Cervantes, Shakespeare, Freud, and the Translation of Human Consciousness

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read *Cervantes, Shakespeare, Freud, and the Translation of Human Consciousness* by Christian Brian Tuell, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in English Literature at San Francisco State University.

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Through a closer reading of text, exploration of Sigmund Freud’s creation of psychoanalysis and its Oedipal take on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, consideration of the concept of the overbearing mother, and examination of repression due to the typical male centered reading of the play, this paper will argue that there exists an even deeper unconscious struggle between Hamlet and Gertrude that provides a better explanation for their actions and helps shed light on the popularity and longevity of the play. In doing this, we will also consider the three men whose ideas contributed to the creation of psychoanalysis, a template which admittedly does help us better understand art and ourselves, though arguably flawed in its blind spot due to its elevation of the paternal over the maternal.
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Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter One: Reading Shakespeare ........................................................................................... 2

Chapter Two: The Dialogue of the Dogs – The Overbearing Mother ................................... 28

Chapter Three: The Knight of the Mirrors – the Doppelgänger ........................................... 31

Works Cited................................................................................................................................ 41
Introduction

There have been many explanations given as to why Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* remains so popular. The most quoted play in the English language and considered by many to be the greatest play ever written, Hamlet’s words and (in)actions captivate each new generation. It has been argued by many, including Harold Bloom, that Hamlet is a character so powerful that he somehow manages to do what few fictionalized characters ever do – he transcends the confines of the author’s play. Yet how is it possible for a play written centuries ago, in a world very different from our own, to still connect to us on so many levels? Some scholars focus on the Oedipal drive to kill the father, others on the tragic flaw in Hamlet’s character that prevents him from action until it is too late, some believe that Shakespeare was writing an anti-revenge tragedy, etc. However, none of these explanations have managed to fully capture the complexity of the play, nor do they satisfyingly explain all the actions of many of the main characters. It is for this reason perhaps that one returns again and again to the play (still one of the most performed on stage and on film) because there is something even deeper within the play that is unnamed on the unconscious level – something that perhaps even the playwright was not able to fully bring to consciousness. This is no more apparent than in the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude, particularly her actions and his inactions throughout the play. Through a closer reading of the text, exploration of Sigmund Freud’s creation of psychanalysis and its Oedipal take on the play, consideration of the concept of the overbearing mother, and examination of repression due to a male centered reading of the play, this paper will argue that there exists an even deeper unconscious struggle between Hamlet and Gertrude that provides a better
explanation for their actions and helps shed light on the popularity and longevity of the play. In doing this, we will also need to consider the three men whose ideas contributed to the creation of psychoanalysis, a template which admittedly does help us better understand art and ourselves, though arguably flawed in its blind spot to the true significance of the mother-son relationship.

Chapter One: Reading Shakespeare

In his famous essay, “Freud: A Shakespearean Reading,” Harold Bloom argues that Shakespeare is Freud’s prime precursor. Bloom uses passages from Hamlet to illustrate Freud sifting through Shakespeare’s work to come up with many of the founding concepts of modern psychoanalysis. There are many in academia that now share this view, but Bloom goes further to state that the very creation of the term Oedipus complex, inserted in place of the Hamlet complex, is a glaring example of the conscious choice Freud made to hide, or kill off, his indebtedness to Shakespeare. However, what if the true cause of Hamlet’s problem is not the father-son relationship, but rather that of the mother-son? What if a patriarchal world view caused the male gaze of both Freud and Bloom to overlook the true root of Hamlet’s crisis?

It can be argued that the true catalyst for Freud’s creation of psychoanalysis is found in his earlier fascination of the works of Cervantes, however, Freud’s repression of those who had strong influences on his life and ideas sometimes hid true origins. Though much of Freud’s writings on psychoanalysis have lost favor in recent decades within the field of psychology, Freud’s modeling of his revolutionary ideas in the field of psychoanalysis on literature has allowed the Oedipus complex to become the literary students’ complex by making the text “speak more than it knows” (Bloom, 3). Psychoanalysis attempts to interpret that which is hidden
within that which is present and since that which is hidden resides within the other or unconscious, texts become road maps of symbols and signifiers that must be deciphered to navigate the landscape of the mind. Freud is still so popular in literature programs precisely because he provides us the tools to see beyond the symbols on the page, into the workings of the subconscious. Yet, it is important to note that Freud could not give the Bard credit even for his own plays.

Freud's desire that Shakespeare not be Shakespeare took a variety of forms before his gladsome discovery of the Looney hypothesis. One feels that Freud was open to every possible suggestion that the son of a Stratford glover, the actor William Shakespeare, was an impostor…If Freud indeed owed Shakespeare much too much, how did it lessen the burden if Oxford and not the provincial actor was the precursor? Was this merely Freud's Viennese social snobbery? My surmise is that Freud desperately wanted to read the great tragedies as autobiographical revelations. The actor from Stratford would do well enough as the dramatist of The Merry Wives of Windsor, but not as the creator of domestic tragedies of those in high estate. (Bloom, 2)

Perhaps it was simply Freud’s ego that prevented him from acknowledging his predecessors, as the heights you do accomplish could be diminished in the eyes of some if you admit you are standing on the shoulders of those that came before, but Bloom adeptly lays out the issues Freud had in conceding the influences of others on the origin of his work.

As for Freud’s fall from favor by some in the field of psychology, it must be acknowledged that Freud himself was always modifying her theories as new studies were completed and that even modern theories on early child development and the onset of sexual desires in humans vary in the conclusions and are constantly evolving. Perhaps the pleasure Freud experienced during his lifelong reading of Cervantes and his choosing to learn a new
language to translate Cervantes might also viewed as a form of regression and desire to return to the maternal. While a strict structuralist interpretation of language would typically be associated with the masculine superego, rules, and the need for order, there are of course other interpretations of the origin of language. If we were to view language through the lens of recent feminist writers, such as Julie Kristeva, we would find a turn away from the more masculine structuralists readings of theorists such as Saussure and may instead view the acquisition of language as a more fluid and emotional process, tied more closely to the feminine, instinctual, and the musical before the onset of the Lacanian Mirror stage. If understood as more fluid, than the child would still be torn between the masculine and feminine during a longer period of development, causing psychological conflicts whether the child is a boy (craving the emotional ties to the maternal, yet at the same time rejecting the mother to achieve his own place in male dominated world) or a girl (experiencing depression from both identifying with and rejecting the mother/herself). Freud would link the trauma of separation from the mother to sexual desires, but what if the child is forced to move away from a pre-language state and separate himself from the mother to move towards language, meaning, and the outside world? This could still cause trauma due to sex, yet not require stimulations of erogenous zones.

However, for the purpose of the topics covered in this paper, if we at the very least grant that a child’s first object of desire is the mother, as she is inextricably linked with the pleasure zones due to nursing and the care associated with fulfilling the child’s needs, it is not impossible to image that this connection may also trigger at least some of the sexual drives within erogenous zones. While Freud would argue that the son’s entire sexuality is unconsciously tied to the mother and that the trauma of maternal deprivation may be viewed as the origin of many
psychoneuroses, even if we refuse to place the origin of human sexual desires this early in
development it is understandable that the severing of mother-infant ties (where the child initially
sees the mother and itself as one) can be traumatic and result in feelings of anxiety. The sudden
awareness of the mother as the “other” and part of the outside world, brings with it the
knowledge that her absence from the child also means the child is without her protective shield.
Perhaps our very first feelings of powerlessness might be the child’s inability to have the mother
fulfill its desires – through the lack of nursing, holding, or eliminating pain and discomfort (a
dirty diaper, hunger, etc.) – which might therefore become the template for our recognizing signs
of danger throughout our lives.

