

Matheme of Phantasy and Object of Desire in Hamlet

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Abstract: “What is a father?” That is the question. This paper discusses *Hamlet* emphasizing the concept of desire and its formation for any human being. From a Lacanian psychoanalytical point of view, a difference between need, demand, and desire will be considered, in order to better understand how desire appears from the fabric of a topological surface and takes its place in the reality of the subject. Then the matheme of phantasy and the various objects that present themselves in *Hamlet*, namely Ophelia and others, as well as the stages of the relationship between Hamlet and his object will be analyzed. The analysis of the obsessional structure allows a better understanding of the movement of desire and action in *Hamlet*, without stating an obsessional structure in the character itself because what is interesting in the end is that Hamlet actually illustrates the place of desire for any human being. Following Lacan’s seminars, the paper will approach the relationship between faith and death, as well as the Borromean place of the Symbolic, with the consequences that emerge when the Symbolic crashes. This way, one could get closer to the fundamental question, pertaining to the function of the father and the unfortunate lifting of the veil that places Hamlet in an impossible position from which he cannot act to fulfill his destiny because the existence of desire is conditioned by the faith in death. The answer to the question would be that a father is seen in the context of actioning as a function, like a mathematical function, to orient the desire of the mother. Instead, in *Hamlet*, there is only legacy of a sin.

Keywords: desire, phantasy, phallus, object, father, law, symbolic, veil, matheme.

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*Psychoanalysis deciphers the unconscious knowledge by
isolating the objects produced in the lack of the Other,
thus allowing the cure to operate on the phantasy.*
(Jacques Lacan²)

The drama of Hamlet is the encounter with death.
(Jacques Lacan³)

1. Matheme

1.1. Desire

Hamlet is a drama of desire. French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan consecrated a large part of his seminar about desire, from 1959-1960, to *Hamlet*, offering a comprehensive and meticulous analysis of the place of desire and of the conditions of possibility of the place of human desire as it is illustrated by *Hamlet*. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire is understood as the “lack” that shifts and moves any speaking subject to wish for more. Desire is delineated as a fundamental lack that constitutes any speaking subject as such. The object that causes any human desire in motion is the “phallus”, the signifier of lack. For the duration of the entire play, Hamlet the son vacillates between “bestial oblivion or some craven scruple of thinking too precisely on th’event” (4. 4.) because the phallus detains and trammels the subject in suspension. Hamlet’s phallic identification⁴ points the way to the idea that as long as he is within identification, he is the object of the desire of the Other; and, in this case, the Other could indwell many others: the mother Gertrude, king Claudius, Laertes, even Hamlet the father. It is yet to be examined.

Hamlet’s encounter with the spectrum of his father is an encounter not with the dead father, but with death itself. The son inherits the legacy of the sin from his father: “GHOST. Adieu. Adieu. Adieu. Remember me.” (1. 5.)

² Lacan, Jacques, “Allocution sur les psychoses de l’enfant”, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966).

³ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre VI: Le désir et son interprétation*, English translation by Cormack Gallagher *The Seminar. Book 6: Desire and its interpretation*, www.lacaninireland.com, lesson from 8 April 1959, 201 (*Book 6* for further references).

⁴ Georgiou, Penny, *Lacan’s Hamlet*, www.londonsociety-nls.org.uk, 3.

Hamlet's procrastination and vacillation should be apprehended in relation to his phantasy and desire. We shall briefly turn our attention to what the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan called *phantasy* and the split or divided subject. This approach enables to conceptualize as well as contextualize desire in his seminars. What the window of phantasy delivers is nothing other than death: therefore, *death is a question of faith*. And, thus, an ethical question.

