

## THE LAW OF THE MOTHER: SIBLING TRAUMA AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF WAR<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper proposes that war can be understood only by examining the human prohibition of violence. As prohibitions and allowances construct society, warfare is a major constructor. Men fight each other; we need therefore to examine this along the horizontal axis of lateral relations. The prohibition is traced back to the annihilation of the toddler's identity as "the baby" when a new sibling takes its place. The mother forbids the murderous wishes of the toddler. The result is an inner warring or clinical depression exemplified by Hamlet's iconic melancholia and—for boys—legitimate warfare. This is sharply divided from the murderous illegal violence from which it arose and has been split off and dissociated but must therefore psychologically accompany it. The construction of two genders and of warfare's contribution to the creation of society are intrinsically related.*

*Keywords: brotherhood, gender, horizontal, prohibition, toddler, trauma*

*Cet article postule qu'on ne peut comprendre la guerre qu'en examinant l'interdit humain de la violence. Étant donné que la société est régie par des interdits et des libertés, la guerre en est un principe constituant. Les hommes se battent les uns contre les autres, c'est pourquoi il nous faut examiner la dynamique de la guerre suivant l'axe horizontal des relations latérales.*

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*L'interdit remonte au moment où l'enfant qui fait ses premiers pas est privé de son identité de « bébé » lorsqu'un nouveau-né vient prendre sa place dans la famille. La mère oppose alors un interdit aux désirs meurtriers de l'enfant. Il en résulte un conflit intérieur ou une dépression clinique – dont la mélancolie de Hamlet est un exemple emblématique – et, pour les garçons, un combat légitime. Cette lutte se distingue nettement de la violence meurtrière illicite qui l'a motivée et dont elle a été clivée et dissociée, mais elle en est le corollaire psychique nécessaire. La construction de la dualité sexuelle et la part de la guerre dans la constitution de la société sont intrinsèquement liés.*

*Mots-clés: fraternité, dualité sexuelle, horizontal, interdit, enfant, traumatisme*

In his book *Better Angels of Our Nature*, in which he tries to persuade us that we are becoming ever less violent, Steven Pinker comments that it is easy to document but hard to explain why young men are the most violent group within the human species. Elsewhere he records research that indicates that in fact it is not young men or even adolescents who can claim this privilege; it is toddlers in the “aptly named ‘terrible twos’” (Pinker, 2011, p. 483). From the perspective that is used here, this is *not* the illegality it appears to be. Psychically, humans are historical persons; all of us are also still the toddlers we all once were. Although we develop from past to present, we must also trace a life backwards from present to some construction of that past that is still present.

Although changed, the past is not changed utterly. Of these toddlers, Steven Pinker quotes psychologist Richard Tremblay:

“Babies do not kill each other, because we do not give them access to knives and guns. The question . . . we’ve been trying to answer for the past thirty years is how do children learn to aggress . . . [T]hat’s the wrong question. The right question is how do they learn not to aggress. (qtd., Pinker, 2011, p. 483)

It was this alternative question—how do they learn *not* to aggress—arrived at from a psychoanalytic perspective that led to the formulation of the Law of the Mother in a book on siblings (Mitchell, 2003). The mother stops her toddler from killing the new baby who usurps its place. (Initially naming this “the Law of the Mother” was a serious joke with the dead Jacques Lacan (1977/1981) whose Law of the Father reformulates Freud’s notorious notion of a castration complex as what ends the Oedipus complex and differentiates the sexes.)

Psychoanalysis privileges the vertical axis of *inter*-generational descent and ascent; it thus joins the branch of feminism that also emphasizes the

vertical, especially patriarchy.<sup>2</sup> The object here is to shift the focus onto the horizontal. In warfare young men largely kill each other, *intra-generationally*. Although women's exclusion from warfare is as central an issue as men's inclusion, as a first stage, this paper gives attention to the creation of war's "brotherhood." Women and men do not have different depth psyches, but their gendering consists in the deployment of distinct aspects of this psyche. Both sexes have the same violent urges; both are forbidden to put them into effect. The horizontal Law of the Mother prohibits her children from murdering each other. Together with the vertical Law of the Father to his sons and daughters, boys are put on the path to become what defines a man by developing a certain use of violence for war; women will have their *non-participation* in violence ascribed as a characteristic of femininity. They are not born thus but become defined as the weaker sex.

