "'performative excellence' of manliness that counts for more than merely being born male" (Gutmann 1997, 386). He is asked to prove himself to be a man, yet since he attempts to prove the impossible, he must prove it again and again until he self-destructs.¹⁵ To quote Bal on masculinity, "Death is the only validation of masculine roles. [...] Self-destructiveness as a complement to self consciousness is played out in an infinite regression" (1984, 327).¹⁶ The play symbolizes a hero's quest for the symbolic order of gender that defines him.¹⁷ The final moment is a discovery of the fundamental lack behind the

¹⁴ See also McCullen, J. T. (1956 May). "Hamlet the Avenger." *The News Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*, 9(3), pp. 5–6. Calderwood, J. L. (1984). Hamlet's Readiness. *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35(3), pp. 267–273.

¹⁵ See also Knight, G. W. (1930). *The Embassy of Death: an Essay on Hamlet*. In *The Wheel of Fire: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Sombre Tragedies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: Oxford.

¹⁶ See also P. Schwenger, (1984). *Phallic Critique: Masculinity and Twentieth Century Literature*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

¹⁷ Edwards (2000) argues that it is Hamlet's internal sense of moral obligation that drives him: "[Hamlet] faces the burden of his responsibilities. But who has told him that it is his responsibility to put the world to rights? To restore the disjointed frame of things to its true

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performance; it is a meeting with death, both symbolic and actual, which freezes his masculinity in a fixed, and thus, in an unassailable and unquestionable, instant. Or as Lacan framed it,

For Hamlet there is no hour but his own. Moreover, there is only one hour, the hour of his destruction. The entire tragedy of Hamlet is constituted in the way it shows us as the unrelenting movement of the subject toward that hour. (1977, 25)

From the very first scene when he receives his orders, Hamlet is progressing toward his fatal hour. His death is prescribed in the very code of revenge, thus “Hamlet’s soul is sick to death” (Knight 1930, 20). The Ghost asks for Hamlet’s “gift of death” as the price of the paternal bond: to be the son of one’s father means to be ready to kill, but foremost, it means to be ready to die in the Father’s name.¹⁸ At the very instant when the Ghost makes his demand to be avenged, the implications of the revenge code render Hamlet both a future murderer and a future victim. He becomes, on the one hand, like Abraham, who takes an order to kill his son from his God/the Father, but also like Isaac, who agrees to be sacrificed/killed. The structural parallels between the two stories follow the pairing between God/Abraham/Isaac and Ghost/Father/Hamlet. The Ghost of Hamlet’s Father represents more than a paternal figure: he represents the divine Law of the Father that binds patriarchy to itself through the shared willingness to give and take “the gift of death.”

“O-phallus”: the Sacrifice of Ophelia

What saves the revenge plot from collapsing on itself into a full-blown sacrificial crisis of distinctions is Ophelia and her apparent purity of character: she is represented as the one truly innocent victim of the story. Since as a woman she is not obliged to follow the revenge code, her morally unequivocal position provides an ethical framework for the story.¹⁹ The only violence that Ophelia is allowed is aimed at herself. She is never expected to follow the code of revenge, more so

shape? No one but himself. It is the entirely self-imposed burden of cleansing the world that he now groans under” (45).

¹⁸ This code of honor is a kind of reversed paternity test in which it is the son who must prove himself the fruit of his father’s loins.

¹⁹ There are a few pop culture horror novels in which the Ophelia figure is actually a ghost that haunts the heroes. In Bergantino’s 2002 *Hamlet II: Ophelia’s Revenge*, Hamlet is a football star who inherits an old castle. When he comes to visit it with his friends and girlfriend, they are haunted and pursued by Ophelia’s avenging ghost, who rises “from her watery grave with vengeance on her mind” (cover).

because it is Hamlet whom she would have to kill. Indeed, Ophelia's dilemma about whether to kill or not to kill Hamlet in order to honor her own Father is impossible to imagine in this world, and impossible for her as a female character to experience. If she were indeed to even consider avenging her Father, the plot would collapse: Would Hamlet be willing to face the avenging Ophelia? What would Laertes then do with his own masculine obligation? Her role as an avenger would undo the masculinity of both. Thus, Ophelia's role is that of scapegoat sacrificed to solve the paradox of the story and its sacrificial crisis of distinctions. Lacan calls her "one of the innermost elements in Hamlet's drama. [...] She provides an essential pivot in the hero's progress toward mortal rendez-vous with his act—an act that he carries out, in some sense, in spite of himself" (1977, 12). Lacan argues that with the death of his father and the loss of the throne (a symbolic phallus), Hamlet has been emasculated, castrated, deprived of his phallus; it is Ophelia who represents it. She is, according to Lacan, "O phallos," Hamlet's symbolic phallus, which allows him to enter the symbolic order of the Law of the Father. Ophelia must die a passive feminine death to leave the space of masculinity clearly defined for Hamlet and Laertes: following the revenge code, they are able to reenact their masculine roles, and die the heroic death of men.

Like that of Hamlet, Ophelia's story is also a story of obedience towards one's father. Like Hamlet, she obeys her father's orders, and like Hamlet, she is undone by her obedience, but unlike Hamlet's, her death is not "proud" or valiant. It brings her neither esteem nor glory. On the contrary, it brings her "reverential pity and too painful sympathy" (Jameson 1858, 257–62). Her unheroic death, juxtaposed with his heroic one, allows him to fulfill his masculine destiny. He is a "man" only insofar as he dies a manly death, and he dies a manly death only insofar as she dies a feminine death. In symbolic terms, her death is an exact opposite of his, and vice versa, his death is everything hers is not. He can become the "man" in the instance of his death only because the "cause" for which he dies is, by definition, unavailable to her. Like Sarah in Genesis 22, Ophelia can never give or take the "gift of death" that would bind her to the symbolic order of the Law of the Father; she can only be "the gift of death" herself.²⁰ The covenant pattern between Hamlet and his Father cannot be replicated in the case of Ophelia: like Sarah, she can never enter into the patriarchal covenant because it would mean undoing the very masculinity it defines.

