The Cultural Double-bind in Literature: Homer, Huck, and Hamlet*

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At the 2nd International Conference on Cross-Cultural Communication held in San Antonio in 1989, the program included papers which dealt with several aspects of reading and interpreting literature across cultures. The revised papers were then published in the special issue of *Language and Literature* (LnL) entitled "Literature Across Cultures."[1] Those articles covered many of the basic approaches to the topic:

- 1. Explication of the cultural values underlying the text, with the expectation that the untrained reader from another culture could use special knowledge.
- 2. Explication of the cultural problems in understanding of a character set in a culture outside his experience and competence.
- 3. Explication of the cultural differences at an earlier stage of the same culture, since a reader might have difficulty understanding motivations and behaviors and meanings of familiar looking words at that earlier stage.

The papers included research on both Eastern and Western literature. One decade later LnL takes another look at the topic of literature across cultures and extends the research in different directions. After a few preliminaries on the definition of 'culture' as used in the title, this article will cover a series of examples from literary history. The progression of particular topics will be articulated as we move toward the culminating example of a cultural double-bind in literature.

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Preliminaries I – "Culture"

Cultural Studies can be very roughly divided into three major areas, each of which is discussed in depth in the literature.[2] One component is the Popular Culture or sets of ways and traditions of behavior. Holidays, customary foods, and so on are discussed under this heading. The component of "Classic" culture can refer to the major architectural, literary, religious and so on figures and products of the culture's history. For our purposes the third component, the focus of this article, is the set of the most fundamental principles or values embedded in the cultural system.

These principles – or at least their hierarchy – which we are discussing may and often do lie below the conscious level. These fundamental principles can be suggested by a question such as "what is someone willing to die for, if anything?" The answer given by an individual may not be the principle or value on which a life or death decision is made at life's critical junctures. In other words, a cultural poll could not be expected to disclose that set of most fundamental principles and a possible hierarchy among them. There are, however, ways to investigate them; more on this point a bit later.

These principles are so deeply embedded in the person that they may only surface as decisions about behavior at crucial decision points in a person's life. The examples of fundamental principles could begin with one that seems universal to human nature: self-preservation, in the sense that the automatic reaction of fear to danger is part of our biological make-up. In addition to the preservation of one's life, we could list several principles that are discussed in relation to some of the major cultures of the world: honor, glory, loyalty, liberty, religious conviction and others that could be mentioned for various cultural systems. Over the centuries people from those cultures have chosen even death if necessary, rather than a compromise with the fundamental principles on which they have lived their lives.

Since we are here in the USA, two examples from our country's history can be used to illustrate the point. In the 18th century as what is now the USA moved toward independence, Patrick Henry's famous line encapsulated a basic principle of our Revolution: "Give me liberty or give me death." The state of New Hampshire chose as its motto "Live Free or Die." Other examples abound from that time period.

Preliminaries II: Literature

Literature, especially the classics as chosen by the society itself, embody the principles and values at the culture's center. It is a truism that much of what we know of some earlier civilizations is through the literature which survives. As we read that early literature, often the main character is in serious conflict with enemies of the group from the outside and often the main character is in situations where there are two or more fundamental choices in decision/action in his actions toward the enemy. When two fundamental but competing principles dictate different

actions, the main character is in the classic double-bind. In cultures which have developed with major influences from different sources, such as different co-existing religious systems, those principles about which we speak may be at the deepest level of human motivation, that is, deeper than the natural urge to preservation of life.

This article goes through a short sequence of examples of literature from different cultures to show a progression toward more and more powerful examples of the cultural double-bind in literature. In going through the examples, both the author and the reader must be kept in mind. The reader is a participant in an act of communication between author and reader and, in the case especially of drama, the reader is present while a set of characters converse. When we as audience see and hear (if only through print) a character or characters torn between two courses of action based on different reasons, we are as if mute participants in the character's serious dilemma. When the author has made us share the feeling or share the judgment that both courses of action are possible, we are drawn further into the literary action. We will return to this point later.