Though Bloom acknowledges that Freud sometimes misreads *Hamlet*, he still believes
that the play is so intimate to Freud that it allows him to “analyze himself as a Hamlet” (4). It is
for this reason that Bloom proclaims that as a commentator upon Freudian concerns, “*Hamlet*
surpasses all rivals” (4). However, Bloom misses the mark in claiming the Oedipus complex was
the true source of Hamlet’s issues as he fails to see how that the roots Freud’s repression (which
are also shared by Prince Hal, Hamlet, and Freud) are in the maternal. Some believe that
controversial concepts like sadism and the death instinct may also have their origins in this early
moment of the child loving the mother yet feeling betrayed and angry in the awareness that they
are in fact not one being. This hostility toward the mother would therefore predate any towards
the father. Interestingly, the origin of the word mother, “mater,” not only refers to the mother
but also the membrane that envelopes the brain (dura mater literally translating to ‘tough
mother”). Could Hamlet’s sudden disinterest in Ophelia (a love interest that was to take the
place of the mother) be more closely tied to a regression to the period in childhood when these feelings of helplessness first reached awareness? Could Hal’s denial of Falstaff and his conquest of Katherine be further examples of these types of regressions?

This same pre-verbal realm is attacked by Hal’s militaristic courtship of Katherine in *Henry V*, with language of conquering lands and using his linguistic domination of her which “positions woman as a foreign language” (467) by asking her to give him the words to penetrate her, “teach a soldier terms / Such as will enter at a lady’s ear” (HV, 5.2.99-100). Traub interestingly notes that, “the symbolic substitution of Falstaff by Katherine thus effects a strategic displacement and containment, as the debased maternal is replaced with an idealize woman” (468).

Mother child bonding is also crucial as it is during this period the child first begins language with the child not only recognizing the mother’s facial expression, but also closely observes her glance (an important component of “intersubjectivity” and language mastery). The mother’s gaze and her emotions (fear, love, anxiety, etc.) become the child’s and within the mother/child-object gaze many believe is a world changing and perhaps traumatic experience that every child must come to when it first begins to understand the mother and child are not one. Strangely, though Freud would attribute the origin of the child’s sexual urges to the mother, he would place the focus of the child’s sexual and aggressive drives with the father (as he temporarily takes away the mother for his own needs). It is here that Bloom is shown to be only half right. He is correct that Freud’s naming of the “Oedipus complex” is a redirection or repression, but not against Shakespeare, but the maternal, for it reorientates the most important
figure in the child’s life as the father. Freud’s focus on the paternal over the maternal is so clear precisely because it comes across as way too much overcompensating against the strength of the latter:

The tenacity of the Oedipal master plot in Freud’s theory itself deserves comment. Numerous theories have been proposed to explain Freud’s insistence upon Oedipal solutions to life’s riddles. Some have focused on Freud’s own personal relationships with his mother and father (Sprengnether, Rizzuto, Robert), others on the social and cultural contexts of European anti-Semitism (Gilman, Geller, Boyarin). It is clear that Freud’s insistence upon the validity of the Oedipal theory was heavily overdetermined. (Jonte-Pace, 17)

Perhaps this is a repression by Freud of his own mother’s power over his life and the effects of living in a patriarchy, however even if we find his ideas of sexual urges in children too disturbing or unbelievable, this feeling of oneness with the person that provides shelter, instruction, and pleasure must be acknowledged as the key to a child’s understanding of the world and finally how it first defines itself. Perhaps this could also explain feelings of “uncanniness” and anxiety later in life, if an adult were to feel torn from an object of desire, as this experience would be one of our earliest, perhaps the very first, in the formation of an independent consciousness – a recognizable painful and likely prolonged experience from early childhood. An especially painful separation then would not only be uncanny in forcing the adult to become an earlier childlike version of themselves but could trigger a regression full of paralyzing anxiety as the adult once more assumes the role of the powerless child. Freud attempts to deny the power of the mother, yet it is the glaring absence of her in his works that the reader is constantly drawn to contemplate. How much of what we term the Oedipal complex, the fear and desire of castration by the father, is merely just a redirected fear of the power of the mother? For if the mother has
that much influence and power over the boy, how can he consider himself a man (especially in a patriarchal society) when he strikes out into the world on his own if he does not repress her influences? How does he separate himself from the bonding which helped form his consciousness, now that he wishes to become his own man?

When Prince Hal is first introduced to us, his mother has already been dead for some time (she died when he was eight years old). This lack of the feminine in his upbringing will become even more apparent when he later tries to woo Katherine, but how is this void to be filled within the play? In her brilliant essay, “Prince Hal’s Falstaff,” Valerie Traub argues that the conventional depiction of Shakespeare’s Prince Hal having to choose between two father figures, Henry IV and Falstaff, needs to be reimagined. This paradigm she believes overly simplifies the choice, between duty and control on one side and hedonism and lawlessness on the other. Traub instead sees the two poles that Hal must choose between as the paternal and maternal. In her understanding of the play, Falstaff represents the maternal body – partly due to Falstaff being the pre-oedipal maternal (before the father causes the oedipal split). If we agree with her assertion that many critics are missing the more subtle gender arguments due to their antipathy to feminism and belief that “women don’t figure” in this period, which she sees as a sort of repression that a “phallocentric culture requires to maintain and reproduce itself” (459), it opens the play up for richer interpretations.

To do this however, we must view the robust and earthy Falstaff in female terms. Traub argues his body, with the emphasis on his swollen and distended belly (with echoes of Juliet’s bawdy nurse) and lines Falstaff speaks himself like, “My womb, my womb, undoes me” (2HIV, 4.3.10, 18-22) places him more in the maternal than paternal realm. She interestingly notes that
“False-staff becomes precisely a false phallus” (462). This view of the play is fascinating as it gives deeper purpose to many of Hal’s decision, especially if we believe masculinity must separate itself from the maternal (like the child from his mother) to develop male independence. Hal’s rejection of Falstaff becomes a symbolic killing of the maternal, alleviating anxieties and reaffirms his male dominance and individualism.

Though for the most part a distant mother, Gertrude is already giving Hamlet advice in the second scene of the play when she first appears at her new husband’s side, yet strangely it is Gertrude’s absence (and perhaps Ophelia’s newly produced uncanniness due to Hamlet’s regression) that Hamlet seems to mourn throughout the play. Gertrude admonishes him to change his looks, but Hamlet “knows not seems” (I.II.76) for inside him is pain “which passeth show” (I.II.85) and though he finally agrees to obey her wishes and stay in Denmark and be a good son, there is palpable hostility towards his mother for not understanding his inner feeling, which simmers upon a sulking childlike questions - how dare you tell me how to behave when you are not correctly behaving yourself? Gertrude seems to lack this basic understanding of her son and sees her husband’s death and her new marriage as part of the natural order. Perhaps Hamlet’s feigning madness and seemingly contradictory actions are simply left-over story lines from the original source, but Shakespeare was never hesitant to change stories to suit his purpose. Yet it we reorientate the cause of Hamlet’s problems toward Gertrude, many of his contradictory actions make more sense.