“Dying for Imagings”: Hamlet’s Masculinity and Nineteenth-Century Nationalism

²⁰ See also Baudrillard, J. (1993). *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London: Sage Publications.

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With the rise of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, the covenant pattern in *Hamlet* provided a framework for politically bound gender differences. A newly defined concept of patriotism that was vital to the national identity designated precisely the paternal byalty demanded of Hamlet.²¹ Thus, *Hamlet* became the central drama of the nineteenth century because the inner conflict of its hero echoed the period's own objectives: glorified obedience to one's Father/land became a matter of divine statue and an essential fabric binding any nation-state. The play began to function as a political drama of ethical responsibility toward the patriarchal lineage: for the nation to have a future, one had to first sacrifice oneself to the ghosts of the past. Starting in the second half of the century, Hamlet and Ophelia began to be perceived as embodying typical characteristics of their respective genders, each determined by the newly emerging nationalist ideas. Nineteenth-century "nationalism can be seen as a powerful ideological expression of (and contributor to) modern definitions of 'masculine/feminine'" (Kramer 1997, "Historical Narratives" 538). National and sexual identities overlapped as masculinity began to be viewed as a moral pillar of national identity, guarding and honoring the patriarchal legacy of the Father/land: "The dynamic of modern nationalism was built upon the ideal of manliness" (Mosse 1985, 64).²² Reflecting the patriotic fervor of the times, Hamlet dominated European culture with his omnipresent image of patriarchal obedience. "[I]n the sixty years following the publication of the Variorum Edition of 1877 and covered by A.A. Raven's *Hamlet Bibliography*, one additional item on the play was published, on average, every twelve days" (Blits 2001, ix).²³ The popularity of Hamlet was a symptom of the époque's fixation on masculinity as the foundation of patriarchal society and the nation: "Masculinity provided the norm for society" (Mosse 1985, 16). Man's character was defined by his adherence to the male code of honor, including a set of obligations to his Father/land.

²¹ The etymology of the word "patriotism" is a combination of Late Latin "patriota," meaning a fellow countryman, and Greek "patrios," meaning "established by forefathers" from "pater," father. Thus, the word "patriotism" literally means a "devotion to one's forefathers." "Matrotism" would mean a devotion to one's founding mothers.

²² In his book, *Fashioning Masculinity: National identity and language in the eighteenth century*, Cohen (1996) suggests that the conflation of masculine and national identities began in England with the fashioning of the English gentleman. The process took place in parallel with the feminization of the French language by the English. The more delineated the identity of an English gentleman became, the more feminine the French language, and France in general, was perceived to be by the British.

²³ On the theatre side, various *Hamlet* productions toured America, France, Italy, Germany, and even Japan. Actors who played Hamlet, such as J. Forbes-Robertson, D. Garrick, E. Forrest, H. Irving, J. Kemble, and S. Bernhardt, became the first international celebrities, able to draw large audiences and devoted followings. In America alone, in 1864 Edwin Booth played Hamlet for 100 consecutive nights in New York.

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Thus, “traditional nineteenth-century Hamletology devoted itself almost exclusively to the study of the problem [of] who Hamlet really was” (Kott 1964, 70). Scholars have passionately argued about various reasons for Hamlet’s delay, questioning whether it was morally justified (“brave” or “cowardly”), thus either defending or condemning Hamlet’s character and his manliness. For instance, in 1874, Minto typically wrote:

His delay is inexplicable to Hamlet himself, though we are all so confident in explaining it for him. One might have pointed out to him, without seconding his own morbid and unjustifiable accusation of cowardice, that he has still no means of satisfying the people that he was a pious avenger and not merely a mad or an ambitious murderer. (quoted in Conklin 1947, 64)

Minto’s opinion of Hamlet as “pious avenger” was predominant among critics and theatre-goers. If occasionally some critics were willing to find reasons for Hamlet’s delay in his “cowardice,” most often they praised him for the “manly virtues,” his nobility of character and courage. They were unwilling, however, under any circumstances, to question the very *raison d’être* of his filial obligation to revenge, considering it a God-given mission, self-evident and undisputable.²⁴ “Man must execute the purpose of a Higher Power,” wrote Tylor in 1874 (quoted in Conklin 1947, 65). Others proclaimed that “divine touch is upon Hamlet” and that Hamlet’s revenge a “sacred duty” or “the sacred rights of fathers” (Ralli 1932, 60–64). Keeble (1883), too, calls the revenge a “sacred duty,” a natural request by one’s father:

Hamlet himself the ghost will only speak when all witness are withdrawn, and then only on such things as have reference either to the duty of sacred revenge or to the courage and right spirit of a true son; themes not unworthy, in sooth, of a father’s care after death. (quoted in Conklin 1947, 47)

Channeling late-nineteenth-century sentiments, in 1917 Blackmore still praised wholeheartedly Hamlet’s “filial devotion”: “We see him in filial devotion pledging himself to work of ‘revenge,’ for which he sacrifices the world, life, and all, save the eternal welfare of his immortal soul” (quoted in Conklin 1947, 373). Hamlet’s revenge was a way to uphold the symbolic Law of the Father: from “Christian honor and principles of morality” to “law, justice, and peace,” as defined by the patriarchal order. Blackmore continues:

²⁴ Such a view of *Hamlet* was also predominant in the twentieth century. R. A. Foakes (2003) notes: “In the twentieth century, critics, from A.C. Bradley in his essay in *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) to the editors of the three critical editions of the play that appeared in the 1980s, have all had much to say about Hamlet’s ‘task’ or ‘duty’ to carry out his revenge” (113).