The Cultural Double-bind in Literature I: Western Literary Classics

a. Homer

We begin our discussion with some examples of literary characters who face difficult decisions when two of the basic principles upon which their lives are lived – or, in this context, upon the cultural values which they have internalized – come into serious contradiction. The first set of examples comes from the Greek poet Homer's *Odyssey* and both examples deal with Telemachus, the son of Odysseus

1st Recall that Odysseus himself has long been absent from home, perhaps deceased. Suitors for his assumed widow and hence his estate have converged on his house daily and have all but consumed all his food and disposable goods. While they have the status of "guests" and therefore should be treated well, they are at the same time rapacious consumers of Odysseus' goods. Telemachus addresses them as such:

> "You suitors of my mother, overbearing in your rapacity,
> now let us dine and take our pleasure…
> Then tomorrow let us all go to the place of assembly,
> and hold a session, where I will give you my forthright statement,
> that you go out of my palace and do your feasting elsewhere,
> eating up you own possessions, taking turns, household by household.
> But if you decide it is more profitable and better
> to go on, eating up one man's livelihood, without payment,
> then spoil my house. I will cry out to the gods everlasting

in the hope that Zeus might somehow grant a reversal of fortunes.
Then you may perish in this house, with no payment given."
[Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, Book I, lines 368-80]

Telemachus, the son, is torn between the culturally crucial principle of hosting guests and the justified inclination toward retribution for the suitors' devastation of all that was his father's. The level of retribution that is being considered is the ultimate one. This conflict of values forms the frame-tale for the Odyssey, in that Odysseus returns and eventually destroys all the suitors who had been ravaging his possessions.

2nd The second example of a cultural double-bind in the Odyssey is that between preservation of one's life versus the obligation to avenge a murder, especially of a father. We read in Book II:

So it is good, when a man has perished, to have a son left
After him, since this one took vengeance on his father's killer…
[Nestor in the *Odyssey*, Book III, lines 196-7][3]

The obligation to vengeance carries with it the highly important cultural values of honor and glory lasting far beyond death.

it is all too true that he* took revenge, and so the Achaians
will carry his glory far and wide, a theme for the singers to come.
[Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, Book III, lines 203-5]

Telemachus travels far to find news of his father and, if he discovers that his father is dead, to identify his killer and avenge his death. His own life is immaterial in the quest for retribution.

If only the gods would give me such strength as he* has
to take revenge….
[Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, Book III, lines
205-6, of *Orestes who avenged the death of his
father, King Agamemnon.]

We see, then, embodied in the basic story of the Odyssey the principle that avenging a father's death is at the wellspring of the culture's soul and has carried the glory and honor of Greek heroes to readers for over 2000 years.

Our next example has many similarities to this example, but also has an added element.

b. **Beowulf**

Another Western classic of literature is the Beowulf, an Old English epic poem[4] in which a similarly deep level of importance is placed on appropriate vengeance. As in the Greek classic, honor and glory are more important than one's life in the value system that underlies the Beowulf. In addition, there is the added element that Christianity has spread through much of Europe since the time of Homer and is a basic part of the poem's structure. For example, after the warrior Beowulf travels to a place ravaged by a monster Grendel, we read:

> Then the brave warriors lived in hall-joys
> Blissfully prospering, until a certain one
> Began to do evil, an enemy from Hell
> That murderous spirit was named Grendel
> Huge moor-stalker who held the wasteland
> Fens, and marshes; unblessed, unhappy,
> He dwelt for a time in the lair of the monsters
> After the Creator had outlawed, condemned them
> As kinsmen of Cain – for that murder God
> The Eternal took vengeance, when Cain killed Abel[5].
>
> [Book II, lines 99-114]

After Beowulf kills Grendel, the monster's even more fiendish mother comes for revenge, that fundamental motivation for action that we have seen in Homer.

> Men came to know
> –it was plain enough – his avenger still lived
> after that battle, for a long time
> in hate, war-sorrow, Grendel's mother,
> a monster woman, kept ward-grief,
> deep in her mind, dwelt in terrible waters
> icy cold streams, since Cain raised the sword
> against closest kinsman, put blade to his brother,…
>
> [Book XXXIV, lines 2441-3]

And so the next major episode in the Beowulf is the re-vengeance of Beowulf on Grendel's mother. Beowulf is ever after praised for his willingness to risk his life to help his friends and fight evil. So again in the second example we see vengeance or retributive justice as a fundamental principle of human value systems.