Phantasy has its own mathematical formula: $\$ \diamond a$ (*S barred poinçon a*). This formula can be read as "the divided subject ($\$$) in relation to (\diamond) the object that causes his or her desire (object *a*)". Phantasy is the pointer of desire since desire is developed and unfolded only through phantasy. Here, the small letter *a* names *the impossible object of desire*, which is *the phallic signifier of lack*. In *Hamlet*, Gertrude and Ophelia will come to take up, at different levels and under several circumstances, this phallic place⁵. Ophelia, as the object cause of desire in the structure of phantasy, goes through various stages of evolution, until she is desired only in so far as she is the *signifier of impossibility*, after her death. Lacan explains:

I recall what the S barred ($\$$) signifies: the S barred represents, takes the place in this formula of what it returns from concerning the division of the subject, which is found at the source of the whole Freudian discovery and which consists in the fact that the subject is, in part, barred from what properly constitutes it qua function of the unconscious. This formula establishes something which is a link, a connection between this subject as thus constituted and something else which is called small *a*. Small *a* is an object whose status what I am calling, this year, "constructing the logic of phantasy", will consist in determining – its status, precisely, in a relation which is a logical relation properly speaking.⁶

⁵ Calderon, Norman Marin, "A Lacanian Reading of *Hamlet*: The Mourning Subject of Desire", *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*, no 2 (2015), 28.

⁶ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre XIV: Logique du fantasme*, English translation by Cormack Gallagher *The Seminar. Book 14: Logic of Phantasy*, www.lacanireland.com, lesson from 16 November 1966 (*Book 14* for further references).

Yet, to begin with, desire for the speaking being always revolves around the demand of the Other, thus there is a logical problem of knowing how the demand of the Other and its function can be properly situated. Because the Other is the barred Other, as one can see on the graph of desire that Lacan constructed in his seminar of '58-'59, a seminar about the formations of the unconscious which precedes his seminar about *Hamlet*. There is a point of jouissance⁷ which can be located as jouissance of the Other. This point, as a point of jouissance, is one from which the jouissance of the Other is ensured, yet it is something that essentially traverses itself in the subject. It is a topological operation which, as we shall see, does not work in *Hamlet* as it is supposed to.

"Desire is only sustained by the relationship it disregards, the division of the subject to an object that causes it. This is *the structure of the phantasy*."⁸ For the neurotic, the phantasy stages an Other and its lack, which is its partner. And neurosis, with its two fundamental structures, hysterical and obsessional, enacts phantasy as relation between the divided subject (*S* barred) and object *a* – which is the object that causes desire, not the object of desire –, relation expressed by the veil of the phantasy. The whole problem with *Hamlet* is that the veil has been lifted by the father, a veil that under no circumstances should be lifted the way it happens to *Hamlet* the subject because this places him in an infernal and ghostly position of forever questioning about the reality of existence. When desire, which is an absolute condition, is court circuited like that, there is only one solution: death. *Hamlet's* death.

1.2. *Absolute Condition*

There are three standard clinical structures in classical psychoanalysis: neurosis, psychosis, and perversion. Neuroses are delineated as two, according to their relationship with desire: hysteria and obsession. If the hysterical

⁷ It is a point without which it is impossible to understand what is at stake in perversion, for example, says Lacan. See *Book 14*, lesson from 15 February March 1967, 116.

⁸ Lacan, Jacques, "Du 'Trieb' de Freud et du désir du psychanalyste", Summary of interventions from the colloquium at Rome university, January 1964, on the theme: "Technics and cases", *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 853, emphasis ours.

subject supports desire as dissatisfied and dashes castration, the obsessional subject avoids his own desire and aims to cancel that of the Other. Whereas the pervert subject willingly poses as a victim of the desire to the Other that he works to afflict. For the psychotic subject, the non-extraction of the object has compromised the advent of the phantasy structure and the possible regulation of *jouissance* through access to desire⁹. Thus, the hysterical seeks the place of desire in the desire of the Other, the question being about the desire that he/she attributes to the Other as such, while the desire of the obsessional is the destruction of the Other, he/she tending to destroy his/her own object. The hysteric lives entirely at the level of the Other, the emphasis is to be at the level of this Other, and this is why the desire of the Other is so much needed, for without it the Other would be nothing but the Law. Therefore, the center of gravity of the entire movement of the constitution of a hysteria is at the level of the Other, whereas in obsession the search itself and the aiming of desire as such is constitutive since it is beyond any demand¹⁰.