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Impelled by a moral courage, as superior to the physical as it is more noble he would dare set himself above an evil court, and measure everyone by the true standard of Christian honor and principles of morality [...] even at the cost of life, depose and punish a murderous usurper. Thus would vindicate law and justice, and restore peace to the disturbed social and moral order. (quoted in Conklin 1947, 370)

The notion of Hamlet following the universal principles of “Christian honor” and a “Higher Power” by obeying the word of his Father, embodied the late-nineteenth century focus on nationhood as honoring one’s Father/land—the obligation to remember the fathers and to be ready to kill and to die for this memory—every man’s “sacred duty.” Hamlet’s obligation to his father paralleled Europe’s own nationalist fervor, in which an allegiance to the past and to patriarchy was endemic to the very idea of the nation.²⁵

Anderson (1983) describes the emergence of nineteenth-century nationalism as an attempt to transform “fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.” Anderson writes: “If [in the nineteenth century] nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always look out of an immemorial past, and still more important, glide into a limitless future” (19). For Anderson, the idea of the nation emerged as a patriarchal imagining, a fraternity of faith that guarded the *status quo* of patrilineage, while demanding and giving death as a price of belonging. Anderson continues: “[T]he nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. [...] [I]t is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (16). Death legitimizes the imaginings as the imaginings legitimize death: one dies for the cause because it’s worth dying for, but it’s worth dying for only because one dies for it. In a similar spirit, Snyder (1968) argues that the nineteenth-century nationalist fervor shared many common characteristics with religious discourse, “including pious idealization of the nation, worship of national heroes and martyrs, [...] construction of national monuments, creation of national myths, willingness to sacrifice life blood for the nation” (Snyder 1968, 23–24).²⁶ The nation was considered a living body that fulfilled the will of God through its people. To die for God and the nation meant, foremost, to die for the language of selfhood that veiled its fundamental lack in the bonds of patriarchal belonging.²⁷ The idea of the nation

²⁵ See also Alvis, J., and West, T. (1981). *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

²⁶ See also Baron, S.W. (1947). *Modern Nationalism and Religion*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

²⁷ It is not an accident that the Civil Rights movement began after three subsequent war conflicts: after dying for their nation, African-Americans demanded equal participation in

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was built on ancestor worship: the sacrifice and injustices suffered by the forefathers united men in a common national destiny; remembering the past was an imaginative act of identification with the Fatherland of the heroic past and the glorious future. In 1790 Burke wrote: “people will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors” (Burke 2003, 274). The national myth of the Fatherland guided the performative enactment of remembrance as a call from the “Higher Powers:” “Defense of the Fatherland is often depicted as the will of God” (Snyder 1968 23–24). One remembers the fathers through an active performance of the “gift of death,” requested and validated by God.

In *Hamlet*, the Ghost asks Hamlet to revenge him and to remember him, conflating the two into one obligation. “While ‘revenge’ designates a future action (destined to restore the integrity of the future line of the Danish monarchy), ‘remember’ designates a return to the past (designated to restore the integrity of the dead king’s living memory)” (Lehman 2002, 107). Memory is channeled through the gift of death that Hamlet is obliged to repay: remembrance entails killing the usurper, but also being prepared to be killed by him.²⁸ Hamlet “regards revenge as a task of creative remembrance, that is, the restoration of a society that has fallen to pieces” (Edwards 2000, 45). The Ghost hence represents as much the past as the future. “It is at once a reminder of time’s passing, an image of the looming of the past over the present, and a presentiment of the future” (Rosenberg 1992, 19). Similarly, Derrida notes that the Ghost returns from the future as an emblem of “the future-to-come” (1994, xix). It symbolizes the continuity of the patriarchal order, guarded by Hamlet’s willingness to follow his demands: “Here again what seems to be out in front, the future comes back in advance from the past, from the back. ‘Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,’ declares Marcellus at the point at which Hamlet is preparing, precisely, to *follow* the ghost” (Derrida 10). In the nineteenth century, the Ghost symbolized the continuity of the nation, the “gift of death” given and taken in the name of both ancestors and posterity. Under the

the privileges of its citizenship; the sacrifice offered a point of leverage in the fight for equality. The same became true for the women’s movement and the gay rights movement, sparking contention about their possibility of joining the armed forces. As Kramer (1997) put it: “Defending a nationalist identity also means defending a sexual identity against threats from others, as Americans have seen in the reasons to proposals that women and homosexuals should have equal rights and duties in the military” (540). Those who opposed gays and women in the army engaged in a circular dialectic: one who is incapable of dying and killing for his/her nation, is “unworthy” of equality; one who is “unworthy” of equality should not be allowed to die and to kill for his/her nation. It is only heterosexual men who should be allowed this dubious masculine privilege. The very essence of male heterosexuality is defined by “the gift of death” given in the name of the Fatherland.

²⁸ Knight (1930) poignantly noted, “If the spirit had been kind, it would have prayed that Hamlet might forget” (19).

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nationalist flag, “those who sacrifice their lives in wars are saviors of the nation” (Kramer 1997, “Historical Narratives” 534). Like a savior, Hamlet sacrifices himself in the name of both the past and the future of Denmark.²⁹

The pious idealization of the nationalist “cause” offered a chance to die heroically, and thus, to give meaning to one’s life: “Nationalism gives meaning to death and helps assuage anxieties about human mortality because the nation continues to live beyond the death of each individual; every life and death is connected to a higher national spirit or reality that seems to promise an endless future existence” (Kramer 1997, “Historical Narratives” 533). In the context of nation as a whole, death wasn’t seen as the end of life, but as a transition into glorious immortality.³⁰ Those who died for their Fatherland (very much like those who previously died for God) became immortal: forever remembered by posterity. This is how Blackmore and many others perceived Hamlet’s death, as a heroic transition into immortality: “Hamlet [...] was not so much deprived of life as set free from mortal bondage. Death only ushered him into that vaster glorious sphere of immortal existence, where in spite of seeming failure, the brave and virtuous are after heroic strife crowned with victory” (quoted in Conklin 1947, 372). Through heroic death, Hamlet fulfills his ethical obligation to patriarchy and, thus, he fulfills his masculine destiny.³¹ Thus, he starts out indecisive and passive (typical feminine characteristics), but eventually kills Claudius and *becomes* a man. In this spirit, Röttscher (1844) wrote about the final scene: “this is the final stage in the evolution of Hamlet’s character. Discord between will and action is silenced, and he no longer feels the sting of inaction” (Ralli 1932, 252). Rümelin (1874) calls the transition that “from youth to manhood” (Ralli 1932, 546). Stressing the elements of patriarchal loyalty and heroic self-sacrifice, the late-nineteenth century turned *Hamlet* into a peculiar *bildungsroman* of newly forming nation-based masculine selfhood. The act of becoming a man equaled that of becoming a citizen, and citizenship was granted to those willing to give and to take the gift of death for the