Yet we notice a major difference in the impact of Beowulf versus the Odyssey. Beowulf ignores great personal danger and travels to fight and kill the evil Grendel and later Grendel's mother. He receives the same glory and honor we saw with the Greeks, but the motivation for action has shifted to a leader whose task it is to fight evil for his people and to fight evil as part of his religious conviction. In the Beowulf, the reader knows that Grendel is evil and that Beowulf is good and that

Beowulf will win. There is essentially no literary conflict in the Beowulf other than a few warnings that he could die. But, to the Christian, death while fighting evil is a positive good on different levels. The reader remains a somewhat distant viewer of the action and is minimally pulled into the action as if a participant.

How did Homer pull the reader into his conflict? Recall that Telemachus did not know his father's fate through much of the Odyssey and that the large number of suitors at Odysseus' home when Odysseus returned alone suggested that Odysseus would die just before achieving his goal. Thus, the fate of Odysseus, of Telemachus, and of the suitors is unknown to us until the end of the epic and thus we are pulled into it, angry with the suitors, fearful for the hero's life, yet hoping for vengeance to succeed.

These two early examples of somewhat different human and cultural values in conflict in a hero's decisions have stood the test of time. Now we turn to some examples from another part of the world.

The Cultural Double-bind in Literature II: Two Japanese Classics

a. **Heike Monogatari**

A somewhat different example than those above comes from the *Tale of the Heike*, a medieval tale of the warring period in Japan's history near the end of the Heian period (794-1185AD). In the episode that is used here, an ordinary soldier in battle manages to capture a young enemy alone.

> "Quickly hurling him to the ground, he sprang upon him and tore off his helmet to 'cut off his head, when he beheld the face of a youth of sixteen or 'seventeen, just about the age of his own son."[6]

The young enemy tells him to

> "Take my head and show it to some of my side, and they will tell you who I am."
>
> "Though he is one of their leaders," mused Kumagai, "if I slay him it will not turn victory into defeat, and if I spare him, it will not turn defeat into victory. When my son Kojiro was but slightly wounded at Ichi no tani this morning, did it not pain me ?
>
> How this young man's father would grieve to hear that he had been killed! I will spare him.'
>
> Just then, looking behind him, he saw Doi and Kajiwara coming up with fifty horsemen.
>
> "Alas! look there," he exclaimed, the tears running down his face, "though I would spare your life, the whole countryside swarms with our

men, and you cannot escape them. If you must die, let it be by my hand, and I will see that prayers are said for your rebirth in Paradise."

We have in this selection the very human anguish of the soldier whose own son is of a young age such as that of his captive and his very human paternal feelings of mercy conflict with his duty as a soldier. We have young Atsumori, whose code of honor requires that as captured enemy he be killed. We have the religious conviction of the soldier who looks to the next life for the honorable young Atsumori, whose story is told in various types of literature such as a famous Noh drama of centuries later. This episode is a powerful one within the Japanese culture, enriched with the multiple-value conflicts that must be resolved in the few moments before the other soldiers arrive.

b. **47 Ronin**

Our next example comes from the period in Japan when Bushido (Way of the Warrior) with its fundamental value of absolute loyalty, was deeply embedded in the cultural system. Two fundamental principles can be cited here. Absolute loyalty to one's lord, which includes the willingness both to die for him or in his defense and – crucial for this story – and to wreak vengeance on those who shame him. The second principle is honor, the reverse of shame. The lord's honor and the samurai's honor require certain actions.

The culturally significant Japanese non-fiction literary work that illustrates this principle is the story of the 47 ronin, or 47 masterless samurai. The story of the forty-seven ronin is one of the most famous in Japanese history and has been recreated in many media, including puppet theater, kabuki; and film. In the story, the samurai code of loyalty to lord is exemplified in a powerful and dramatic way. Honor requires that vengeance be done to their lord's enemy even though the long process might bring dishonor and deep shame to any or all of the 47 while they are carrying out their plan. One part of the internal conflict within each warrior concerns his need to keep his mission secret while his family and friends may see only shame which in some way affects them all. Briefly, the story[7] as follows:

In 1701 Lord Asano, daimyo of the Akoo domain in western Japan, was assigned to perform ceremonial duty at the shogun's court in Edo, now Tokyo. Unfamiliar with court practices, Asano accidentally violated a strict rule of the shogunate about drawing a weapon at court, thereby insults the lord Kira, attacks that lord but only wounds him, and is then ordered to commit suicide to atone for his transgression. When word of the suicide got back to Akoo, some forty-seven of Asano's vassals, rendered masterless samurai or ronin by his death and the confiscation of the Ako domain, formed a secret pact to avenge him. These ronin waited two years to carry out vengeance. During these two years, many of them

> devoted themselves to dissolute and rather shameful pursuits for the purpose of throwing Lord Kira off his guard. Finally, on a snowy morning early in 1703, the ronin attacked and killed Kira at his residence in Edo and carried his head to the temple where their lord had been buried. There was a spontaneous outpouring of admiration by the Japanese people for this brave and selfless act. But the ronin had broken Tokugawa law and were condemned to die, although they were allowed to commit suicide in the honorable samurai manner.

The example is an important one for our purposes, because the vendetta [Act of Vengeance] of the forty-seven ronin struck deep cords in the feelings of the Japanese. The behavior of these men epitomizes the standards of Bushido, the way of the warrior. One aspect of what they did deserves especially to be noted. In the feudal tradition, the two main responsibilities that a person owed in life were to his parents (as representatives of his family) and to his lord. The Japanese samurai of the Tokugawa period clearly treasured loyalty to their lord and the lord's honor above family, as we can see in this example..

Now it is true that readers from any culture can be drawn into these two stories because the values of honor, of loyalty, of religious conviction, of parental empathy and so on are part of all cultures. Even though the placement in the hierarchy of deepest motivational principles may differ by culture, they are all at the deep level. We all can respond to them as readers although we may know little about the details of that other culture.

We turn now to the final two examples. So far we have looked at literature which involves several people and involves outside forces causing conflict in the main character. The most intense literary experience, however, may be that which deals with competing motivational forces within one human soul. In the two examples below, the crucial parts of the literary works involve a character communicating with himself – and with the audience/reader as listener.

The Cultural Double-bind in Literature III: Concluding Examples

Our last two examples are a contrast in reader participation in the main characters' double-binds. In each case the reader is aware of the deepest conflicts within the character's soul as he wrestles with his conscience to decide the best course of action.

a. Huckleberry Finn

In Mark Twain's 19th century American classic novel, we find that for all practical purposes, the young Huck Finn was not enculturated into any "sivilized" system of values. Huck tries to avoid being "sivilized" by fleeing to the Mississippi

river and rafting away. A Black man, Jim, joins him after running away from the same town as Huck. As they move down the river, Huck interacts with people from various value systems (perhaps we could label them "subcultures" in terms of values) such as the Grangerfords who are engaged in a blood feud with another family, with two con men who prey on the small town people, and so on. Each episode gives Huck an inside look at a subcultural set of behaviors in action, so to speak. Since they are traveling south from Missouri, the common denominator is that the people live in slave states and Jim must stay hidden.

The value systems, the 'sivilization" rules, of each group that Huck Finn meets seem to have something wrong with them or are in some way skewed. As they travel from one to another, Huck becomes worried that there is no way to escape for Jim or for himself and he spends a few pages in chapter XXXI trying to think of what to do. The episode is crucial for the book and for this article. Huck's decision is to follow the law and turn in his friend Jim. Huck thinks over the little that he learned of "correct" behavior as the son of the town drunk. He thinks that it is the good and legal thing to do since Jim was owned by someone. Huck even goes so far as to write a letter back home to have someone come and take Jim back to his owner.

At this point the reader wants to tell Huck "No, don't do it." But after thinking that he would be doing a religious good and a legally correct action, at least according to most of the people that he has met in his short life, Huck thinks of his friendship with Jim, of Jim's humanity, and reverses his decision.

> It was a close place. I took [the letter] up and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:
>
> "All right, then, I'll go to hell" – and tore it up."

At the climactic point in this American classic, the main character has talked to himself (and to us as participant) about the weight of the values of those around him and about his experience of the humanity and friendship of the runaway Jim and has decided that his own personal value for Jim is deeper than any other value, even the future of his own soul. For our purposes, this is a truly excellent example of the cultural double-bind in literature.