There is something special about demand, it has its own properties: by the very fact that it is articulated as demand, it is a *demand for love*, for something that can be considered neither satisfaction, nor reply to another demand. And it does not matter if the other answers, by giving his or her presence or absence, here one can see, in demand as unconditional demand for love, the *introduction of the Symbolic order*. It means that there is also a *loss* in relation to need, since in this beyond of any demand the Other loses its preeminence, while need originates in the subject itself, not in the other.

Thus, the fundamental dimension of the human desire is this state of being unconditioned because it is an *absolute condition* which abolishes the dimension of the other since the other does not even have to reply with a yes or a no. Therefore, desire can be understood as being extracted from the ground of needs, but it is an absolute condition with respect to the Other in what concerns the demand for love from which any need is subtracted. "Desire is going to present itself as that which in the demand for love is a

⁹ *Cahiers cliniques de Nice*, <http://www.sectioncliniquedenice.fr/assets/ccn-11.pdf>, 6.

¹⁰ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient*, www.staferla.fr, lesson from 14 May 1959, 400-401 (*Book 5* for further references).

pointer to any reduction to a need, because in reality that satisfies nothing other than one's self, namely desire as absolute condition."¹¹

As a matter of fact, in the Shakespearean drama *Hamlet* it is truly a matter of the signifier since any subject cannot cancel anything if it is not a signifier. Saying that something "is not" only brings upfront the very same cancelled thing as signifying. Only things that are formulated as demand can be canceled, however it is a demand for death which is at the same time a demand resulting in the destruction of the desire of the Other and all within which the subject is himself able to articulate. But, in order that the subject should not be himself destroyed, it is all the more necessary to isolate those parts of the discourse which can be conserved compared to those parts of the discourse which should by all means be cancelled: the never-ending story of yes and no as one can witness throughout the play. A game of separating what in the demand either conserves or destroys him, which is crucial for the preservation of the Other as such, "because the Other only exists as such at the level of signifying articulation"¹².

It is precisely a question of the signifier since there are two horizons of demand, the primitive demand addressed to the other, which is a demand for love and symbolizes the Other as such. Then, we must distinguish between the other as a *real object* capable of giving satisfaction and the Other as *symbolic object* capable of giving presence or absence. This Other "is the matrix within which there are going to crystallize these fundamental relationships which are at the horizon of every demand, and which are called on the one hand, love, on the other hand hate, and of course ignorance."¹³

1.3. *Topological Surface, Cut and Phantasy*

The establishment of phantasy essentially needs something, namely a substance or, better, a surface, a topological surface from which phantasy could take its material. It must be a closed surface, like a bubble, says Lacan, though not a sphere.

¹¹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 7 May 1958.

¹² Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 25 June 1958, 336.

¹³ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 2 July 1958, 499.

This surface which I call bubble has properly speaking two names: *desire and reality*. It is quite useless to exhaust oneself in articulating the reality of desire because, primordially, *desire and reality are related in a seamless texture*. They have no need of needlework; they have no need to be sewn together. There is no more “reality of desire”, we would say, than it would be correct to say “the back of the front”: there is one and the same fabric that has a front and a back. (...) This fabric is woven in such a way that one goes without noticing it, since it has no cut or stitches, from one to the other of its faces. And that is why, before you, I made so much of a structure like the projective plane, imaged on the board by what is called the mitre or the cross-cap.¹⁴

It is relevant to notice that there is only one face to this topological surface. Before any cut takes place, there is this distinction between the front and the back, and the Moebius strip is one structure which allows a discussion around the *topological surface of phantasy*. The relations of the subject to the Other in *Hamlet* imply a dimension that is not an intrinsic property of the surface. No matter what type of surfaces, it is in a third dimension that they take on their function. So, the dimension of the Other is a matter of distinguishing a front from a back on a topological surface, but even if necessary, it is not sufficient for the main character of the play, young Hamlet, to be able to distinguish between reality and desire. For that, it would be necessary to have a subject in question and thus, a cut is necessary on the afore-mentioned projective level that Lacan speaks of.