One of the most repeated questions regarding Hamlet decisions is why he doesn’t simply kill Claudius from the beginning (or at the very least while Claudius is kneeling alone in prayer). Hamlet is the king’s son, of ruling age, and his father’s ghost has told him Claudius is guilt of
fratricide. There are many unsatisfying arguments for his inaction: he feels guilty for killing the man that did what he really wanted to do (the Oedipal), Shakespeare is actually writing an anti-revenge play which Hamlet is trying to rise above, Hamlet’s father was a murderer and his uncle is just following the playbook in this patriarchal world, Hamlet does not want Claudius’ soul to go to heaven (a not so well known loophole in Christianity), he is unsure the ghost is really his father, etc. However, what if the cause of his inaction is Gertrude herself? If we view Hamlet’s inactions as a regression, brought on by his mother’s abandoning him for Claudius (was she also somehow complicit in the murder at least in his mind?) than this regression has brought him back to the feelings of powerlessness he once had as a child. Freud wrote in Civilization and its Discontents, “I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection” (21). Margolis comments on this passage:

For the oedipal child, perhaps. But Freud ignores an earlier and far stronger childhood need – the need for the mother’s protection. How explain this oversight? The forcefulness of Freud’s statement, contrasting sharply with his more characteristic open-ended formulations, suggest an emotional component. The protection Freud sorely need was not by his mother. What he longed for was protection by the father against the engulfing tendencies of his mother. But here his father had failed him, abandoning him to his mother and leaving him no recourse but to consign his rage to the unconscious, layering it over with denial and idealization. (25-26)

Modern feminist criticism of Freud includes this blind spot in Freud’s writings and some of his later concepts created to address these apparent inconsistencies are also called into question:

“Belatedly and reluctantly arriving at the concept of aggression as innate, Freud sensed the possibility of becoming aware of his aggressive feelings toward his early mother. To defend against this dreaded realization, he went on to postulate the concept of the death instinct, which turned the aggression inward. Only under the aegis of the death instinct was Freud able to accept the concept of an aggressive drive.” (23-24)
It could therefore be argued that not only Freud’s death from cancer of the mouth, the loss of acceptance of many of Freud’s theories over the years due to his blind sport when it came to his inability to acknowledge the primal influence of the maternal, Hal’s renouncing of Falstaff, and Hamlet’s own failure to act are all tied to the fear of a powerful mother. This would mean Hamlet could not possibly kill Claudius, for although Claudius is a substitute father, he is still a father figure that can shield him from his mother and his aggressive feelings towards her which he is repressing by redirecting his focus on daddy. It is only once Gertrude is poisoned, that Hamlet can finally do away with his superfluous father. However, is there more to Hamlet’s indecisiveness than the popular Oedipal theory?

Freud distinguished between primary repression, by which the initial emergence of an instinctual impulse is prevented, and secondary repression, by which derivates and disguised manifestations of the impulse are kept unconscious. The return of the repressed consists in the involuntary irruption into consciousness of unacceptable derivatives of the primary impulse, not the dissolution of the primary repression. (Rycroft, 157)

Could it be that there is something even further repressed than Hamlet’s Oedipal impulses towards his father/uncle? Is there a deeper taboo that is being repressed that concerns his feelings towards his mother?

Hamlet’s procrastinations could then be seen not as a lack of energy or will, but as a case of paralysis, analogous to the motor paralysis Freud had encountered in hysteries…paralysis is linked to taboo, and, in particular, to sexual taboos drawing their power from the fear of castration. (Hamacher, xiii – xiv)
Paralysis defines Hamlet and though it is common to focus on the images of the slaying of the father and his ghost, *Hamlet* is a play that is dominated by his feelings towards his mother and Ophelia:

T.S. Elliot writes: “The essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother… *Hamlet* is dominated by an excess of the facts as they appear”. As they appear, yes, but not as they actually exist in Hamlet’s soul. His emotions are inexpressible not for that reason, but because there are thoughts and wishes that no one dares to express even to himself. We plumb here the darkest depths. (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 100)

Let us consider the actions in the play if we place the mother as the true catalysts of Hamlet’s sudden change.

Shakespeare unfolds to us the full horror of Hamlet’s situation gradually, adding one load after another to the burden he has to bear until we fell that he must sink benefit it. The apparition in the first scene forewarns us of “some strange eruption” that threatens the state of Denmark. The opening of the second scene shows us the Prince robbed of his inheritance by his unable and mourning a beloved father whom his mother has already forgotten. Here is matter for pathos, though scarcely for tragic issues. But Hamlet now steps forward and tells us what is in this heart, what overshadows his disinheritance so completely that he does not mention it. His mother is a criminal, has been guilty of sin which blots out the starts for him, makes life a bestial thing, and even infects his very blood. She has committed incest. (*What Happens in Hamlet*, 39)

It does seem in terms of crafting increasing horrors, that the mother’s infidelity is the most terrible and purposely placed last:

“Yet at the outset”, as Dover Wilson remarks, “The hideous thought of incest is the monster present in Hamlet’s mind throughout the First Soliloquy. It is that, far more than the indecent haste of the wedding, which makes ‘all the uses of this world’ seem ‘weary, stale, flat and unprofitable’, sullies his very flesh, causes him to long for death and prompts the bitter cry ‘Frailty they name is woman’.” (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 94)
We see this clearly in Hamlet’s first soliloquy in Act I when his outbursts during the soliloquy seem to become uncontrollable when he thinks of his mother’s betrayal. In the famous “O that this too, too solid (or is it ‘sullied’ perhaps by the mother?) flesh would melt” speech:

Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet, within a month-
Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman! -
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe, all tears- why she, even she
(O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn'd longer) married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue! (Hamlet I.ii.133)

Hamlet seems most out of control during the play during the times when he reflects on his mother’s marriage. As Ernest Jones notes:
Now comes the father’s death and the mother’s second marriage. The association of the idea of sexuality with his mother, buried since infancy, can no longer be concealed from his consciousness. As Bradley well says: “Her son was forced to see in her action not only an astounding shallowness of feeling, but an eruption of course sensuality, ‘rank and gross,’ speeding post-haste to its horrible delight.” Feelings which once, in infancy of long ago, were pleasurable desires can now, because of his repression, only fill him with repulsion. (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 82)

Though Hamlet will kill the men that get in the way of his love objects, he is so disturbed by the reoccuring thought of “incestuous sheets” that he must talk himself down from killing his mother at different points in the play. Hamlet’s Orestes complex becomes apparent as he heads to his mother’s bedroom, he tells himself, “let not ever the soul of Nero enter this firm bosom” (Act III, ii) and promises to “speak daggers to her but use none” and we must questions why does Nero come to his mind (a famous royal son who reportedly slept with his mother and later became her murderer) as he approaches his mother’s bedroom; why must he plead with himself to hold back her murder? In her bedroom, his palpable disgust of her could be seen as a manifestation of intensely 'repressed' sexual feeling:

> “Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed; Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse; And let him, for a pair of reechy kisses, Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers, Make you to ravel all this matter out. (Act III, Sc. 4)"

Though Hamlet tells himself he is no Nero, Ernest Jones notes that:

> When a man who has been betrayed is emotionally moved to murder, whom should he kill, the rival lover or the lady? It is a nice question. Some men answer it, in words or in deeds, one way, other men the other (Othello!), and in doing so reveal much of the deepest attitude towards the two sexes. By this is not necessarily meant that the sex whose member they kill is the one most hated, despite the obvious hostility of the act. (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 92)
It is possible then that the murders of Polonius and Claudius are merely Hamlet projecting his anger on them as he is too afraid, or unable to kill his mother. This redirection of his anger towards these men, may also help us better understand his unfair treatment of Ophelia. Ernest Jones goes so far as to state Ophelia is simply a substitute for Gertrude, especially how he childishly at times plays them off each other:

A case might even be made out for the view that part of his courtship originated not so much in direct attraction for Ophelia as in an unconscious desire to play her off against his mother, just as a disappointed and piqued lover so often has resort to the arms of a more willing rival. It would be hard otherwise to understand the readiness with which he later throws himself into this part. When, for instance, in the play scene he replies to his mother's request to sit by her with the words 'No, good mother, here's metal more attractive' and proceeds to lie at Ophelia's feet, we seem to have a direct indication of this attitude; and his coarse familiarity and bandying of ambiguous jests with the woman he has recently so ruthlessly jilted are hardly intelligible unless we bear in mind that they were carried out under the heedful gaze of the Queen. It is as though his unconscious was trying to convey to her the following thought: 'You give yourself to other men whom you prefer to me. Let me assure you that I can dispense with, your favours and even prefer those of a woman whom I no longer love.' His extraordinary outburst of bawdiness on this occasion, so unexpected in a man of obviously fine feeling, points unequivocally to the sexual nature of the underlying turmoil. (A Psychol-analytic Study of Hamlet, 266)