²⁹ Furness (1877) went as far as comparing Hamlet to Christ: “No one of mortal mould (save Him, ‘whose blessed feet were nailed for our advantage to the bitter cross’) ever trod this earth, commanding such absorbing interest as this Hamlet. . . . No syllable that he whispers, no word let fall by any one near him, but is caught and pondered as no words ever have been, except of Holy Writ” (xii).

³⁰ See also Aries, P. (1974). *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

³¹ The late-nineteenth-century directors often emphasized the difference between pre-murdering and post-murdering Hamlet. Foakes (2003) notes that: “It is hardly surprising that since the nineteenth century many actresses have been attracted to the role” (117). Thus, Hamlet was often played by women, from Charlotte Crompton to Sarah Bernhardt. Playing the part allowed them to exhibit some feminine characteristics, but also eventually to overcome them (See also Wadsworth, F. W. (1966). *Hamlet and Iago: Nineteenth-Century Breeches Parts*. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 17(2), pp. 129–139.).

“cause” of the Fatherland. As Kramer (1997) put it: “All (male) persons who participated in the struggle against the national enemy became part of the nation and hence entitled to the rights of national citizenship and to representation in the images that sustained the ‘imagined community’ of the [...] nation” (Kramer 531).³² Hamlet became an everyman, “of no epoch or nationality,” struggling to live up to the social and political expectations of his gender set up by the national ambitions of the emerging nation-states (Ralli 1932., 44).

“Germany is Hamlet”: Hamlet and the Rise of German Nationalism

Germany is perhaps the most apparent example of the role that Hamlet played in the construction of nationalized masculinity. In *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Mosse (1985) argues that the nineteenth-century concept of masculinity that emerged in Germany was tinted by nationalistic undertones insofar as it entailed control over one’s sexual impulses (with an exclusive emphasis on heterosexuality), manly military camaraderie, and redemptive vengeful violence toward the enemy. Nineteenth-century German patriotism was in part defined through the prism of gender: to be patriotic meant, foremost, to be masculine. Conversely, masculinity was defined through the prism of patriotism: to be masculine meant, foremost, to embrace patriotic obligations towards one’s nation, primarily to be willing to kill and die in its name. Masculinity became the very “foundation of the nation and society” (17), Mosse writes. It was a matter of courage, “an outward symbol of the inner spirit” (13).³³ In 1911, in a book aptly titled *Shakespeare and the German Spirit*, Gundolf suggests that *Hamlet* formed the very core of Germany’s national sense of self-definition.³⁴ Gundolf considers Hamlet a foundational story, a national myth, like the Bible or Homer, a “symptom and element of German *Bildung*” (316, 318). Following the tradition of German *Geistesgeschichte*, the book sketches the evolution of Hamlet’s figure in Germany’s consciousness: from impassionate but vacillating Romantic to resolute avenger who overcomes his nihilism in the name of higher ideals and eventually embraces his masculine/patriotic obligations to kill and to die for his Father.³⁵

³² See also Elliston, D (2004 November). “A Passion for the Nation: Masculinity, Modernity, and Nationalist Struggle.” *American Ethnologist*, 31(4), pp. 606–630.

³³ See also Mosse, G. (1996). *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

³⁴ The idea of Shakespeare foreshadowing the German national character in *Hamlet* can be found earliest in Heinrich Theodor Rotscher in *Die Kunst der dramatischen Darstellung zweiter Teil* (Berlin, 1844), pp. 127f.

³⁵ See Wellek, R. (1968 Summer). The Literary Criticism of Friedrich Gundolf. *Contemporary Literature*. 9 (3), pp. 394–405.

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Gundolf constructs a history of German Mind or Spirit as the self-discovery of quintessential German-ness through the prism of Hamlet's redemptive narrative.³⁶ As much literary study as historical treaty, Gundolf's book reflects on the complex relationship between Hamlet and German national identity that dominated the nineteenth century.³⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century, "almost everyone in the nineteenth century Germany, it seems, had some view on Hamlet. He was, in all cases, an essentially German Hamlet. [...] Furness needed nearly ten pages of bibliography to document *Hamlet* reception up to 1877, an account that did not mention the early draft of *Wilhelm Meister*, Hegel, Schopenhauer or Nietzsche and which could not take in some Romantic writing, as yet unpublished" (Paulin 2003, 436). Zimmermann argues that eventually Germans "made their understanding of [Hamlet] a pattern of their national comprehension of themselves in crucial historical situations" (1994, 293).

Germany's obsession with Hamlet began in the late eighteenth century.³⁸ On 20 September 1776, the Ackermann company, directed by Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, gave the first large-scale performance of the play in Hamburg.³⁹ Played on three consecutive nights, the performance, which marks the beginning of Germany's affair with Hamlet, exerted instant fascination on Hamburg's audience: "the numerous audience in the playhouse was so attentive, so transported, that it seemed as if there were only one person present, only one pair of eyes, only one pair of hands, because the stillness was so universal, the silence so numbed, [there was] wonder, weeping, and applause" (Schink 1781, 1–53, quoted in Williams 1986,

³⁶ See Pfister, M. (1986). Germany is Hamlet: The History of a Political Interpretation. *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies* 2, pp. 106–126.