So, going beyond Tremblay's observation that we have to stop toddlers from killing, the proposition here is that war and warfare are dependent on a prohibition on lateral violence. In a seeming paradox, war would not be war if violence were not forbidden. This argument goes directly against the grain of evolutionist studies such as Azar Gat's magisterial *War in Human Civilization* (2006) and Pinker's highly acclaimed thesis of diminishing violence in post-Enlightenment culture (2011). In both these studies all forms of violence and warfare are treated as equivalent, as interchangeable; diminishing civilian rape in the United States is an instance of Pinker's thesis, which does not differentiate it from endemic rape in warfare worldwide—and thus by Americans (and other post-Enlightenment combatants) overseas. Pinker's argument depends on this, to my mind, mistaken conceptualization of violence and warfare as taking place on a continuum. Instead, illegal violence and legal warfare are divided by a prohibition.

Although, of course, it uses violence, warfare is, and must be, created through a prohibition of violence. Prohibitions and allowances are the building blocks of human society. Wars and kinship are infinitely various; however, for society to exist at all, both human sexuality and the urge to kill are organized through prohibitions and allowances—with whom one may and may not have sex, whom one may and may not kill.

This prohibition is both the condition of warfare's existence and it is why and how warfare contributes to the construction of human society. As the historian of the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel (1949/1995) points

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2. As Cynthia Cockburn writes, even when clearly appropriate, the terms *fratriarchy* and *andrarchy* have not had staying power (Cockburn, 2011). This useful collection appeared shortly after the writing of this paper.

out, war's monuments and weapons are cultural artifacts. Unfortunately that applies to elegant drones as much as to beautiful swords and stunning castles. Braudel's observation has a general proposition that is crucial: "Did the end of [this particular] . . . war mean peace? Not entirely, for *by some apparently general law*, warfare simply took on new forms, reappearing and spreading in this guise" (1995, vol. 2, p. 865; my italics). It is a "general law" that although war is, of course, not all there is to society, nevertheless, war is coterminous with society. War itself, or war and peace as dialectical terms, are always present as one of the main ways humankind becomes social. This is something we all know but seem not to want to think about.

Although other animals fight, doubtless with some degree of organization, no species has warfare any more than it has highly developed language or complex artifacts. Nor, as far as we know, do other animals have that persistent inner violence, an internal warring, that is so major a feature of what we describe as clinical depression or melancholia. What I am calling "warring" is the prohibited violence that is either turned inwards as a psychic malaise (melancholia) or outwards, as spontaneous but unauthorized self-defence or as criminality.

In 1580 Montaigne summed up the implications of this observation:

As for war, which is the greatest and most pompous of human actions, I should be glad to know whether we want to use it as an argument for some pre-eminence, or, on the contrary, as testimony of our imbecility and imperfection; as indeed the science of undoing and killing one another, of ruining and destroying our own species, seems to have little to make it alluring to the beasts who do not have it. (1580/1957, p. 347)

*Hamlet* is a play in which an important theme is the complex relationship between illegal violence—brother murders brother—and legal warfare. The murdered Hamlet should have been a soldier: "Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage" (5.2.349).

The common root of legal and illegal violence is fighting to survive, which is what we feel we are doing as toddlers. This common source means that illegal violence will inevitably accompany legal violence, but that does not mean they should be conflated: in today's "legitimate" warfare a non-combatant civilian will be raped or killed, riddled with the fall-out of a cluster bomb; a "suspect" will be tortured, imprisoned in a cage without trial for years; a population will be exterminated through genocide. Legal warfare reveals its traumatic origins in that, like all trauma, it is *compulsively repeated* but it shows its provenance in culture and society-building

by creating artifacts and fighting for gains (such as oil) well beyond basic survival.