It is in moment like this in the play, that our hero seems to revert to something less than we have come to expect from this play-acting Prince. His treatment of Ophelia seems the most unfair in the play:

The total reaction culminates in the bitter misogyny of his outburst against Ophelia, who is devastated at having to bear a reaction so wholly out of proportion to her own offence and has no idea that in reviling her Hamlet is really expressing his bitter resentment against his mother.” 'I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another; you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad' (Act III, Sc. I). On only one occasion does he for a moment
escape from the sordid implication with which his love has been impregnated and achieve a healthier attitude toward Ophelia, namely at the open grave when in remorse he breaks out at of Laertes for presuming to pretend that his feeling for her could ever equal that of her lover. (Ibid, 268)

When Ophelia finally leaves the play on her own accord, we cannot help but feel anger towards Hamlet for his part in her suicide. She is not the only innocent character however that comes to a cruel end due to Hamlet’s redirection of his Orestes complex:

The intensity of Hamlet's repulsion against woman in general, and Ophelia in particular, is a measure of the powerful 'repression' to which his sexual feelings are being subjected. The outlet for those feelings in the direction of his mother has always been firmly dammed, and now that the narrower channel in Ophelia's direction has also been closed the increase in the original direction consequent on the awakening of early memories tasks all his energy to maintain the “repression.” His pent-up feelings find a partial vent in other directions. The petulant irascibility and explosive outbursts called forth by his vexation at the hands of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, and especially of Polonius, are evidently to be interpreted in this way, as also is in part the burning nature of his reproaches to his mother. Indeed, towards the end of his interview with his mother the thought of misconduct expresses itself in the almost physical disgust which is so characteristic a manifestation of intensely repressed feelings. (Ibid, 269)

Yet we cannot help being drawn to Hamlet despite his at times childish and seemingly erratic behavior. Perhaps we too subconsciously know there is more rotten in the State of Denmark than his uncle’s sin.

In the play, we often find Hamlet both attracted to and repulsed by his mother. His reawakened sexual impulses towards her stand in contrast to his revulsion of his mother’s sensuality and choice of a new husband. Freud believed that a son’s attraction to his mother went through different phases:
This early period of sex life normally comes to an end around the fifth year and is replaced by a period of more or less complete latency during which ethical restraints are built up as protective formations against the wishes associated with the Oedipus complex. In the following period of puberty, the Oedipus complex is revived in the unconsciousness a disposition that attach to it are sexuality. This begins its further transformations. Only during puberty do the same drives develop to reach full intensity, but the direction of this development and all the dispositions that attach to it are determined by the prior infantile early blossoming of sexuality. These two periods in the development of the sexual functions, interrupted by a period of latency, seem to be a biological peculiarity of the human race and seem to contain the conditions for the origins of neurosis. (Freud quoted in Kaufmann, 119)

Others, such as Jung would argue this was not completely sexual but related to archetypes common in human experience:

Jung believed an “ancient matriarchal community predated patriarch. Jung told Freud he believed the incest taboo emerged from this matriarchal period of history, as a proscription against incest that was not sexual, but a defense against the desire to return to the womb. Therefore, the origins of repression were not specifically sexual. (Makari, 275)

Great Mother-Goddess can be found in many cultures and usually they are both great creators and destroyers. Regardless of the origin, we must wonder if part of Hamlet’s paralysis is his unconscious recognition of a prior infant stage of feelings that is both uncanny and partially repressed. Ernest Jones comments on the importance of the mother-father relationship in the son’s sexual development:

The importance of female fidelity begins, as all things do, in infancy. In spite of the natural jealously of which we have spoken earlier, there is no doubt that the mother’s fidelity to her husband, and particularly their marital happiness together, helps the infant to buildup defenses against his sensual impulses and gradually to transform and divert them along more hopeful paths…If the mother is unfaithful to her husband or unduly lascivious, particularly if she is unduly sensual with the boy himself (thus committing a symbolic incest), not only is a strain placed on the latter’s efforts to develop more
socially, but he is apt to protect himself by generating an aversion, a sense of disgust, or even actual hostility to the mother. Her behavior has stirred things in him that he cannot endure, and which may make his life or his sanity impossible. Where she to proceed even further, and commit incest itself, then she has broken down the barrier so valuable to the boy in coping with his own impulses. (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 93)

The line from the play in which Hamlet refers to his birth is also interesting and how he phrases his complaint:

…in the bitter talk with Ophelia, Hamlet says, “I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me”. What does this dark saying portend? It sounds more sinister even than killing a king. And there is a slight difference between “had I never been borne: and “had my mother not borne me.” Need the mother be mentioned, and for whom would it have been better? (*Hamlet and Oedipus*, 98-99)

Upon first hearing, most people probably take this to mean he simply wishes he were not born, but he is actually saying he wished Gertrude had not borne him.

Another interesting theme regarding strong women in Shakespeare’s plays, reveals itself in series of threes. In *The Three Caskets*, Freud notes the reoccurring image of three choices being given in the choice of women in folk tales, fairy tales, and interestingly in two of Shakespeare’s plays - the three caskets in *The Merchant of Venice* and the division of the kingdom between the three daughters in *King Lear*. These reoccurring images are not random according to Freud:

We might argue that what is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman – the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him; or they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man’s life – the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more. (Freud, quoted in Hamacher, 121)
Interestingly, Gertrude bears him, Ophelia (Gertrude’s replacement) is temporarily his mate, and Hamlet (after temporarily sharing Ophelia’s grave with her), winds up in a grave himself.

This apparent competition between the women in Hamlet’s life might also better explain the curious circumstances surrounding Ophelia’s death. Gertrude gives a lovely (and yet strangely unsettling describing of the suicide of Hamlet’ love in its artistry) and moving description of Ophelia’s death and discloses the events of her final demise with “her garments, heavy with the drink, pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay to muddy death” (V.I.82-84). A memorizing speech, yet we are left to ponder, how does she know these details? Was Gertrude there? Why was Ophelia’s slow death while singing permitted to happen? How can this scene be explained in any way accept that Gertrude allowed the mad Ophelia’s death to happen?

Another interesting aspect of Gertrude is that while she is emotionally absent from Hamlet throughout the play, at time she fulfills the role of Ophelia’s missing mother. It is Gertrude that tries to comfort Ophelia when she tells her of her father’s death (interestingly two characters that both seemingly go mad due to their fathers being murdered turn to her with radically different responses). We might consider that Hamlet and Ophelia mirror each other not only in this respect, but they also both seem to be characters that in the end transcend the revenge play they are confined within. Ophelia seems to rise above the pettiness of the characters in the play and chooses to leave the play for her own ending. If you translate her name as “o phallus” it also gives new meaning to Hamlet’s regression and sense of powerlessness, and his inability to remain her lover after his mother’s remarriage. As for Hamlet’s inaction, if we grant the origin
of Hamlet’s conflict being his mother, it is interesting that only after Gertrude’s death does Hamlet finally regain his power (phallus?) and finally act.

The fear of the maternal lies just under the surface in the works of Shakespeare and Freud. Freud attempts to deny the power of the mother, yet it is the glaring absence that the reader is drawn to contemplate. How much of what we term the Oedipal complex, the fear and desire of castration by the father, is merely just a redirected fear of the power of the mother? If the mother has that much power of the boy, how can he consider himself a man without castrating her?