³⁷ As an undergraduate Goebbels was a student of Gundolf, though Gundolf reportedly refused to act as his Doktorvater. See Strobl, G. (1999 July). The Bard of Eugenics: Shakespeare and Racial Activism in the Third Reich. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34 (3), pp. 323–336.

³⁸ The earliest performances of *Hamlet* in Germany (by English players) date back to 1603. In 1865, Albert Cohn published the earliest eighteenth-century translation of the play. It has been preserved by "a late and modernized copy of a much older manuscript. That copy, bearing the date, 'Pretz, den 27. Oktober 1710,' has once been in the possession of Conrad Ekhof, the celebrated actor and manager of the Theatre of Gotha. (born at Hamburg, Aug. 12, 1720—died at Gotha June 16, 1778) after whose death some extracts of it were published in the 'Theater-Kalender auf das Jahr 1779'" (238).

³⁹ The Ackermann production, however, was not the first performance of Hamlet in Germany. It is believed that the first performance of the play was given by a small and obscure Ilgener troupe in 1770. See Cohn, A. (1865). *Shakespeare in Germany in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Account of English Actors in Germany and the Netherlands and of the Plays Performed by Them During the Same Period*. London: Asher.

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291). While in 1776 *Hamlet*'s popularity in Hamburg remained steady,⁴⁰ the play was quickly taken up by various wandering theatre troupes, and "by the end of the decade the whole of German-speaking Europe can be described as having been gripped by a veritable 'Hamlet-fever'" (Williams 1986, 291). In 1781, German critic and dramaturge Schink wrote enthusiastically about *Hamlet*: "Royal cities and tiny market-towns, splendid halls and wooden booths echo with his name, and men and boys, virtuosi and reading teachers, First Heroes and letter-carriers, struggle over him and flaunt their immortality" (Schink 1781, 1–53, quoted in Williams 1986, 291). At the time, the only available translation was Wieland's, published in 1766.⁴¹ Though Wieland's translation lacked Shakespeare's metaphorical touch and poetry, it was the only version available at that time, and it helped to ignite *Hamlet*'s popularity.⁴²

In 1795, in *Wilhelm Meister*, Goethe, using Wieland's text, considered *Hamlet* the very personification of the German Romantic spirit and feeling: "From the flames of another world comes forth a spirit demanding revenge, but in vain. Everything conspires to invoke revenge, but in vain," Goethe writes ominously, calling *Hamlet* "a beautiful, pure, noble and most moral nature," and his obligation to revenge "holy" (quoted in Diamond 1925, 95). In Goethe's vision, *Hamlet* is a hero "without the strength of mind, [...] who sinks beneath a burden which he cannot bear and which he must not renounce" (quoted in Diamond 1925, 92). Goethe's *Hamlet* is weak, lacking will and initiative. He is a typical tragic poet, thinking large thoughts but unable to transform them into action. Goethe's Romantic images of *Hamlet* as sensitive thinker dominated the first half of the nineteenth century. In *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel (1807) uses the image of *Hamlet* and Yorick to define the essence of the Spirit, and to describe the difference between *being in-* and *for-itself*:

The skull-bone does not have in general the significance of being the immediate actuality of the Spirit. But the many-sidedness of Spirit gives its existence a corresponding variety of meanings. [...] A variety of ideas may well occur to us in connection with a skull, like those of *Hamlet* over Yorick's skull; but the skull-bone

⁴⁰ In 1776, the Ackermann players gave a total of ten performances of *Hamlet* in Hamburg alone. In 1777, they performed it over fifteen times (Williams 1986: 291).

⁴¹ See Leuca, G. (1955 November). Wieland and the Introduction of Shakespeare into Germany. *The German Quarterly*, 28(4), pp. 247–255.

⁴² The version that was staged in most cases was one edited and adapted for the stage by the playwright and dramaturge Franz Heufeld in 1773. For details, see Williams, S. (1986 October). The "Great Guest" Arrives: Early German "Hamlets." *Theatre Journal*, 38(3) Performance of Textual History, pp. 291–308; and Bennett, B. (1986). *Modern Drama and German Classicism: Renaissance from Lessing to Brecht*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. pp. 255–56.

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just by itself is such an indifferent, natural thing that nothing else is to be directly seen in it, or fancied about it, than simply the bone itself. (200–201)

The in-itself being of the skull is the skull as it is—a bone; its being for-itself, on the other hand, is a set of existential significations that the Shakespearean tableau of Hamlet with Yorick imbued it with. In fact, the tableau, for Hegel, is an ideal image of self-reflective thought. Referring to Hamlet simply as “the consciousness,” Hegel further writes: “The consciousness, therefore, that is purer than the latter which believes in witches [Macbeth], and is more prudent, more solid, and thorough than the former which trusts the priestess and the beautiful god [Oedipus]” (447). For Hegel, Hamlet’s deeply self-aware self-reflection is an apotheosis of “pure” ideal consciousness. Following Goethe’s image of an overwhelmed, fragile Hamlet, in *Aesthetics* Hegel sees Hamlet as a “noble soul [...] not made for this kind of energetic activity, [...] full of disgust with the world and life, [...] [who] eventually perishes owing to his hesitation and a complication of external circumstances” (1225–1226). Elsewhere Hegel continues: “In his melancholy and weakness, his worry, his disgust at all the affairs of life, we sense from the start that in all his terrible surrounding he is a lost man, almost consumed already by inner disgust before death comes to him from outside” (1231–1232). Hegel’s fatalistic view of Hamlet as somewhat destined to failure because the frailty of his spirit mirrored the general contention of the moment. It was Hamlet’s pensiveness, his “spirituality,” that made him for Hegel, as for Goethe, the perfect embodiment of the ideal/idealistic self. Politically and ethically, Hegel compares “the invisible spirit of the world History with Hamlet’s ‘old mole,’” while considering Hamlet’s revenge as “ethically justified” (quoted in Paulin 2003, 371). For Hegel, Hamlet’s revenge was uncontestable (the Law of the Father who makes the law by merely pronouncing it). Eventually the motive of revenge, which Hegel hinted at, became quintessential to Germany’s understanding of Hamlet and itself. Germans began to see their historical and national destinies through the ethical and narrative paradigm of Hamlet’s revenge.