One can use this proposition of the conceptual importance of the prohibition of violence in many ways. Here a limited number of linked and connected observations are offered. First, some observations about toddlers and the mother's prohibition of their violence. Second and third, a psychoanalytic and a gender-studies background as to how these might be considered. Fourth and fifth, the two disciplines are brought together to consider the boy's sister and the formation of the brotherhood in warfare. Those excluded from warfare—women, Hamlet, and the wretched of the earth—bring these observations to a (temporary) conclusion.

#### THE LAW OF THE MOTHER AND THE "TERRIBLE TWOS"

The typical difficulties and difficult behaviour of the two- to three-year-old are widely recognized. Paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott called the crisis experienced at this age "a trauma of separation": separation from the mother. However, his observations and case histories show that this crisis has two dimensions: the loss of the mother and the acquisition of a new baby who takes the toddler's place. Joan has experienced not only a trauma of separation from her mother but also what we need to designate as an autonomous experience—"a *sibling* trauma."

Joan, aged two years five months, was an only child till thirteen months ago, when a brother was born.

Joan had been in perfect health till this event. She then became very jealous. She lost her appetite, and consequently got thin. When left for a week without being forced to eat, she ate practically nothing and lost weight. She has remained like this, is very irritable, and her mother cannot leave her without producing in her an anxiety attack. She will not speak to anyone, and in the night she wakes screaming, even four times in a night—the actual dream material not being clear . . .

*She pinches and even bites the baby, and will not allow him things to play with. She will not allow anyone to speak about the baby, but frowns and ultimately intervenes.* When she was put in a welfare centre she worried a great deal, and, *having no one to bite, bit herself*, so that she had to be taken home again after three days.

She is scared of animals.

"If she sees the boy on the chamber she heaves until she is sick." If given chocolate she puts it in her mouth and keeps it there till she gets home, then she spits it all out again.

She constantly prefers men to women.

The parents are exceptionally nice people, and the child is a perfectly healthy and lovable child. (Winnicott, 1931/1975, pp. 3–4; *my italics*)

The sibling trauma refers to the fact that the new baby takes the elder child's place in such a way that the toddler becomes “no one”—for a time. Winnicott (1978, p. 13) again:

The mother said that there had been a great change toward ill health in the “Piggle” recently. She was not naughty and she was nice to the baby. It was difficult to put into words what the matter was. But *she was not herself* (Winnicott's italics). *In fact she refused to be herself and said so: “I'm the mummy. I'm the baby.”* She was not to be addressed as herself. She had developed a high-voiced chatter which was not hers. (*My italics*)

The toddler, who was the one and only baby of the family, feels annihilated. It had thought the promised baby would be more of itself, but instead it seems to be a replacement. The toddler feels chaotic. When it is slightly older, she can formulate her urge: it is “kill or be killed.”

Luisa and Josef were aged four and two when Rafi was born. The new baby was charming; the elder children were by this time good friends. One day when Rafi was just three weeks old, his siblings walked in from playing and announced to their mother that they did not want Rafi anymore. They wanted to throw him out of the window. The family lived on the seventh floor of a tower block.

Four-year-old Emma pushed the pram of her new brother, Julian, very fast down a steep hill. Reprimanded by her mother, “You could have killed him,” Emma countered, “Would that have been so very earth-shattering?”<sup>3</sup> Of course we can laugh and take refuge in the fact that small children do not know that death has dominion and is forever. But isn't it rather the other way around—that these universal experiences of infancy give us the template for our later acts of violence? Later the child will play at shooting dead with immediate resurrection, but as a toddler it wants the baby out of the way forever. If killing the baby were not prohibited, the toddler would be Cain in adulthood, the deed would be Claudius's murder of King Hamlet.

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven.  
It hath the primal eldest curse upon't—  
A brother's murder. (*Hamlet*, 3.3.36–38)

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3. Laura Mulvey, 17 Jan. 2012.