In Shakespeare’s time, James VI of Scotland would have had his own insecurities with becoming James I of England. Scotland was a backwater compared to England and Edinburgh lacked the prestige of the much richer and cosmopolitan London. To obtain his crown he had to move to England, placate his new subjects by agreeing to tolerance with regards to religion where possible (though nearly blown up by Catholics only two years into his reign) and replace a much-loved and successful Queen (who had his own mother executed). Is it surprising his unconscious male psyche was attracted to stories of evil and powerful women? Shakespeare seems keenly aware of James’ interests as he changes the fairies in the original story of Macbeth to witches and uses the plot of regicide and powerful women (with more ridged gender roles than typically found in his plays) to appeal to James’ tastes and fears (as James, unlike many educated men of his time, actually believed in witchcraft). We can only imagine James’ reaction when Lady Macbeth proclaims, “Unsex me here, and fill me, from the crown to the toe, topfull of direct cruelty” (I.V. 41-44). Yet Lady Macbeth, like Elizabeth, is left childless at the end of her
life and for all her strength and unrelenting support of her treasonous husband, dies mad and alone off stage and we are left with a much more masculine space at the end of the play. The power of the women at the beginning of the play is gone, Macbeth is bested by a man who is superior as he was not even born of a woman and replaced by a new king that claims to never have known a woman. This new male only space at the conclusion of the play is so glaringly, how can it be seen as anything other than fabricated to calm male anxieties about powerful women?

Though Freud does argue that the mother is the source of desire, since the father becomes an obstacle to that desire, Freud places the struggle between the son and the father as the prime precursor of many of the neurosis, including the Oedipus complex and fear of castration. The reader is left to wonder however, is Freud’s preoccupation with the father really a redirection from a repression of the influence of a too strong a mother? Were the prime precursors for Freud and Shakespeare’s princes overbearing or absent mothers from which they struggled to break free?

If this is truly our earliest memory of feelings of danger, it is interesting that there are many absent and horrible mothers within the works of Cervantes, Shakespeare, and Freud. One only must consider the witch Canizares in the Dialogue of the Dogs, the “pregnant” round bellied “false staff” and the Prince’s missing mother in Henry IV, Gertrude as both her son’s absent mother and Cordelia’s surrogate mother in Hamlet, and Freud’s own issues with his mother which might lead us to reconsider the creation of psychoanalyses owning more to a lacking mother or at the very least triggered by both parents from which a wounded conscious would
need to dominate or subvert to survive. If we were to view the unconscious as the “territory marked out by desire for and fear of the mother,” (El Saffer, 18) Freud’s concentration on the Oedipal complex takes on an even larger significance. Perhaps there is simply a pain or shame too difficult to name when it comes to the maternal:

The phallic mother is a feminine being, who with the phallus, possesses and devours the fathers. The devalued father is left to bear the burden of the Terrible Mother. To identify oneself with the mother, then – to be the mother – is at the same time to possess the father (active homosexuality) and to be possessed by him (passive homosexuality). The hybrid phallic mother accumulates, in her double physiology, the inverse parental functions: mother and father, active mother and passive father. Is the witch not like this, with that double sex in the form of the belly that hangs halfway to her thighs, concealing/revealing the indecipherable private parts? How is it possible, then, to be mother if not by rejecting her? (El Saffar, 254)

Freud often wrote of the importance of his father in his life and he considered a father’s death the “most significant event, the most decisive loss, of a man’s life.” (Gay, 89) However, though Freud was deeply disturbed when his father died, he did not find his mother’s death as traumatic. As his biographer Peter Gay noted:

It was almost as though her active long life enabled her psychanalyst son to skirt the full implications of the oedipal combat to which he had been, after all, the first to call attention. It matters to the history of psychoanalysis that Freud was very much of his father’s son, dreaming and worrying more about paternal than about maternal relations, and unconsciously eager to leave some of his ambivalence about his mother unanalyzed. (Gay, 89)

Yet, despite his inability or unwillingness to analyze the importance of his mother in his development, Freud was very close to his mother, and we know that he believed his mother was much smarter than his father (though his father was twenty years her senior). Yet because of her sex, she was confined within the middle-class paradigm of nineteenth century Vienna to have her
existence defined as a housewife. Freud’s many writings of the superiority of men over women seem all the more incomprehensible, given the family life he was born into. Could he not see beyond the confines of patriarchy the cage within his unhappy mother was perched? It is these glaring blind-spots that modern day critiques of Freud usually gravitate, but what if these blind-spots were not blind-spots at all. What if they developed from a need to manage hyper-suppressed fears of the power of the mother over the creation of the male psyche? For if the male psyche owes more of its creation to the influences of the female, what type of superiority can it really claim? If we consider that many of the issues that Freud investigates in his works revolve around the early relationships between mother and child, this perhaps becomes even more important as the mother-child bonding is typically the first experience of a child’s consciousness. So much so that for the first few years of its life, a child feels they are still joined to the mother as when in the womb.

Freud goes so far as to attribute some people’s need for religion, which he terms the “oceanic feeling,” to the child’s first understanding of the world as this mother and child oneness. The loss of this connection as the child becomes to understand that the mother (and later the world) is separate from the child, still leaves a yearning for this early feeling of peace; a desire to return to that original state of oneness with the universe (though a return to the memory of the absolute power of the child within the early child worldview might also be argued to be part of this pull toward religion/oneness in a world that becomes more and more chaotic as the child grows). Freud’s own mother was described by her friends and family as “not what we would call a lady, had a lively temper and impatient, self-willed, sharp-witted and highly intelligent” (Gay, 504). Freud’s niece, one wrote that Amalia Freud was:
Temperamental, energetic, and strong-willed, getting her way in small matters and large, vain of her appearance almost to her death at ninety-five, efficient, competent, and egotistical. She was charming and smiling when strangers were about, but I, at least, always felt that with familiars she was tyrant, and a selfish one. (Gay, 504)

Freud is often quoted that his mother called him her “golden son” and his being born with a caul was taken as a sign by her that he was destined for great things. This fixation on her favorite child, which can of course be viewed through a lens of narcissism, “would be hard to escape, even after the most thorough-going self-analysis.” (Gay, 505). Freud would articulate the strong force of the mother on the child in his writings, yet there is a glaring lack of focus on the mother in most of his case histories.

Dora’s mother, best by what Freud calls “housewife’s psychosis,” is a silent, minor actor in the family melodrama. Little Han’s mother, though to her husband’s mind the cause of her son’s neurosis with her seductive behavior, is subordinated to that husband, the auxiliary analyst who transmits Freud’s interpretations. The Wolf Man’s biological mother achieves only severely limited significance as a partner in the primal scene he had observed or fantasied as a little boy. The Rat Man’s mother makes some fleeting appearance, mainly as the person whom the patient consults before he starts his analysis. And Schreber’s mother might as well not have lived. (Gay, 505)

This lack or reduction of the mother is glaring. One might wonder if Freud’s own habitual need for a cigar (reportedly averaging twenty a day) is less related to the old joke, “When is a cigar not a cigar?” than tied to the desire for the missing mother as revealed in an oral fixation. Interestingly, Freud “admitted that his passion for smoking hindered him in the working out of certain psychological problems” (Jones, 155), a knot he was never able to untangle when it came to the maternal. As Margolis notes,

This admission would suggest that Freud may have sense that his smoking was a link to the pregenital phase of his life. We may say that the acting-out implicit in his smoking
replaced the exploration necessary for arriving at insight which might have liberated him from his early mother as from his addition. But this Freud was unwilling, or perhaps unable to do, preferring the immediate rewards of his addiction. Perhaps his own dread of uncovering his preoedipal conflicts contributed to his resounding reassurance to others harboring the identical dread. (99)

His other great addition throughout his life was the collection of Egyptian (the maternal Empire that masculine Rome conquered) antiquities. He would purchase these objects with a compulsion, typically carrying them around with him for days before finally placing them around his home, of giving them to friends as gifts. “Realizing the importance of smoking and the collection of antiquities to his well-being, Freud called them his ‘addictions.’ We understand an addiction as being ‘rooted in an oral dependence of outer supplies,’ symbolically, nurtured from mother” (Margolis, 98). Also, interesting to note, that “Without the daily and immediate nurturance afforded by smoking, Freud claimed that he lacked the capacity to maintain the self-control and the tenacity necessary for his work” (Ibid.). Given the excruciating painful way Freud died, it would understandably take something as important to him as being unable to write (the separation from the maternal in the mind yet soothing the neurosis through oral stimulation) for him to continue to smoke as the lesions grew in his mouth. “Surgery, it appears, which symbolizes castration by the father, was less threatening to Freud than was abstinence, which symbolized separation from the mother” (Margolis, 101). It is the repression of the maternal which might help us to understand the gulf in Freud’s work when it came to his own consuming addictions.