In 1828, the year of the July Revolution, Wagner wrote his first tragedy, *Leubald and Adelaide*, in which the title hero is, like Hamlet, “driven by the apparition of the spirit of his father, murdered under similar circumstances, and by his call for revenge, to such violent deeds, that he finally goes mad after a series of murders” (quoted in Istel and Baker 1922, 496). Wagner’s “Leobald has vowed to his father’s spirit to ‘wipe the whole clad of the Roderichs from the face of the earth’” (Istel 1922, 496). Wagner’s strong emphasis on revenge, like Hegel’s, foreshadows Germany’s newly burgeoning idea of Hamlet as an avenger. It was at that time that Hamlet was slowly becoming the *tour de force* behind nineteenth-century Germany’s idealized self-definition. Canonized by the Schlegel-Tieck

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translation of Shakespeare's collected works, which began in 1797 and was completed in 1833,⁴³ Hamlet quickly became a metaphor for Germany and its own national longings for redemption and vengeance. The image of Hamlet as Germany (and/or Germany as Hamlet) was invented by the writer Ludwig Börne in 1828, and by 1844 it had become popularized by Ferdinand Freiligrath's poem, which begins with the statement "Deutschland ist Hamlet!" and ends with the call to "Avenge me."⁴⁴ At that time, the meaning of Freiligrath's image was somewhat ironic: humiliated in Napoleonic wars, Germany is viewed as incapable of rising to the occasion and, like hesitating Hamlet, as unable to redeem its ignominious past. As Pfister points out:

In the context of the War of Liberation against Napoleonic rule, the national-patriotic activities of the Burschenschaften (student fraternities) and the struggle of the liberal or revolutionary intellectuals of 'Young Germany' working towards a republican and unified Germany in the March Revolution of 1848, this romantic self-image of Germany as Hamlet-like 'Volk der Dichter und Denker' ('people of poets and thinkers'⁴⁵) was turned polemically on itself" (1994, 77).

Freiligrath's bold statement "denigrating Hamlet as a pathologically introverted philosopher, dreamer and talker" became a political tool used to criticize Germany's inability to bring about real revolution.⁴⁶ Regardless, Freiligrath's poem ends on a redemptive note, foreshadowing a new interpretation of Hamlet as Germany: one who eventually embraces his manly obligation and follows his father's call to revenge. The final lines of Friedrich Freiligrath's poem "sees the prince as one day parrying the poisoned rapier and rising to a new life" (Paulin

⁴³ See Habicht, W. (1983). Shakespeare in Nineteenth-Century Germany: The Making of a Myth. In Modris Eksteins and Hildegard Hammerschmidt (Eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Germany: A Symposium*. (pp. 141–157); and and Habicht, W. (1992). The Romanticism of the Schlegel-Tieck Shakespeare and the History of Nineteenth-Century German Shakespeare Translation. In Lieven D'Hulst and Dirk Delabatista (Trans.), *European Shakespeares: Translating Shakespeare in the Romantic Age*. (pp. 141–57). Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publishing.

⁴⁴ H. A. Jones (1916) once wrote ironically that Germans are not Hamlets; they are bloody Macbeths (24).

⁴⁵ "Ditcher and Denker"—a phrase coined by Madame de Staël in *De L'Allemagne* (London, 1813). Quoted in Pfister, M. (1986). Germany is Hamlet: The History of a Political Interpretation. *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies* 2, p. 114.

⁴⁶ In this spirit, André Gide (1931) commented sarcastically on "the very German mentality" of Hamlet: "'To be or not to be . . . ' is almost Schopenhauer. And that continual hesitation, that incapacity for action, that infirmity of purpose which is neither French nor English, but German" (Sonnenfeld 1964: 94).

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2003, 445). Like Hamlet, Germany too would one day raise from the ashes to assume its proper position on the world stage.⁴⁷

In 1877, in *The New Variorum Edition*, in a gesture of national pride and defiance against Goethe's Romantic vision of a weak and irresolute Hamlet, Furness dedicated his volumes on *Hamlet* to "Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft" in Weimar with the words, "representative of a people whose recent history has proved once for all that Germany is *not* Hamlet." Speaking about "recent history," Furness, of course, was referring to the revolution of 1848, which, according to him, proved "once for all" that Germans were capable of more than futile existential musings. Furness's position reflected a newly emerging understanding of "Hamlet as Germany": increasingly, in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was not Hamlet's melancholic vacillation that was seen as a particularly German characteristic, but his eventual, though belated, act of revenge.⁴⁸ Though initially Germans identified with Hamlet's melancholia, by 1848 they began to see themselves as victorious in the moment of his final triumph, when screaming "Then, venom, to thy work," he finally stops contemplating the moral weight of his position, kills Claudius in a wild rage, and, for a brief moment, seizes the power that rightfully belongs to him.⁴⁹ If in 1819 Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger, the German philosopher and translator, suggested that Hamlet's story is guided by "higher necessity which will destroy both avenger and avenged" (Paulin 2003, 438), by mid-century, Hamlet's revenge (and his death) was interpreted as his definitive victory. For the new generation of Germans, *Hamlet* became an inspirational story, a peculiar *Bildungsroman* that provided a new model of nationalized masculinity. As Zimmermann put it: "This dreamer, who wavers between world-wearing and aimless energy, and who triumphs at the end of the play, became the idol of Germany's youth" (1994, 295). In the second half of the nineteenth century, "the nationalist myth of Hamlet soon formed the tradition" that made Hamlet a "national surrogate figure" (Zimmermann 1994, 294). Some German youth "saw in [Hamlet] the symbolic fulfillment of their own aspirations and dreams—an aristocratic hero who [...] successfully resolves the conflict between ideals and actions and who fights against corruption and oppression"

⁴⁷ See also Lepenies, W. (2006). *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

⁴⁸ See Paulin, R. (2003). *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany 1682–1914. Native Literature and Foreign Genius*. Anglistische und Amerikanistische Texte und Studien 11. Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: Olms.