It is the mother's prohibition that forbids killing the kin and later the symbolic brotherhood; the prohibition opens the way to the male child's killing the non-kin, actual or symbolic, the enemy.

The mother's prohibition against killing the new baby is the first absolute law of infancy; it comes on top of her socializing the infant into cleanliness, good eating habits, and the rest. "Do not kill" operates laterally, intra-generationally along a horizontal axis. To help renounce the wish to kill, the child must use its narcissistic love for the baby who it thought would be more of itself: it must love the baby, then its brother, then its neighbour, then its friend, then its symbolic brother, "as itself." Not being allowed to kill the sibling opens the horizontal social world of the peer group, which, according to Pinker's research, after infancy becomes more active than the parents for social formation. Human sociality as a horizontal structured institution, in this thesis, starts here. The child has to give up the mother of infancy and go off to play with peers. The boy goes on eventually to fight the enemies who form their own brotherhoods but who are also heirs to the murderous hate the boy had for the baby that turned out *not* to be more of himself but to be someone different. Boys are encouraged to find a substitute opponent outside, girls to keep the violence directed inwards masochistically. Of course there is no absolute division and much individual variation.

Sibling trauma is a necessary trauma that we all more or less survive and, by emptying out the present as trauma does, facilitates a rite of passage from the old state of infancy to the new state of childhood. Winnicott's Piggie was "not herself" and refused to be so, developing a different way of speaking. It is useful here to distinguish between changing roles as, for instance, from schoolgirl to student, and more fundamental changes as from pre-social infant to social child or, in some societies, from dependent child directly to independent adult. With or without initiating ceremonies (which are usually induced trauma), there will need to be an evacuation of the previous status so that there is room "inside" for the new one. The flooding in of "unbound," uncontrollable energy that characterizes the process of trauma, pushes the old self out: after an experience of "not-being-there," with help, a new one can begin to be established. Following the mother's law, for the toddler-in-transit to becoming-a-child, "big" boy or girl, the baby, hitherto the object of its lethal jealousy, becomes instead an object of both affection and denigration, love and contempt.

**PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Psychoanalysis is widely attacked and even more widely ignored. However, its object of understanding *unconscious processes* and its means of doing so remain valid and important and largely uncontested. It is the notion of unconscious thought processes themselves that must bear the brunt of this opposition. Psychoanalysis works with and tries to describe the establishment of human culture in the inner world, the unconscious psyche of the individual. This culture starts as the diversely expressed but nevertheless general or universal rules, regulations, and laws we are all meant to obey without thinking or even consciously knowing about. The rules and laws are most clearly seen in their many failures: the psychoses (or madness), neuroses, dreams, slips of the tongue or pen, and the psychopathologies of everyday life and the expression or acting out of what has been prohibited. These are the more or far less serious moments, when the drives and desires that have been prohibited, come back into evidence, accompanied and distorted by the ineffective regulations against their expression. What is allowed is defined by what is not.

The prohibitions and allowances of sexuality dominated the psychoanalytic picture until the First World War. In 1920, trying to grasp the psychology of the traumatic neuroses that are so prevalent in war, Freud proposed a “death drive,” which, subsequently, in an exchange of views with Einstein, he made responsible for human war as such (1920, 1933). This human drive to return to an inorganic state (individual death) when fused with the opposing “life” drive, takes the active outward form of the destruction of others—killing. The illegitimate violence will become repressed, producing pervasive feelings of guilt for the violence one wanted and therefore somewhere still wants to commit. This violence and guilt figures in the depression of the melancholic. Unconscious guilt, rather than the symptoms that mark the return of repressed sexuality, signifies the return of inner or outer violence: “Oh what a rogue and peasant am I”—or are you.

