bined with supervised class work, should do the job. Institutions without teaching assistants will have to provide other forms of instruction; but they cannot avoid the responsibility.

8. *The dissertation.*—The dissertation ideally ought to be the exercise in which the diverse scholarly attainments of college and graduate years are brought together in one grand demonstration. If this is impossible, the question may be raised whether the dissertation is justified and whether it should not be abandoned or whether a series of lesser, more satisfactory final exercises should not be substituted in its stead. This question I do not propose to answer, but I raise it as one deserving reflection.

If graduate training is informed by the educational ideals I have suggested, then the dissertation, or whatever takes its place, should exemplify the high level of original, creative effort for which the training stands. Some dissertations being produced today no doubt meet this requirement. Others do not. I would include among unsatisfactory dissertations those which are simply descriptive in nature—bibliographies, frequency counts, source data, analogues, word lists, editing, and similar factual collections. This is not to condemn such investigations. They have their place and purpose. But these are the means, not the ends, of scholarship. To accept them as the final task, as the culminating effort in a long program of training, is to mislabel and distort.

Among obviously acceptable kinds of dissertation subjects would be biography, imaginative literature, critical studies, evaluations, interpretations. Less weight would be attached in the final judgment of the job to the factor of "contribution to knowledge" than to perceptiveness, creativeness, and originality.

Well, there is my program. I leave it to your mercies with only one concluding remark. I will not insist upon a single item among my formal specifications so long as the spirit is observed. For it is the spirit, not the law, which giveth life.

Hamlet and Freud

MARSHALL W. STEARNS[1]

THE time is passing when a critic of literature in general or of *Hamlet* in particular can win the respect of an intelligent audience by refusing to deal with Freudian thought. As Herbert Muller observes, Freud's "basic contribution is as original as it is incontestable, and beyond the power of criticism to destroy." With this opinion both Kenneth Burke and Lionel Trilling, for example, concur; yet the large group of critics who are loosely termed "Shakespearean scholars" are virtually united in ignoring Freud's forty-nine-year-old comments on *Hamlet* as well as the more recent developments in the field of psychoanalysis.

There have been at least four typical attitudes toward the Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet* among Shakespearean scholars. The most general is to ignore it, as did Kittredge and Caroline Spurgeon. The more modern attitude is to label it "demolished," as does Draper, or an "obvious brainstorm," as does Hankins. A third attitude—a combination of the

[1] Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

first two—is to attack it obliquely, deducing generously from Shakespeare's works (as does Schücking) the poet's "indomitable courage, self-sacrificing love and magnanimity, with above all, a respect for human dignity"; or more pointedly (as does Stoll) stating flatly that Shakespeare's "imagination is normal . . . he knows little of perversion or degeneration."

The fourth attitude, which by implication recognizes the existence of a problem, consists of suggesting a happier alternative. Thus, Campbell contends that Hamlet's "sex-nausea" is the "proper attitude for an [Elizabethan] satirist to assume towards the sins of sex"; while Bundy, and others, fall back on Elizabethan psychology, claiming that Hamlet's references to sex provide a "typical example of the 'humour' of a melancholic."

Two critics have faced the problem which Freud attempted to solve. Citing an impressive amount of evidence, Logan Pearsall Smith writes that "if any deductions are to be made from Shakespeare's writings about his nature, an excessive and almost morbid sensuality must have been part of his endowment." Dover Wilson goes further. Speaking of "the strain of sex-nausea" in Shakespeare, Wilson concludes:

> That it was not a mere trick found useful to a practicing dramatist is, I think, proved by its presence in the ravings of Lear, where there is no dramatic reason for it at all . . . that "couch for luxury and damned incest," which, unseen, is ever present to the mind of Hamlet and of the audience, is, I think, symbolic. Far more than the murder, it is this which transforms the Prince's imagination into something "as foul as Vulcan's stithy." The imagination of Othello is as foul and more explicit. Even Lear, as I have just said, broods "over the nasty sty" and begs "an ounce of civet to sweeten his imagination," while to Posthumus and Leontes is given utterance scarcely less outspoken than Othello's. Above all in *Timon of Athens*, which breathes a hatred of mankind which rivals Swift's, nearly a whole act is devoted to the unsavoury topic. Collect these passages together, face them as they should be faced, and the defiled imagination of which Shakespeare writes so often, and depicts in metaphor so nakedly material, must be his own.

Wilson mentions Freud, however, only to dismiss him and proceeds to add his own explanation: Shakespeare's sex-nausea is caused by some unidentified "personal jealousy."