⁴⁹ In 1835, Heine was first one who ominously noted that in the eyes of German youth, the image of Hamlet has a Messianic aspect: "The German youth love Hamlet, because they feel that 'time is out of joint.' They also yearn for that which they are called to restore" (Quoted in Pfister, M. (1986). *Germany is Hamlet: The History of a Political Interpretation*. *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies* 2, p. 115.)

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(Pfister 1986, 105). While the romantic image of vacillating Hamlet retained its appeal, the new image of avenging Hamlet slowly emerged alongside. By the late nineteenth century, with the rise of the Weimar Republic and the solidification of German nationalism,⁵⁰ such visions of Hamlet as avenger became part of Germany's right-wing political rhetoric and a new propaganda tool.⁵¹ Hamlet became a political allegory of divided soul, "a mirror of the German national character and its historical destiny" (Pfister 1994, 77). The Prussian scholar Friedrich Theodor Visser saw him as a symbol of hope for Germany's retaliation, "which will finally disprove the topos of Germans as a race of irresolute thinkers and poets" (Zimmermann 1994, 301). On the eve of the war, this proud image of Hamlet as heroic avenger made the play a must for every contemporary acting company. In just the 1911–1912 theatre season alone, the *Yearbook* of The German Shakespeare Society reported 413 different Shakespeare productions staged throughout Germany by 178 companies; most of them were productions of *Hamlet*.⁵² By the early twentieth century Hamlet had become Germany's cult object.⁵³

⁵⁰ See Eyck, E. (1967). *A History of the Weimar Republic*. Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press. and Fink, C. & Hull, I. (1985). *German Nationalism and the European Response*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

⁵¹ For the political uses of the German literature at that time, see Berghahn, K. L. (1971). Von Weimar nach Versailles: Zur Entstehung der Klassik-Legende im 19. Jahrhundert. *Die Klassik-Legende. Second Wisconsin Workshop* (pp. 50–78). R. Grimm and J. Hermand (Eds.). Frankfurt/M: Athenäum.

⁵² See Pfister, M. (1986). Germany is Hamlet: The History of a Political Interpretation. *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies* 2, pp. 106–26.

⁵³ See Williams, S. (1990). *Shakespeare on the German Stage. I: 1586–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP; and Larson, K. (1991). The Classical German Shakespeare as Emblem of Germany as "geistige Weltmacht": Validating National Power through Cultural Prefiguration. Delivered at the 1991 MLA.

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ma mort. Mais sache-le, toi, noble enfant, le serpent qui a piqué la vie de son père, aujourd'hui porte sa couronne.



Oh! Horrible! too horrible!

HAMLET.

O! mon âme prophétique! Mon oncle...

LE SPECTRE.

Oui, cet incestueux, cette brute adultère, par les sorcelleries de son esprit, par ses dons de traître — oh! esprit et dons pervers qui ont tel pouvoir de séduire! — a gagné à sa honteuse luxure la volonté de ma très apparemment vertueuse

LIV. 4

4

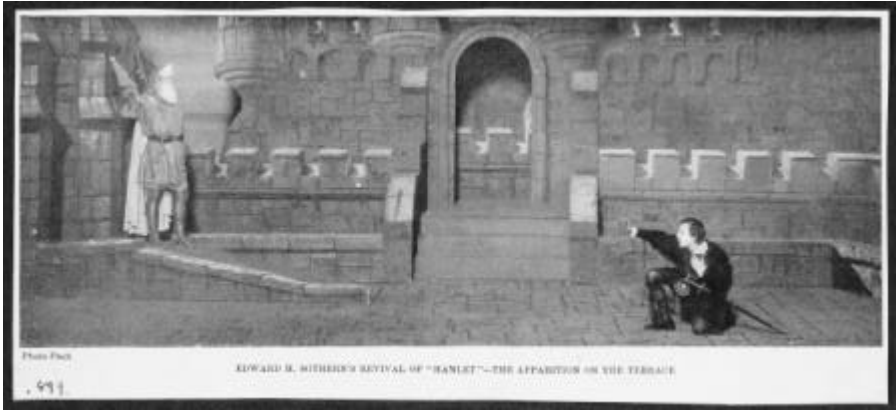
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Ham. Whither wilt thou lead me? speak,
I'll go no further.

Act I. Scene V.