To this should be added the central place of *prohibited* violence on the horizontal axis. However, because it involves the toddler, we are looking at a psychic defence that is more likely to be splitting and/or dissociation than the subsequent repression of the Oedipus complex. It is not only that the effects of the sibling trauma precede and lead into the Oedipus and castration complex, the ability to express and symbolize, but also that the splitting in particular is normative of social life. Dissociation with its etymological root in *socius* (partner/ally/companion) also characterizes the transitional stage from toddler to social child. Where the toddler is not quite yet at the *socius* and often hence displays some dissociation, the adult



will have lost emotional and psychological contact with those lateral companions who make up the peer group in her or his social world. When he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, Hamlet claims they are not near his conscience; he is unable to care about them—dissociated from his erstwhile “brothers.” The mother’s law demands that the prohibited violence of the toddler be sublimated, socialized, and reconfigured in the brotherhood of warfare. This Hamlet does not achieve. Failure to do so may produce melancholia—“a pure culture of the death instinct” (Freud, 1923, p. 53)—as its other side.

Although it has by no means always been regarded as pathological, depression is recorded in all known human societies. Today, it is considered one of the most serious mental health problems affecting some 121 million people worldwide. It is expected that by 2020 it will be the second leading contributor to the global burden of disease. It already accounts for approximately 850,000 lives by suicide every year.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare’s Hamlet expresses the feeling well: “how weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (1.2.133–4).

## GENDER

Warfare is gendered not just incidentally, as maintained by Pinker (2011) and Gat (2006), but in its very construction. And it works both ways: warfare is a means of constructing gender just as the heterosexual and homosexual gender distinction is a means of constructing warfare. Humans uniquely mark birth by representing first and foremost the heterosexual gender distinction: “It’s a girl, it’s a boy.” However, this comes to have meaning for the recipient only when the birth of the usurper baby re-stages it for the toddler. The same gender sibling is more like oneself: he can thus be assimilated into the homosocial/sexual brotherhood or she can join the sisterhood. Gendering will be boy–boy (brotherhood), girl–girl (sisterhood), girl–boy (siblinghood).

In the ideals of boys’ games, in the fantasies of chivalry, and in the “just” war, a brotherhood of combatants fight another brotherhood of combatants; in the realities of adult warfare, this is, at best, only partially so. The enemy turns out to be not only the rival brotherhood but everyone who seems to threaten survival—men, women, and children. From the viewpoint of the “terrible” toddler still latent in the adult fighter, the enemy will

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4. I am grateful to Felicitas Rost (University College, London University) for this information and for discussions about clinical depression, the subject of her PhD in theoretical psychoanalysis.

be nominally another “brotherhood,” but this enemy is predominantly the hated aspect of the usurping baby in its various manifestations.

Although warfare may be planned patriarchally, it is young men, banded and bonded together, who do the fighting. A social bond depends not only on those who are included but also on those who are excluded. Even today 99.9% of combat troops are men. Women are excluded for the very reason that they are women, not because they cannot or do not want to fight. The problem is that women’s exclusion from fighting seems to have meant that they are also largely excluded from analyses of war. An analysis should not reflect but critique the material under examination.

A gender analysis thus demands a dual perspective: why and how is the brotherhood of fighters created both by the *inclusion* of young men and the equally important *exclusion* of women? War, by definition, excludes femininity. What does the status of inclusion/exclusion tell us about the constitution of the combatants and of the enemy? The enemy must be a feared opponent who is forced by superior power (the “big boys”) to become weaker; but the rationale of the big boys warfare is to protect those who are weaker on their own side—their own women and children. Intrinsic to the understanding of the weak is an irreconcilable contradiction—they are both the defeated and the protected. This contradiction may be a factor in the “extra” abuse of women in warfare, a reason why rape as much as killing is a feature of warfare.

Urged to love the baby “as itself,” *neither* gender can fully assimilate the opposite sex into its newly discovered gender identity. The boy cannot love his sister as himself except insofar as he neutralizes her gender and incorporates her into the brotherhood in the workplace or in warfare. He effects a psychic split: where he *loves* her as *different* from himself, it is as the smaller, weaker, lovable baby whom he can cherish and protect; he also *hates* the different baby, the different baby becomes the enemy and the girl/woman, one in five of whom worldwide suffer rape or attempted rape. When the brotherhoods of war legitimately kill each other as rival brotherhoods, they each also kill the enemy with the survivor’s illegal violence against the hated baby.