Freud’s well-known aversion to music may also provide a glimpse into the repression of the maternal. It is a well-known and curious fact that Freud could only take pleasure in music if
it was accompanied by words. Without words, it made him feel uneasy and unable to write or concentrate.

Heinz Kohut suggests that music without words, what he calls “pure music,” often transports us into psychic localities and feeling states connected with the pre-verbal realm of the early mother-infant relationship. Unlike the domain that is mediated by language, which is made of “clearly defined and definable” experience, this is a realm of “countless forms and intensities and of emotions. (Whitebook, 56)

Freud’s aversion to music without words was so great that he admitted he was unable to work if it was within hearing distance as he was both unable to focus and unable to give himself up to the music and receive any pleasure.

Perhaps the key to the enigma lies in his sister Ann’s disclosure that her mother was “very musical.” How explain, then, that the favorite child of a musical mother had so strong an aversion to music? It is commonplace that the impressions of early childhood are lasting, the impressions received from mother, the child’s first object, particularly so. And no doubt Amalia, like all mothers, crooned and sang to her son as she held him in her arms, her first-born, bearer of her unfulfilled ambition. (Margolis, 120-121)

The siren song that calls the sailors to their deaths becomes, on some level to Freud, the death of the differentiated self.

The concept of the overbearing or “terrible mother” that runs through Cervantes’ works must have its own origin. Cervantes had known many periods of poverty throughout his life, most painfully the poverty he suffered as a child would haunt him his entire life. His father, Rodrigo de Cervantes, initially born into a position of wealth and privilege, had struggled himself when Miguel’s grandfather has deserted his family to pursue a younger woman. “Had his father stayed in the family home it is probably that Rodrigo would have married into a family
rich enough to offset his lack of university education and his possible deafness (McCrorly, 26); instead he would deal with this new reality of having to earn money by trying to make a living as a surgeon, at the time commonly called a barber (which mainly attended to wounds, set bones, and used bloodletting as a cure and did not require any university training – and also found as a character within Cervantes’ works). Spain at this time was a Catholic society structured around centuries of patriarchal domination. As status, power, and wealth in a patriarchy typically flows from the male side, Rodrigo, who reportedly was hard of hearing, or even perhaps deaf, appears to have burned through what was left of his family wealth and well to do friends’ hospitalities, so the dowry that that marriage to Leonora de Cortinas brought him was greatly needed as it extended his ability to live the life he had known. Leonora’s parents were landowners, and though much is not known of what they thought of their daughters’ choice, the fact that they never attended the baptisms of any of their grandchildren speaks volumes. Rodrigo’s mother’s father had been a doctor, so perhaps being abandoned by the paternal, he naturally turned to the maternal side of his family as a drowning man might a life vest.

However, due to a poor economic climate and abundance of barbers looking for patients, that couple had to move their growing family many times to look for work. Rodrigo would wind up spending seven months in debtors’ prison due to a loan he was unable to pay in which he used the family’s silverware as collateral, but he was later released as the court sided with his claimed exception as a Nobleman in lineage. Rodrigo told the judge he owned properties in other places and once freed, he would repay the loans. There is no record this was ever done. The debtors were not even able to collect on the silverware as Leonora was able, using powerful friends, to argue that they had come from her side of the family and therefore must remain with her. The
Cervantes family would spend years, reduced to vagabonds constantly fleeing the father’s debts with Leonora having to support the family during the father’s time of imprisonment and unemployment. During a time when men were supposed to be the source of economic and social status, this would have been seen as humiliating to a young Cervantes. Given Cervantes issues with his own mother, to the extent of even displacing her name, Cortinas, with Saavedra, which has the effect of “making the authorial name a crucible for erasure and repression” (El Saffar, 10) it might lead one to wonder if perhaps the true origin of the castration complex is not the father but is instead the detachment from the mother. The witch or evil sorceress out become a reoccurring theme in Cervantes works.

Chapter Two: The Dialogue of the Dogs – The Overbearing Mother

A favorite childhood author may also shed some light on Freud’s aversion to the maternal. Freud’s favorite story from his youth was Cervantes’ The Dialogue of the Dogs, a text about two dogs discussing absent and horrible mothers and the shame they both suffer. Freud loved this story from his childhood so much that, along with his school friend Eduard Silberstein, he founded a “Castilian Academy” in which Freud identifying himself as the listener dog within the pair. For years during their youth and even later into early adulthood, the two young men would write each other their concerns and pretend to play the role of the dogs, which included Freud’s reoccurring role as the “listener.” This story effected Freud at a very young age and on many levels, not only in the role of the dog Berganza, as he voices his issues with his horrible mother while the other dog mostly just listens to his description of events, but Freud loved this
work so much, he decided to learn the Spanish language through translating this work – to identify and love a work so much as to take the time to learn another language so as to appreciate it in its original form cannot be overstated. To do this, Freud would have had to use the process of taking one language’s symbols and replacing them with another’s. Given his love of language, puns, and often use of researching the origin of a words to unwrap the stories of his patients to get to the real origin of their problems, it perhaps cannot be overstated how much of a debt his formation of psychoanalysis owes to his love of this story from his early childhood. Freud’s own family members were surprised when Freud suddenly appeared to have learned Spanish, though they knew he had not taken any courses. They found it amusing that his deep childhood love of the works of Cervantes had pushed him towards learning yet another language.

In “The Colloquy of the Dogs,” the dog Berganza is told that he was not born a dog, but human and that his mother is a witch named, Montiela, while his father is a good-for-nothing man named Rodriguez (a hapless Rodrigo?). The witch is seen as cunning and malicious woman that the dog Berganza renounces as his mother. As his departed mother’s friend tells Berganza about his birth, Berganza tells his canine friend Scipio, “Every single thing the old woman told me in praise of the woman she claimed was my mother was a dagger piercing my heart, and I wanted to attack her and tear her to pieces” (Exemplary Stories, 287). When she attempts to kiss Berganza, he will not allow it, saying the mere thought was disgusting. Scipio replies, “You were right not to; because there’s no pleasure only torture, in kissing or allowing yourself to be kissed by an old woman” (Exemplary Stories, 282).
Another horrible mother character can be found in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, as it is Teresa Panza who “hides masculine virility” (El Saffar, 248). She states to Sancho Panza (himself an object that might seem feminine with his large extended belly and habit of ridding side saddle), “My father’s name was Cascajo (stone, or gravel); and as your wife I am called Terza Panza (belly), though by rights I should be called Teresa Cascajo” (II.5), thereby claiming the privilege of the male surname for her own. She is also interestingly the reason Sancho Panza is so eager to leave home and join Don Quixote on his quest. Freud’s early fascination with these stories of powerful monstrous women perhaps seems all the more understandable given statements such as in *Civilization and its Discontents* that, “I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection” (21). Margolis comments on this passage:

For the oedipal child, perhaps. But Freud ignores an earlier and far stronger childhood need – the need for the mother’s protection. How to explain this oversight? The forcefulness of Freud’s statement, contrasting sharply with his more characteristic open-ended formulations, suggest an emotional component. The protection Freud sorely need was not by his mother. What he longed for was protection by the father against the engulfing tendencies of his mother. But here his father had failed him, abandoning him to his mother and leaving him no recourse but to consign his rage to the unconscious, layering it over with denial and idealization. (25-26)

Modern feminist criticism of Freud includes this blind spot in Freud’s writings and some of his later concepts created to address these apparent inconsistencies are also called into question:

“Belatedly and reluctantly arriving at the concept of aggression as innate, Freud sensed the possibility of becoming aware of his aggressive feelings toward his early mother. To defend against this dreaded realization, he went on to postulate the concept of the death instinct, which turned the aggression inward. Only under the aegis of the death instinct was Freud able to accept the concept of an aggressive drive.” (23-24)
It could therefore be argued that not only Freud’s premature death from cancer of the mouth, but also the loss of acceptance of many of Freud’s theories over the years are both at their heart due to his inability to acknowledge the primal influence of the maternal.