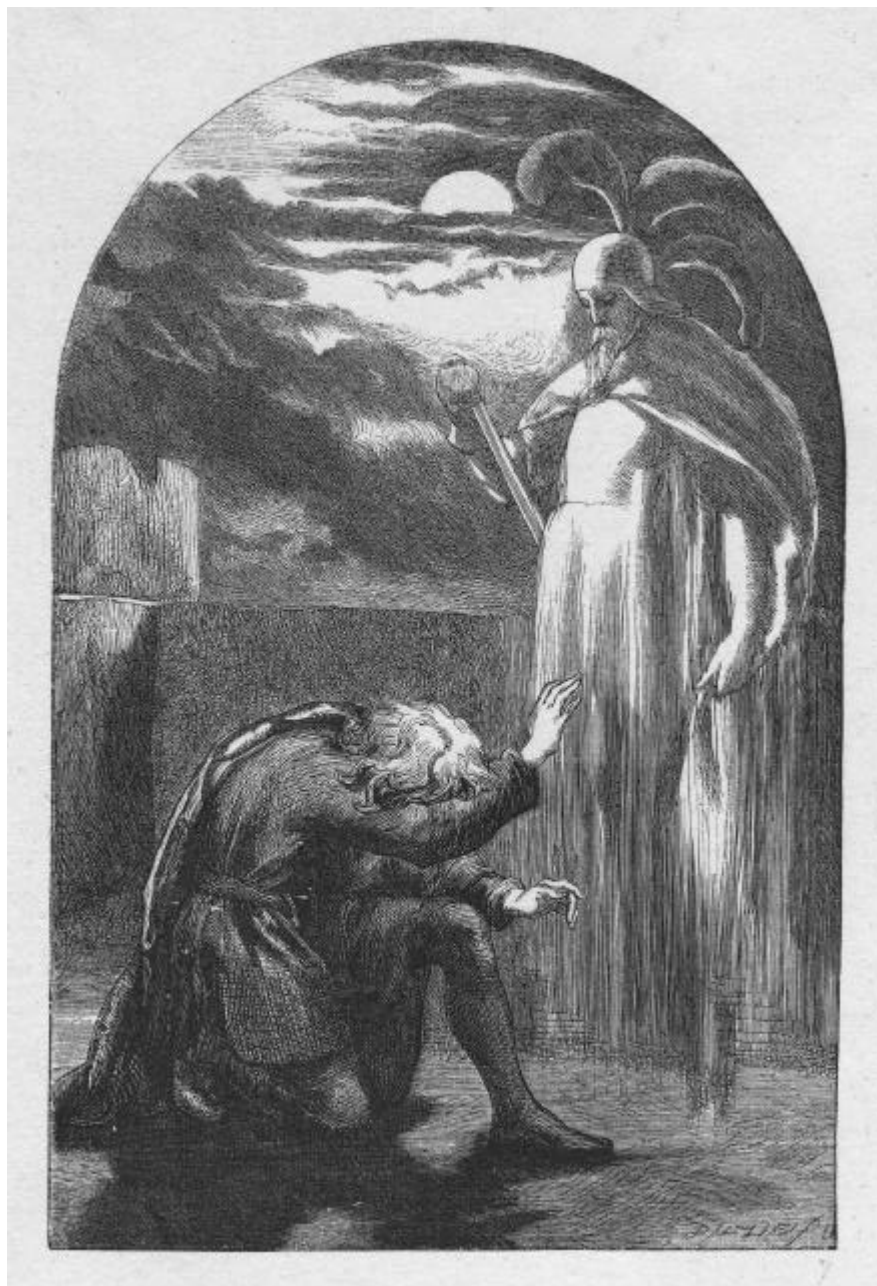
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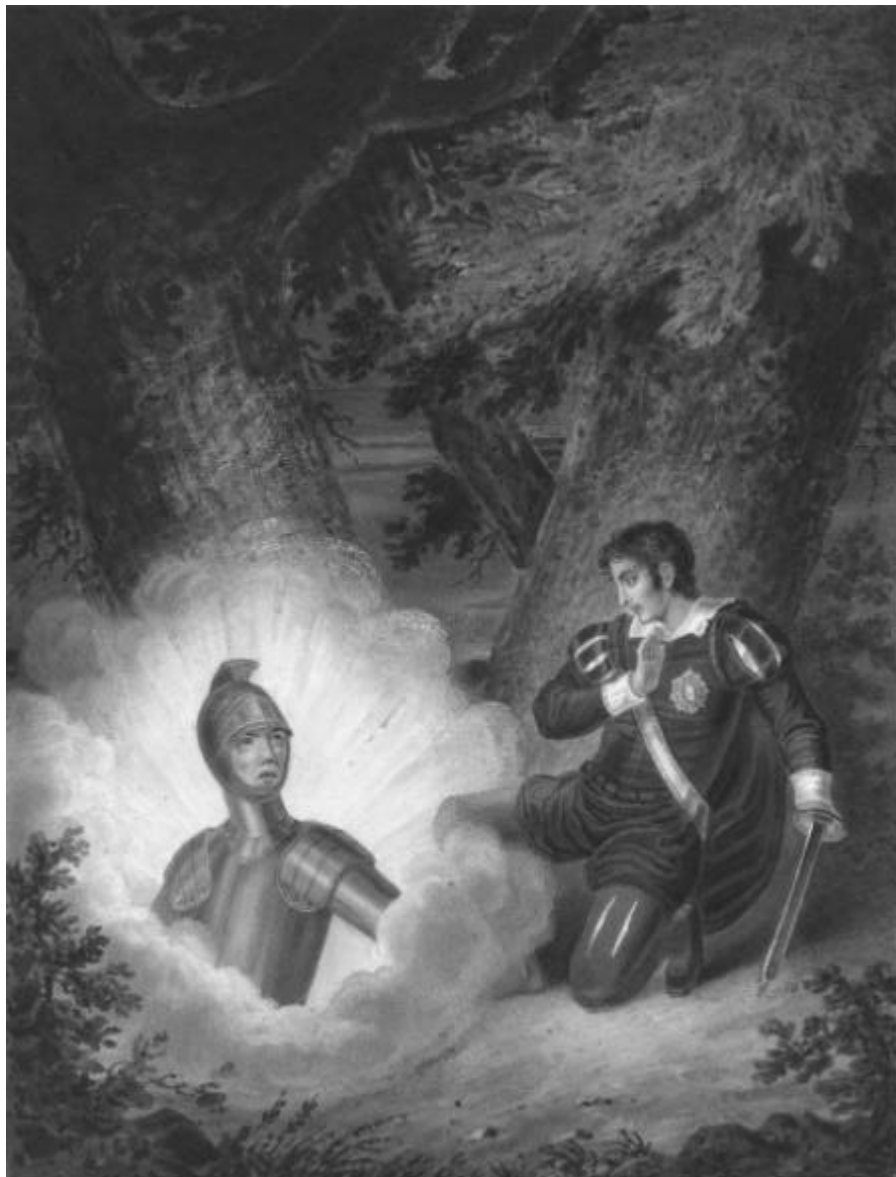
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