Absence from fighting does not mean absence from warfare, and therefore as well as the male–female relation around fighting, the female–female sisterhood and the female/male siblinghood needs to be part of the picture. In war, as with employment, there are “women only” jobs; for instance, women can group as formal sisterhoods such as nurses, or informal ones as mothers or sex workers. Often what women are doing is

invisible because they do not belong in the ideology of “a woman’s place.” What are women doing in warfare when they are nominally (only rarely actually) combatants?

#### THE BROTHERHOOD OF WAR

The world treats the category of “women” as objects of men’s perspective rather than as subjects of their own history, which is both distinct from, and shared with, men. Psychoanalysis, like many other disciplines, has repeated this perspective; gender studies has the task of analyzing it. Here it is hoped that looking at what “man has made of man” from the boy’s perspective is critical rather than collusive.

Most important for this argument is that it is the prohibition against sibling murder that enables the *symbolization* of brotherhood. The prohibition means the kin baby brother is split: in his good aspect he is the same as the boy, and in his bad aspect he is the enemy. In this sense, although he cannot be mourned like the boy’s lost mother of infancy, the baby has disappeared into the split of “the same” and “other”—friend and foe. The boy’s brothers are his actual literal kin, and symbolic, all those who are categorized as such on the loved side of the divide and in the absence of the hated side.

Survival of any sort brings with it the ecstasies of being alive. War’s brotherhood makes this ecstasy a centrepiece. Steven Pinker quotes Vietnam marine and writer William Broyles who, in his *Esquire* article “Why Men Love War” (1984), wrote,

The enduring emotion of war . . . is comradeship. A comrade in war is a man you can trust with anything, because you trust him with your life . . . war is the only utopian experience most of us ever have. Individual possessions and advantages count for nothing; *the group is everything*. What you have is shared with your friends. It isn’t a particularly selective process, but a love that needs no reasons, that transcends race and personality and education—all those things that would make a difference in peace. (p. 56, my italics)

War offers the apotheosis of the loving brotherhood.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition;  
And gentlemen in England now-a-bed  
Shall think themselves accurs’d they were not here,

And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day. (*Henry V*, 4.3.62–69)

As Broyles says, the comradeship or brotherhood of war “transcends race and personality and education.” A commander today, as Henry V yesterday, can conduct war only if he creates a brotherhood. But reciprocally, as “the general law” to which Fernand Braudel pointed, so far we have wars in order to regularly renew the brotherhood of society in peace as in war. Human society and the brotherhood of man as we have known it has not been able to exist without recurrent warfare.

**THOSE EXCLUDED FROM WAR: THE DISINHERITED, WOMEN, AND  
HAMLET**

It is known that the disaffected do not support war. Although most of the world can be rallied into the symbolic brotherhood of war, most do not belong to it. Through what we might here call the “secondary” ideologies of religion, nationality, and ethnicity, the excluded men can be temporarily incorporated into the military brotherhood, the vile can “gentle their condition,” briefly they may share Broyles’s “utopia.” Those who used to be referred to as “cannon-fodder,” Falstaff’s erstwhile companions, Pistol, Nim, Bardolph, and the rest, the wretched of the earth, are called out of poverty and immiseration to fight, and once the battle is lost or won, it is to a peacetime of violent poverty and immiseration, that the vast majority, the mass of humankind, dead, maimed, or alive, will be returned.