Smith and Wilson are practically unique among Shakespearean scholars in assuming that these passages contain an autobiographical element. There may be some irony in the fact that this assumption might not have occurred to either critic if he had not lived in an age permeated by Freudian thought. In more recent times, the psychoanalytic interpretation of *Hamlet* has received qualified approval in the passing remarks of nonacademic critics. Lionel Trilling says, for example, that "there is, I think, nothing to be quarrelled with in the statement that there is an Oedipus complex situation in *Hamlet*"; and Herbert Muller observes further that the Freudian strategy may have penetrated "the secret of Shakespeare's unconscious intention."

The fact is that the psychoanalytic interpretation of literature in general and of *Hamlet* in particular does have a limited value. Any opinion on this question, however, would be inadequate without a critical understanding of the origin and development of Freudian thought on the subject.

I

In a footnote to *Die Traumdeutung* (1900), Freud suggests that "Shake-

speare's *Hamlet* is rooted in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*." Freud attributes the fact that the Oedipus pattern is openly worked out in *Oedipus Rex* and disguised in *Hamlet* to the growth of repression in the history of civilization. Remarking that no satisfactory explanation has been offered for the basic problem in *Hamlet*, namely, "Hamlet's hesitation to accomplish the avenging task which has been assigned to him," Freud observes that the correct explanation may be found in the "peculiar nature" of Hamlet's task:

> Hamlet can do everything but take vengeance upon the man who has put his father out of the way, and has taken his father's place with his mother—upon the man who shows him the realization of his repressed childhood wishes. The loathing which ought to drive him to revenge is thus replaced in him by self-reproaches, by conscientious scruples, which represent to him that he himself is no better than the murderer whom he is to punish.

Reasoning from evidence in the play and elsewhere, Freud concludes that Hamlet is unaware of this conflict within himself and that this conflict is the product of a similar state of mind in Shakespeare himself.

Freud then points to the external evidence that *Hamlet* was written soon after the death of Shakespeare's father, that Shakespeare's short-lived son was named "Hamnet," and that an almost contemporary play of the poet's, *Macbeth*, deals with the allied theme of childlessness. Perhaps I should note in passing the circular logic involved in establishing an interpretation by an appeal to the facts of the poet's life, and then attempting to cast light on the poet's life by applying this interpretation. Freud concludes with the qualifying remarks:

> Just as all neurotic symptoms, like dreams themselves, are capable of hyper-interpretation, and even require such hyper-interpretation before they become perfectly intelligible, so every genuine poetical creation must have proceeded from more than one motive, more than one impulse in the mind of the poet, and must admit of more than one interpretation. I have here attempted to interpret only the deepest stratum of impulses in the mind of the creative poet.

Thus, in the process of disclaiming any complete explanation of the creative genius, Freud makes the statement that he has discovered the most important, underlying cause.

II

In 1911, Ernest Jones developed Freud's footnote into a brilliant monograph of ninety-eight pages, an effort which received Freud's explicit approval in the third edition of *Die Traumdeutung*. As the most authoritative and extensive presentation of the strict Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet*, Jones's monograph deserves close consideration.

At the outset, Jones, who shows an excellent grasp of the Shakespearean scholarship of the day, assembles comments to the effect that *Hamlet* is the poet's most autobiographical play. How central this literary judgment is to the Freudian hypothesis becomes clear, I think, when it is remembered that the analysis of a work of art can be based only upon the pattern of psychoanalytic thought, not on the scientific application of the psychoanalytic technique to a living patient. Thus, Jones can apply only the technique of dream analysis to Shakespeare's symbols; he must work without the analysand's free association with the details of the dream, an element of the psychoanalytic strategy which Freud generally emphasized. This limitation is real but not necessarily fatal. As Kenneth Burke observes:

> The critic should adopt a variant of the free-association method. One obviously cannot invite an author, especially a dead author, to oblige him by telling what the author thinks of when the critic isolates some detail or other for improvisation. But what he can do is to note the context of imagery and ideas in which an image takes its place . . . until finally . . . one grasps its significance as motivation.

Burke, I suppose, is suggesting a more modest approach than that attempted by Jones, but the end results may well be similar. It is one of the limitations of Caroline Spurgeon's book on Shakespeare's imagery that, while ably adopting this approach, she resolutely refuses to have anything to do with the poet's references to sex.

Jones proceeds to the numerous explanations of Hamlet's vacillation as expounded by various groups of critics, rejecting persuasively the theories that Hamlet is incapable of action, that external difficulties are too great for Hamlet, and that Hamlet has doubts about the legitimacy of his revenge. To rebut the explanation that the play as it stands is imperfect and incoherent, however, Jones points to the play's "lasting popularity," forgetting for the moment that, for whatever the cause, there was a time when *Hamlet* was not popular. Nevertheless, the point seems to be well taken. "The task was a possible one," says Jones, "and was regarded as such by Hamlet."