Chapter Three: The Knight of the Mirrors – the Doppelgänger

Wherever you go, I shall be there always,
Up to the very last one of your days,
When I shall go to sit on your stone.

“December Night” Alfred de Musset

The story of the “Knight of the Mirrors,” in the second volume of Don Quixote, is full of modern-day concepts in psychology and stands out particularly in its relationship to psychanalyses, as well as Otto Rank’s concepts of the doppelgänger and Jacques Lacan’s concept of the mirror stage in human development. Cervantes’ use of these concepts draws attention to the fact that hundreds of years before Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and Jacques Lacan began their own works exploring these complicated topics, Cervantes was already grappling with these ideas to help bring a new understanding of the human consciousness. When we also consider the Lacan mirror stage so wonderfully parallels the story of the Knight of the Mirrors, we have yet another instance where these stories from his childhood become outlines for the techniques that will later be crucial within the field of psychology. We should also consider that
Cervantes use of theatre, or “narratives within narratives, of stories, characters, and narrators whose origins remain foreign or uncertain, repeats the theme of psychoanalysis that it is lack that haunts the subject…all systems, including language, are constructed to disguise the lack” (El Saffar, 14) as much of the enjoyment and wisdom in Don Quixote’s adventures are his shining the light on the false paradigms and the hypocrisy in things we take for granted, which is done through the telling of stories.

In volume two, chapter fourteen, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza are greeted by their doppelgängers. While Sancho Panza spends his time relating his childhood to his own mirror image, The Squire of the Wood, Don Quixote relates his view of what it means to be a good knight to the Knight of the Wood (soon be known as the Knight of the Mirrors). However, his double, the Knight of the Woods, tries to usurp or even erase Don Quixote from existence by claiming all of Don Quixote’s achievements are now his to claim:

He of the Grove said to Don Quixote, "In fine, sir knight, I would have you know that my destiny, or, more properly speaking, my choice led me to fall in love with the peerless Casildea de Vandalia. I call her peerless because she has no peer, whether it be in bodily stature or in the supremacy of rank and beauty…To be brief, last of all she has commanded me to go through all the provinces of Spain and compel all the knights-errant wandering therein to confess that she surpasses all women alive to-day in beauty, and that I am the most valiant and the most deeply enamored knight on earth; in support of which claim I have already travelled over the greater part of Spain, and have there vanquished several knights who have dared to contradict me; but what I most plume and pride myself upon is having vanquished in single combat that so famous knight Don Quixote of La Mancha, and made him confess that my Casildea is more beautiful than his Dulcinea; and in this one victory I hold myself to have conquered all the knights in the world; for this Don Quixote that I speak of has vanquished them all, and I having vanquished him, his glory, his fame, and his honour have passed and are transferred to my person; for the more the vanquished hath of fair renown, the greater glory gilds the victor's crown. Thus the innumerable achievements of the said Don Quixote are now set down to my account and have become mine. (Cervantes, 409)
The battle between doppelgänger knights is a wonderful image as though the history of the doppelgänger is one of struggles between likeness and the desire for difference, it is also typically male in form. This is perhaps due to the female’s ability to replicate herself in the act of birthing – a miniature copy of her produced from her own body. Or is it the male’s fear of the woman being able to recreate him, a copy, where the fear has its true origin – will junior someday be bigger and stronger and eventually usurp the father?

Rank argues that the double is a form of self-preservation for mortal man and that the sprit, or shadow, is needed to cope with the knowledge that we are all destined to die:

The theme of the “double” has been very thoroughly treated by Otto Rank. He has gone into the connections the “double” has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the astonishing evolution of this idea. For the “double” was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an “energetic denial of the power of death,” as Rank says; and probably the “immortal” soul was the first “double” of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of the genital symbol; the same desire spurred on the ancient Egyptians to the art of making images of the dead in some lasting material. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death. (Freud, 142)

The artist might then be seen as a spiritual double, with the power to be able to immortalize himself in his creation. However, along with this sense of a spiritual life comes the concept of guilt, allowing the double an escape mechanism by making it possible for the individual to transfer their negative aspects onto the double.
Applying these ideas to the “Knight of the Mirrors” is fascinating as the Knight of the Mirrors, though trying to help his neighbor, Alonso Quixano, is essentially trying to “kill” Don Quixote. Don Quixote is himself a fabrication, created by Alonso in a madness allegedly brought on from reading too many fictional books about chivalry (or was it in simply trying to apply the structure and logic of fiction to an irrational world?). On another level, the reason Cervantes states he wrote volume two of the story is that other writers had stolen his creation and were making bad doubles of his art. He therefore writes volume two not only to ridicule their aping, but also as an attempt to kill off the character of Don Quixote once and for all. This second volume, therefore from its beginning, anticipates Don Quixote losing in battle. But who could better this larger-than-life creation? Only a mirror image of Don Quixote of course. Though Don Quixote defeats the Knight of the Mirrors early on, his foe will return as the Knight of the White Moon (a reflection itself of the sun) or the Knight of the Polished Moon or as a “magician mirror” as Nabokov noted, in a compulsion to repeat battles between the doppelgängers until the release of death as “the frequent slaying of the double, through which the hero seeks to protect himself permanently from the pursuit of his self, is really a suicidal act” (Rank, 79).

To the Knight of the Woods challenge, Don Quixote creates another double of himself by telling the knight to calm down and that he “knows this Don Quixote he speaks of” and that there must be some mistake or witchcraft involved:

Calm yourself, sir knight," said Don Quixote, "and give ear to what I am about to say to you. I would have you know that this Don Quixote you speak of is the greatest friend I have in the world; so much so that I may say I regard him in the same light as my own person; and from the precise and clear indications you have given I cannot but think that
he must be the very one you have vanquished. On the other hand, I see with my eyes and feel with my hands that it is impossible it can have been the same; unless indeed it be that, as he has many enemies who are enchanters, and one in particular who is always persecuting him, some one of these may have taken his shape in order to allow himself to be vanquished, so as to defraud him of the fame that his exalted achievements as a knight have earned and acquired for him throughout the known world. And in confirmation of this, I must tell you, too, that it is but ten hours since these said enchanters his enemies transformed the shape and person of the fair Dulcinea del Toboso into a foul and mean village lass, and in the same way they must have transformed Don Quixote; and if all this does not suffice to convince you of the truth of what I say, here is Don Quixote himself, who will maintain it by arms, on foot or on horseback or in any way you please. (Cervantes, 411)

As the “friend” of Don Quixote is revealed to be the true Don Quixote, it is here that the Knight of the Woods transforms into the Knight of the Mirrors before Don Quixote’s eyes, though his true identity still remains hidden:

Don Quixote examined his adversary and found that he already had his helmet on and visor lowered, so that he could not see his face; he observed, however, that he was a sturdily built man, but not very tall in stature. Over his armour he wore a surcoat or cassock of what seemed to be the finest cloth of gold, all bespangled with glittering mirrors like little moons, which gave him an extremely gallant and splendid appearance; above his helmet fluttered a great quantity of plumes, green, yellow, and white, and his lance, which was leaning against a tree, was very long and stout, and had a steel point more than a palm in length. Don Quixote observed all, and took note of all, and from what he saw and observed he concluded that the said knight must be a man of great strength, but he did not for all that give way to fear, like Sancho Panza; on the contrary, with a composed and dauntless air, he said to the Knight of the Mirrors, "If, sir knight, your great eagerness to fight has not banished your courtesy, by it I would entreat you to raise your visor a little, in order that I may see if the comeliness of your countenance corresponds with that of your equipment. (Cervantes, 413)

The image of the many mirrors is also interesting to our modern minds due to the now famous work of Jacques Lacan which finds that humans are unique in the animal worlds in that even as early as six months of age, infants are prewired to differentiate between the “I” of the self and the “other” “I” reflected in the mirror: “This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the
child at the infant stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem
to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the “I” is precipitated in a
primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and
before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (Lacan, 2). The image of
Don Quixote’s doppelgänger standing before him should therefore transcend even language,
however, his madness (or the witches magic) prevents him from recognizing the “I” in the other.