Women by definition of their womanhood are excluded from war, but they can likewise be drawn into the military fraternity or play female supportive roles. Women are 51% of the population, more than “half the sky.” For both genders, the sibling is the object of a taboo on incest. However, sexual play, same-sex or other-sex, is widespread among sibling and peer children, with older brother–younger sister being, in the UK, the most prevalent form of sexual abuse. When in play children produce imaginary babies, which in toddlerhood and beyond, they do at the drop of a hat—these babies are created parthenogenetically, they produce them, as Little Hans said, “from myself, of course.” In relation to each other, brothers and sisters are not future mothers and fathers—the vertical axis—but sexual partners or objects (Mitchell, 2007). In kinship terms, the sister will become the wife of the “brother’s friend,” an affinal lateral relation. The wife offers legitimate sexuality for the man. When the illegitimate rage returns, she is the prostitute, camp follower, the trafficked sex slave or vic-

tim of rape. From the viewpoint of an analysis it important not to confuse women's interdependent sexual and reproductive roles. Either or both may be the object of warfare—but they are not the same. The vertical axis gives us reproduction (an identification with mother and father), the horizontal gives us the sexual roles: wives and prostitutes.

Shakespeare's character of Hamlet is neither a woman nor one of the disinherited masses. He is the son of a conqueror king, a Renaissance prince pre-eminent in the brotherhood of man. Yet Hamlet cannot understand how Fortinbras, or by implication, *anyone*, can possibly go to war; why do men "go to their graves like beds" (4.4.54)?

The "o'erhasty" incestuous marriage of his mother to her brother-in-law has made Shakespeare's Hamlet turn his aggression inwards as a girl must, to become, still today, our icon of melancholia. In his melancholia or clinical depression he attacks himself as a woman and as the disinherited of the earth: "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I! / . . . Why, what an ass am I! / . . . [I] Must like a whore, unpack my heart with words, / And fall a-cursing like a very drab, / A scullion! Fie upon't, foh!" (2.2.538–576). A whore and the lowest forms of prostitution (a drab, a scullion) meet up with asses, rogues, and peasants—the lowest of the low. Whatever their actual social status, melancholics experience themselves as the disinherited.

However, any sort of threat to life, from a physical illness onwards, can jolt the depression and turn the illegitimate violence once more outwards as a survival strategy. The spy Polonius (whom Hamlet thinks might have been the murderer Claudius) and Claudius's proxy murderers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern threaten Hamlet's life. He fights for his life—"in my heart there was a kind of fighting" (5.2.4)—and then depression ends and he can act. Hamlet has known that beneath the legitimacies of war's killing, there lies prohibited murder. He has been no more able to kill his father's murderer than he has been able to fight a war. At the tragedy's end, the all-important prohibition has become the thinnest line separating illegal murder from war's legal killing. The carnage in which all the main characters are murdered ought to have been a battlefield, and the dead Hamlet should have been a soldier. As with the masses of the disinherited, beneath the culture of warfare there is murdering and being murdered.

The boy toddler who has managed to sublimate the violence with which he would get rid of his baby brother and thereby use his aggressive energy for warfare, turns sibling murder into warfare's killing. Are there other ways?

**“BE BEGINNING TO DESPAIR, TO DESPAIR, / DESPAIR, DESPAIR,  
DESPAIR, DESPAIR . . . SPARE! THERE IS ONE, YES I HAVE ONE”<sup>5</sup>**

Although he did not pursue the question, Freud, in his exchange with Einstein, initiated by the League of Nations, thought the most important question was why some people do *not* want to fight. He thought it had more to do with aesthetics than with ethics. Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a great poet. If war contributes to the construction of society, then those who, instead of wanting war, are engaged in aesthetical enterprises will be using their prohibited violence in artistic pursuits rather than enterprises of war. Even where protest art is engaged and violent, people value the beautiful constructions of peace and the aesthetic artefacts that are the “excess” of war but that offer a new tranquillity afterwards. Destructiveness and violence are crucial for creativity—Matisse, for instance, talked about his work in terms of raping (Spurling, 2005, p. 24). When something is prohibited, the energy that drove it has to go somewhere. Sublimations are what psychically contribute to civilization. The boy becoming a warrior is sublimating his uncontrolled violence. What we are looking for therefore is a route for sublimations other than warfare.

It would be an untenable fantasy to dream that the use and sublimation of prohibited violence by the making of art and its subsequent appreciation by others could take the place of warfare’s construction of society. But it is a dream in the right place.

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