Yet Huck's decision is not the strongest example the impact of internally conflicting values on the reader, because we as participant want to say to Huck, "No, don't you understand? You won't be condemned to hell but will be praised for standing for your belief." The impact on the reader is one of relief that Huck made the right decision. In addition, to the reader Huck may seem almost too young for his decision to have a strong impact. A stronger impact would involve an older and stronger character who is making a decision that will also involve his soul irrevocably. And thus we come to our last example, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

b. **Hamlet**

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, we have the revenge motivation seen earlier and we have the religious element we have seen in the Beowulf. However, the religious element operates differently and the main character is not a simple avenger of his father's death. The play is famous for many reasons, one of which is the power of young Hamlet's soliloquies. Through these soliloquies we learn about the nature of the revenge that he contemplates.

In addition, though them we also hear him working through the various cultural doublebinds that he faces. Early in the play an apparition (whether from heaven, purgatory, or hell) that declares itself as the elder Hamlet asks for vengeance upon his brother Claudius for fratricide/regicide, in particular for being murdered without chance of repentance for any serious sin. As young Hamlet carries out the ghost's ideas, he contemplates with friends and in soliloquies the reasons for and against his act of vengeance. At the deepest level, he must decide whether vengeance is the right action in terms of retributive justice and in terms of moral or religious good or evil.

The first motivation is based on retributive justice, if indeed Claudius is guilty. Here Hamlet must convince himself that the ghost was truthful and that his uncle Claudius did secretly murder the elder Hamlet. Yet this complication is further complicated by a competing basic principle of action, that is, by motivation number 2 which is the religious element. Shakespeare intertwines these motivations in such a way that young Hamlet and we, the audience[8] are not sure if the alleged ghost of Hamlet's father is actually his father's ghost and if the call to vengeance is morally good. As Hamlet's friend says early in the play, the ghost may be a demon from hell in the likeness of Hamlet's father and therefore Hamlet may be motivated by an evil force masquerading as a good force. We as audience are pulled into the play on this point, even before young Hamlet appears in the play, because we have seen the ghost disappear twice when heaven is invoked.[8] We as audience join Horatio later in warning Hamlet about the ghost's words, in warning him not only that his life, like that of his father, might be in danger, but also that his very soul may be lost if he follows the ghost's exhortation to vengeance.

Yet, Hamlet discovers that Claudius did murder Hamlet's father, so that both Hamlet and the audience seek justice or in this case vengeance upon Claudius. But now the audience is also in a double-bind and for a religious reason.

Yes, if Claudius is a murderer, then he should face judgment and we the audience empathize with Hamlet's revenge. We also know the line from the Bible that says "Vengeance is mine says the Lord". Should Hamlet seek individual vengeance or could he seek judicial or legal retribution? Since Claudius is King and

therefore in charge of the system of Justice, the task would be difficult or more probably impossible. Only Hamlet can act - and we return to his double-bind which can be stated in this way. If the ghost is from heaven and speaks truly, Hamlet should act; if the ghost is from hell and is deceiving Hamlet, Hamlet's actions my damn his own soul forever. The double-bind is clear at this point.

Yet, if the play had only this level of conflict, Hamlet would be easy to interpret. When we find that Claudius is indeed a murderer, Hamlet could be seen as a Beowulf conquering evil. However, Shakespeare is rarely so simple..

So let us move to the level deeper than we have seen yet. Hamlet decides to wreak vengeance not just on Claudius' life in physical terms, but to wreak vengeance on Claudius' very soul for all eternity. Recall that at one point in the play, Hamlet has decided to kill Claudius. When he sees Claudius praying, he mistakenly thinks that Claudius has repented of the sin of murdering Hamlet's father.

The text in Act III, scene 3, is as follows:

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven:
And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd.
A villain kills my father; and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread;
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;
And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No!
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent.
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't;
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
As hell, whereto it goes.

If Claudius had been repentant - which he was not - death at this point would send Claudius' soul to heaven. Hamlet waits for a later time to wreak vengeance which would last eternally.

This decision is the crux of the play, of the revenge motif Hamlet has decided to take his revenge on the spiritual level. If, then, he has followed the exhortation of an evil spirit and if he himself dies during the act of vengeance and therefore has no chance to repent of his own sin, then his revenge not only damns Claudius but it damns Hamlet's own soul to hell eternally.