Resurrecting the view of Baumgart and Kohler, namely, that Hamlet's ethical objection to revenge was not fully conscious, Jones observes that this view points in the right direction and, turning immediately to Bradley's remark that Hamlet's unconscious detestation of his task is so great that it "enables him actually to forget it for periods," he describes this comment as a penetrating insight along psychoanalytic lines. Subsequently, Jones enumerates the changing reasons which Hamlet gives for his delay, labeling them all false pretexts and adding that "the more intense and the more obscure is a given case of deep mental conflict, the more certainly will it be found on adequate analysis to centre about a sexual problem."

Among those unacquainted with the development of Freudian thought, such flat assertions are perhaps the cause of more antagonism, conscious and unconscious, than any other single factor. It is extremely doubtful, however, whether a first-rate modern analyst would make such a statement today. Freud's emphasis upon sexuality has been greatly exaggerated in the lay mind, while he himself has been known to deny vehemently that his psychology is pan-sexual. In point of fact, Freud's libido theory was never finally defined by its inventor, although he gradually broadened it from the sexual "instinct" (a clearly inadequate concept) to what Karen Horney terms the "total non-specific sexual energy" (a concept dangerously close to tautology). Recent analysts, who subscribe to the principle of psychobiological totality, have successfully readapted Freud's concept in a less prominent role. Working from a principle first established by embryology—that in all phases of development total integration precedes individuation—they have concluded logically that the most fundamental force is integrative and that the sexual pattern is only part of a more fundamental life pattern. Hence Jones's assumption applies only to a part, although a very important part, of the total personality problem; he may be dealing with an effect rather than a cause.

Turning to the problem of what Hamlet is repressing, Jones notes that Hamlet is more upset by his mother's misconduct than by his father's murder; in fact,

Hamlet's soliloquy, in which he contemplates suicide (Act I, Scene 2), occurs before Hamlet is aware of his father's murder but after he knows of his mother's hasty remarriage. This point had been stressed by Furnival and developed by Bradley to explain Hamlet's delay in terms of the "moral shock of the sudden ghastly disclosure of his mother's true nature"—an insight which most Shakespearean scholars (with the exception of Granville-Barker) ignore. If we accept unquestioningly the conventional standards of the causes of deep emotions, Jones observes, this interpretation would be adequate; but Jones does not believe that such circumstances would turn a healthy mind to thoughts of suicide.

Accordingly, Jones delivers his own hypothesis—"the deepest source of the world-old conflict between father and son, between the younger and the older generation, the favorite theme of so many poets and writers, the central *motif* of most mythologies and religions"—namely, the Oedipus complex:

> How if, in fact, Hamlet had in years gone by, as a child, bitterly resented having had to share his mother's affection even with his own father, had regarded him as a rival, and had secretly wished him out of the way so that he might enjoy undisputed and undisturbed the monopoly of that affection? If such thoughts had been present in his mind in childhood days they evidently would have been "repressed," and all traces of them obliterated, by filial piety and other educative influences. The actual realization of his early wish in the death of his father at the hands of a jealous rival, would then have stimulated into activity these "repressed" memories, which would have produced in the form of depression and other suffering, an obscure aftermath of his childhood's conflict.

In support of this hypothesis, Jones examines Hamlet's attitude toward the other characters in the play, concluding that the intensity of Hamlet's repression is the guide to the bitterness of his outburst against Ophelia and his physical disgust in the bedroom scene with his mother. Here is a specific answer to the query Dover Wilson raises. Further, the more vigorously Hamlet denounces his uncle, the more powerfully he stimulates his own repressed complexes. "Hamlet's moral fate," concludes Jones, "is bound up with his uncle's for good or ill."

At this point I think the reader might well question the double-edged logic with which Jones interprets Hamlet's attitude toward the other characters. For example: when Hamlet is rude to Gertrude, Jones would describe it as a reaction caused by his repressed love for her; when Hamlet is polite to Gertrude, it is his unconscious love for her asserting itself. This objection would be well taken but of doubtful importance. As Kenneth Burke remarks in another connection:

> You may demur at that, pointing out that Freud has developed a "heads I win, tails you lose" mode of discourse here. But I maintain that, in doing so, you have contributed nothing . . . nothing but an alternative explanation is worth the effort of discussion here. Freud's terminology is a dictionary, a lexicon for charting a vastly complex and hitherto largely uncharted field. You can't refute a dictionary. The only profitable answer to a dictionary is another one.