The Knight of the Mirrors however refuses to show his true face to Don Quixote and as the
two knights quarrel over who is the true Don Quixote, a battle is fought over reality while Sancho
hides from his mirror image as he is frightened by its large prosthetic nose (an uncanny fright due
to the repression of the image of the male penis as Sancho has abandoned his family to go on these
boyish adventures with the Knight of the Sorrowful Face perhaps). Unbeknownst to both Sancho
and Don Quixote, the two “mirror images” are really their concerned friends trying to break Don
Quixote out of his madness and bring him back to reality by having them look at themselves.
Possibly the attempt at a cure fails as Don Quixote only sees fractions of himself in the many
mirrors displayed the Knight, but even when the Knight of the Mirror loses the battle, and is
revealed to be Sampson Carrasco, Don Quixote refuses to believe this and instead claims to be still
under the power of enchantment of an evil witch. Interestingly, the fear of gazing too long into
mirrors are common in many cultures, “these ideas are associated with the prohibition of gazing
at oneself in the mirror at night. If one does this, one loses his own image – i.e., one’s soul” (Rank,
63). The mirror shows us an uncanny reverse image of ourselves, similar but different, and “the
conviction that the mirror reveals concealed matters is based upon the belief of the double” (Rank,
These passages are fascinating as they depict the desire to cure mental illness with the use of “reflection” and discussion or the origin and nature of the subjects, but also that the blame for the origin of the break from reality lies with an evil sorceress.

Interestingly, Cervantes lays the blame of Don Quixote’s illness at the foot of the powerful witch, and though Freud does believe that the mother is the source of the desire for the child which the father becomes an obstacle to obtain, he instead places the struggle between the son and the father as the prime precursor of many of the neurosis, including the Oedipus Complex and its fear of castration. We may wonder however, if Freud’s preoccupation with the father is perhaps a redirection of the repression of a too strong mother? Were the prime precursors for both Freud and Cervantes overbearing mothers that they spent their lives, and works, trying to break free?

This image of the confrontation with the double is not of course confined to Don Quixote, but common in literature. Otto Rank’s thought provoking work, The Double, makes many interesting observations about the phenomena of the double, and uses the film, The Student of Prague, to help us visualize these concepts as “it may turn out that cinematography, which in numerous ways reminds us of the dream-work, can also express certain psychological facts and relationships – which the writer often is unable to describe with verbal clarity – in such clear and conspicuous imagery that it facilitates our understanding of them” (Rank, 4). The film portrays a poor but dashing student, Balduin, whose double attempts to thwart his love of the beautiful Margit, perhaps reflecting the fear of loving another which could eclipse the self-love of the individual. However, he also pays no attention to the lovely flower girl, Lyduschka that is madly in love with him, which leads the viewer to question Balduin’s ability to love in the first place.
Interestingly, though Don Quixote undergoes his trial and tribulations for the beautiful and noble Dulcinea del Toboso, he admits to Sancho Panza that he has never actually met her in person.

Some doubles are immediately met with feelings of dread and fear as by the *Student of Prague*, while others may even be initially accepted as a potential friend, such as Titularrat Golyadkin’s doppelganger in Dostoyevsky’s *The Double*, “There is even an alliance against the foes of the hero, who tells his new friend the most important secrets” (Rank, 30), but as the doubles always seem to share one life, there is always in the end an almost Darwinian struggle to survival between the two. Yet interestingly, typically if one is killed, so too is the other. There also appears in all these works mentioned a sense of a defective ego – either one that is too strong in love with itself and feels it needs only itself to be happy (and can subsist with an idealized but never obtained lover), or the ego that has so much self-loathing that it has no love to project onto another person. We may laugh as the Knight with the Sorrowful Face battles his windmills, but his existence is one full of pain, ridicule, and loneliness.

Interesting to note, Nabokov does not read *Don Quixote* as a comical novel, though many academics read the novel as a humorous picturesque showing the knight’s mad wisdom in an illogical world. Nabokov views the novel as inherently full of the Spanish cruelty that was common for its time. He acknowledges that Cervantes has created a character that transcends the pages he is written but argues that “the only difference between Sir Lancelot or Sir Tristram, or any other knight, and Don Quixote is that the latter did not find any real knight to fight in an age when gunpowder had replaced magic potions” (Nabokov Lectures, 47). Nabokov views the romances of chivalry not as “all Ladies and Roses and Blazons” but scenes “in which shameful
and grotesque things happened to those knights and they underwent the same humiliations and enchantments as Don Quixote did – and that, in a word, *Don Quixote* cannot be considered a distortion of those romances but rather a logical continuation, with the elements of madness and shame and mystification increased” (Nabokov Lectures, 47).

*Don Quixote* also uses the doppelgänger as a sign of madness, which is not uncommon in the history of literature:

> The uncanny effect of epilepsy and of madness has the same origin. The ordinary person sees in them the workings of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellowman but which at the same time he is dimly aware of in a remote corner of his own being. The Middle Ages quite consistently ascribed all such maladies to daemonic influences, and in this their psychology was not so far out. Indeed, I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that very reason. (Freud, 150)

Shakespeare’s mad king was likely created around the same time as Cervantes’ mad knight, and just as Lear has his fool to play the part of a king, Don Quixote has his Knight of the Mirrors to reflect his madness back to him. Both men are broken by reality at the end of their works, but both characters somehow transcend their works. Both Shakespeare and Cervantes are two men whose works seem to transcend time, as so many of our modern-day concepts of the workings of the human psyche have their origins in their writings. Freud based much of his psychoanalysis on their works, and modern scholars, like Otto Rank, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva, will continue to return to Cervantes’ works for ideas and inspiration.

Shakespeare and Cervantes create the two poles of the axis for Freud’s evolving ideas of psychoanalysis to rotate. William Shakespeare is the Oedipal father that Freud cannot bear to
acknowledge for even the authorship of Shakespeare’s own plays and Freud represses Shakespeare’s influence so much that he chooses the name of Oedipus instead of Hamlet to communicate his understanding of the human mind. If we consider that all writing is a conversation with that which came before and follows, perhaps this does not truly matter. However, had Freud taken another lesson from Oedipus Rex, to know they self, he might have understood and acknowledged his deeper debt to the maternal. If Shakespeare’s struggles between princes and kings represents the patriarchy in Freud’s mind, Cervantes’ world of witches, evil mothers, and sorceresses is the preoedipal maternal where the language of psychoanalyses originates. Freud was a true fan of each writer and continued their work unlocking the human mind using stories and metaphors, yet sadly because of his own neuroses Freud was never able to acknowledge or perhaps even understand how much of a debt he owed to both men and to the powerful women in their works and in his own life. If we acknowledge this common blind spot in the minds of these men, we can perhaps expand our understanding and find new meanings within their works.
Works Cited