If Hamlet does not realize that his spiritual vengeance upon Claudius is itself a serious sin, it could be argued that he cannot be condemned for his action. We have heard in his soliloquy in the preceding scene (Act III, scene 3) hints that suggest Hamlet has come to see himself on the verge of evil action.

> Tis now the very witching time of night,
> When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
> Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
> And do such bitter business as the day
> Would quake to look on.

He himself would act at the witching hour doing hellish work. The suggestion that he is at least partially aware of the consequences of his action is hard to ignore. We have earlier heard him voice his internal arguments about heaven and hell, about conscience and reason, about justice. We have learned that he has resolved - apparently - his double-binds, that is, he has decided to avenge his father's death only with Claudius' soul, regardless of the effect of his action on his own soul.

Here is where the audience says to him - a reversal of the audience's internal cry to Huck – “but don't you understand that by achieving vengeance of the soul, you may be damning your own soul? Think it over, for God's sake. Don’t let your blood lust blind you." Note that here we have left behind the basic motivation of vengeance: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We have also left behind the basic motivation (a la Beowulf) of exterminating evil. Thirdly, we have left behind the religious aspect of justice, as we saw in the Heike: "I would kill you, because I must, but I will pray for you to be in paradise.”

The audience sees only one hope for Hamlet's soul at this point in the play. If his actions are motivated by blind hatred and anger, then he will be guilty but not as guilty as if he had considered his actions and had acted with cool intent and purpose. Shakespeare takes away even this slim hope for Hamlet during the next to Acts. In his soliloquy in Act IV, he states his final decision.

> O, from this time forth,
> My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!
> [Exit]

By Act V, many things have prevented Hamlet from acting out his revenge. He has had time to decide calmly to carry out his revenge of damnation. His decided with

full knowledge, will, and consent to damn his own soul[9] if necessary to accomplish his purpose. The audience is left without any possible redemption for Hamlet except that he survive the act of vengeance and realize that his revenge has gone to far.

That final soliloquy in Act IV lets the audience know the he embraces a principle deeper than liberty, than loyalty, than honor, than life, than life in paradise forever. His climactic decision to damn his own soul forever if necessary has a power with infinitely more impact that the apparently similar decision of Huck Finn.

Conclusion

A study of the motivations of the major figures in a culture's literary history helps us study the basic principles or values upon which the culture is based. We find in the Greek classics and other a powerful cultural obligation to host/share – perhaps even approaching the point of destitution. We see the strength of commitment to loyalty and preservation of honor in Japanese and other classics. We see the various deeply embedded religious principles in our examples from the Beowulf, Heike, and Hamlet. Many other such examples could be cited.

Yet literature deals with conflict, a conflict which is intensified as it occurs within the soul of a single character. In Hamlet, we see an example of a character who sorts through and considers the hierarchy of some of the deepest values in Western culture. Then he decides to replace them with his own personal deepest value of spiritual vengeance. Thus he joins MacBeth, Othello, and Lear as rejecters of deep cultural values and as the primary agents of their own tragedies.

Notes

1. *Intercultural Studies in Literature*. A special issue of *Language and Literature*. Volume XIV. 1989.
2. One of the widely used texts is now in its 7th edition: Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter, eds., Intercultural Communication: a Reader. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company. 1998.
3. All references to Homer are from Richmond Lattimore, trans. *The Odyssey of Homer*. New York: Harper and Row. 1967.
4. Chickering, H. D., Jr. (trans.) *Beowulf*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books. 1977.
5. The story of Cain and Abel is from “Genesis”, the first Book of the Bible.
6. Keene, Donald. ed. *Anthology of Japanese Literature*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld. 1960. pp. 180-181.
7. Varley, H. Paul, *Japanese Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 3rd edn. 1984. p. 184.

8. The analysis of Hamlet which best leads toward the conclusion in this article can be found in Eleanor Prosser's excellent book *Hamlet and Revenge*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1967)
9. A mortal sin is one which, if the person does not repent, causes the person's soul to be sent to hell upon death. The qualifications for an action to be a mortal sin include: (a) the action must be a mortal sin as defined in the religious teachings; (b) the person must know this; (c) the person must perform the action willingly with (d) no mitigating factors (such as being forced at gunpoint). Hamlet's revenge clearly seems to qualify under these criteria.