The validity of Jones's hypothesis depends upon much more fundamental considerations.

For instance, how valid is the theory of the Oedipus complex, the concept upon which the Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet* and many other literary compositions depends? The Oedipus complex is based largely upon Freud's theory of the libido which, as I have noted, is inadequate. Specifically, the strict Freudians regard the Oedipus complex as a basic psychological determinant which tends to be biological in origin and therefore ubiquitous. This is in accord with

the static concepts and instinct theories of Freud's day. But more recently anthropologists have demonstrated that fixations of this nature may be culturally determined, and many modern analysts have concluded that the Oedipus complex is occasionally more of a symptom than a cause of environmental maladjustment. I do not mean to deny the frequent existence of the Oedipus pattern but rather to classify it as one factor among others of equal and often greater importance, such as the emotional forces which Karen Horney lumps together under the phrase "basic anxiety."

Jones concludes his monograph with a study of Shakespeare's sources, a history of the play, a survey of the Oedipus complex in the other plays of Shakespeare, and a lengthy study of the Oedipus legend in literature and folklore. Remarking that it is beside the point to inquire into the poet's conscious intention, Jones delivers his main hypothesis (stated earlier in the monograph): The play's great merit is due to the fact that "the hero, the poet, and the audience are all profoundly moved by feelings due to a conflict of the source of which they are unaware."

III

Although the medical practitioners, like the Shakespearean scholars, will have nothing to do with Freud, the psychoanalysts have written papers on every possible literary composition, from Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and Dunbar's *Tretis of the Twa Marit Wemen and the Wedo* to the works of Ibsen, Strindberg, D. H. Lawrence, and Kafka. Some of these articles are interesting, but most of them, since they fail to take into account the developments in the field since Freud, are monotonously similar. Frequently they present a more or less mechanical application of strict Freudian theory to a literary composition, while the most noticeable variation in treatment consists in the amount of detail from the work discussed which the ingenuity of the analyst can fit into the Freudian framework.

Since the Freud-Jones interpretation, two typical articles have appeared in the psychoanalytic journals on *Hamlet.* In 1928, Norman J. Symonds subjected the graveyard scene of the play to the most minute analysis, corroborating Freud's hypothesis in great detail. In 1929, Ella Sharpe analyzed *Hamlet* as a "tragedy of impatience," arriving at similar conclusions. Miss Sharpe does, however, raise the problem of the process of artistic creation:

> One needs to think in terms of the creator, not in terms of Hamlet . . . the poet is not Hamlet. Hamlet is what he might have been if he had not written the play of *Hamlet.* . . . So Shakespeare, having externalized and elaborated the inner conflict on his father's death, kept the course of sanity. It is perhaps the range and depth of this power to dramatize the inner forces of the soul that made him at once the world's greatest playwright and a simple normal man.

Whatever relief the reader may feel in hearing a psychoanalyst refer to Shakespeare as a "simple normal man" must be tempered immediately. Miss Sharpe feels that the poet kept from going insane only by writing *Hamlet.* The simpleness and normality of this alternative is doubtful, while the implication that Hamlet is insane is incorrect. The cause of this fundamentally Freudian confusion, however, lies deeper and will be mentioned in connection with Freud's theory of art.

One of the more recent (1944) psychoanalytic interpretations of *Hamlet* occurs in the passing remarks of Edmund Bergler, who has been successful in treating living authors. Bergler adds a subbasement to the Freudian structure. Ac-

cepting the theory that art is the expression of unconscious phantasies, he raises a logical query concerning Stendhal, Diderot, and others who were consciously explicit in the description of their own Oedipal symptoms. To the possible dismay of the older psychoanalysts, who discovered such passages with a shock of confirmation when the Oedipus complex was still on trial, Bergler concludes that these *conscious* manifestations are simply a defense mechanism against the other horn of the Freudian dilemma—homosexuality. Thus, the obvious Oedipus complex in *Hamlet* "originated as a means of defense against a more deeply imbedded conflict." The reader is justified in concluding that, at least in the case of *Hamlet*, those disciples of Freud who limit themselves to embroidering upon the fundamentals of the master are gilding an already overdecorated lily.

IV

What can Freudian thought be said to contribute to the study of *Hamlet?* Misunderstandings on this point have been as numerous as they have been violent. Freud himself said that his analytic method "can do nothing toward elucidating the nature of the artistic gift nor can it explain the means by which the artist works—artistic technique." In other words, the Freudians would not pretend to judge whether or not Shakespeare is a great poet or *Hamlet* a great play; on the subject of what constitutes genius, and the problems of form, tone, feeling, and style—the technical factors which make much of the difference between a great and an inferior play—they have nothing to say. They are concerned with content alone, and from the content of *Hamlet* they would deduce only Shakespeare's unconscious intention. This apparently simple deduction, which can never be fully proved or disproved, has wide implications however, for, if it is acceptable, the Freudians can then suggest an additional reason for Hamlet's delay and the play's popularity, as well as an insight into the character of Shakespeare as a private citizen.

I have reserved for mention at this point one of the most fundamental inadequacies of the Freudian interpretation of art, namely, the version of the creative process. Freud regarded literature with great respect, since, among other things, it frequently anticipated his own insights into character and personality; but he gave it an ignominious position in his rather arbitrary epistemology. At best, Freud felt that art reduced mental tensions; that it worked as a "substitute gratification," rewarding artists for their contribution to culture; that it aided in the common experiencing of worth-while emotions; and that it kept alive man's cultural heritage. This is the bright side of the coin.

In practice, Freud concluded that art was a "technique for evading infantile guilt while expressing, more or less elaborately and unconsciously, phantasies of a universal nature." It is impossible to escape the conclusion that Freud considered art an illusion, harmless because it did not attempt to be anything more than an illusion. He also apeaks of art as a beneficial narcotic, implying that the artist differs from the neurotic only in the fact that the artist can return cheerfully to reality after he has completed his creative activity. Freud does, however, make an exception for a "few people who are, one might say, obsessed by art," and who make an "attack on the realm of reality." This exception, it seems, would have to apply to all the great artists of all time.

The flaws in Freud's theory of artistic

creation are manifest. If adopted, the theory leads to the conclusion of Miss Sharpe, mentioned earlier, that Shakespeare kept from going insane only by writing *Hamlet*. Actually, although it is true that art shares some of the qualities of neurosis for, since it cannot exist in a vacuum it has certain dream elements and is a mode of self-expression, art is also, in the words of Kenneth Burke, "conscious graph and communication." A great artist is in command of his illusions, making them serve the purpose of a more concrete relation to reality, while the neurotic is frequently possessed by his. Freud's view, which is based upon a narrow, hedonistic concept of artistic creation, fits the rest of his theories excellently but constitutes another point at which the Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet* must be qualified.

In the course of this sketch I have attempted to indicate some of the limitations to the strict Freudian interpretation of literature in general and to *Hamlet* in particular, from incidental aberrations in logic, through the difficulties of dealing with a manuscript rather than a living author, to the varying and sometimes unimportant inadequacies of Freud's libido theory, the Oedipus complex, and his concept of artistic creation. None of these limitations, however, constitutes a refutation of the entire Freudian hypothesis, although each tends to narrow the comprehensiveness and applicability of the theory as a whole. On many fundamental points modern analysis has affirmed the essential truth of Freud's conclusions.

As is the case with all biographical material, Freud's interpretation contributes, however slightly, to a fuller understanding of the artist's work. Kenneth Burke remarks:

> Only if we eliminate biography entirely as a relevant fact about poetic organization can we eliminate the importance of the psychoanalyst's search for universal patterns of biography . . . and we can eliminate biography as a relevant fact about poetic organization only if we consider the work of art as if it were written neither by people nor for people, involving neither inducements nor resistances.

Further, there is no virtue in ignoring Freud's interpretation of *Hamlet*, and there is some value in adding his admittedly marginal theories to our total picture of what the play may "mean." To ignore Freud's interpretation among the many critical theories to which the play has given birth is neither broad-minded nor scholarly.

Specifically, although it is impossible to accept it in every detail or as the only explanation of the problem of *Hamlet*, the Freudian hypothesis is the only interpretation which attempts a logical explanation of Shakespeare's sex-nausea, a characteristic of the poet's work which Dover Wilson and others have fully recognized, as well as the bitterness and intensity of Hamlet's remarks to Ophelia and Gertrude. In so doing, Freudian thought has shed some light upon a sadly neglected problem of Shakespearean criticism.

As Lionel Trilling says, "the Freudian psychology is . . . the only systematic account of human nature which, in point of subtlety and complexity, of interest and tragic power, deserves to stand beside the chaotic accumulation of insights which literature has made over the centuries." Perhaps Freud's greatest contribution to literary criticism is in the province of imagery and symbolism, which he and later authors have established as the source of unconscious revelations of the author's mind and character. "In the depths of his imagery," says Burke, "an artist cannot lie," and in this direction the future contribution of Freudian thought to literary criticism may well be found.