Every cut establishes a complete change in the structure of the surface, meaning that the entire surface becomes the object *a*. The entire surface becomes “a disc that can be flattened, with a front and a back, and you cannot pass from one to the other except by crossing an edge. This edge is precisely what makes this crossing impossible, at least this is how we can articulate its function. First of all, *in initio*, the bubble by this first cut – rich in an implication which does not leap to the eyes immediately – by this first cut, becomes an object *a*.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 14*, lesson from 16 November 1966, 4, emphasis ours.

¹⁵ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 14*, 5.

If Lacan qualified phantasy as a “freeze frame”, it is decisive not to forget about the “edges” of an image by virtue of the formula of any topological surface: Vertices-Edges+Faces=Surface¹⁶. That is to say that the phantasy is the real “freeze” which, cut off from logical time, plunges Hamlet the subject and his destiny into a topology of the space of neurosis.

The *pointçon* from the matheme of phantasy remains an originally structured *vel* which depicts the relation of Hamlet to object *a*. It should be presumed or accepted as Lacan presents it by using Euler circles for the relation to the Other. So, in the formula of phantasy the *vel* is built from two logical operations which are called union and intersection, where union depicts the liaison of the subject to the Other and intersection defines object *a*. If one Euler circle is the subject not yet constituted and the other Euler circle is the Other, then the intersection of the two circles is the place where Lacan situates object *a*. This should be read as follows: that what appears and comes up from the relation of the subject to the object *a* is defined as a first circle, and then another circle, that of the Other, with the small *a* in their intersection. The subject can only be established in a relation of lack to this object *a* which is from the Other, at first, “except by wanting to be situated in the Other, also not to have it except amputated from this object *a*”¹⁷. Henceforth, object *a* is the result of these two logical operations: union and intersection.

Regarding the surface of a bubble that is the fabric of desire, on the plane of the imaginary relation, an explicitly inverse relation to the one that channels the ego to the image of the other is established. The ego is matter at hand to the avatars of the image, as a sham, as Claudius is, but it also establishes a perverted logical order in so far as it imprudently crosses the logical frontier which could expect that at some point in the creation of the structure that is presumed to be primordial, what is rejected can be called

¹⁶ “Any two polygonal decompositions have a common subdivision, using all the vertices and edges of the given decompositions and enough new edges to ensure that the surface is divided into polygonal faces; the number of vertices, edges and faces may be increased at will by subdivision, however the alternating sum $S = V - E + F$ does not change under either of the basic subdivisions, and thus is independent of the decomposition, this being the Euler characteristic for surfaces”, see Jonathan Hillman, “Graphs, Knots and Surfaces”, *The University of Sydney*, 2006, <https://www.maths.usyd.edu.au/u/jonh/gsk.pdf>, 13.

¹⁷ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 14*, 6.

“non-ego”. Lacan dismisses this idea, because “the coming into play of language in no way admits such a complementarity”. Talking about the function of *Verneinung* at Freud, “in this lack established by the structure of the bubble, which constitutes the stuff of the subject, there is no question of us limiting ourselves to the term, now obsolete, because of the confusions that it implies, of ‘negativity’. The signifier (...) is not simply what supports what is not there. The *fort-da*, in so far as it refers to maternal presence or absence, is not, here, the exhaustive articulation of the coming into play of the signifier. The signifier does not designate what is not there, it engenders it.”¹⁸

1.4. *Matheme of Phantasy*

For Jacques Lacan, phantasy is a formula, a “matheme” that can only be *written* and, as he postulates, mathemes are the only things that can be transmitted. Sigmund Freud too used the word “phantasy”, yet his conception has two extremities: on the one hand the content of the phantasy, and on the other hand the author of the phantasy. When talking about the content of the phantasy of the subject, of a speaking being, it is about a merger of elements which come from the subject’s experience on the one way and from the discourse of the Other on any other way, a discourse which precedes and surrounds a subject, yet at the same time it is a discourse that builds and arranges the subject. Then, when talking about the author of the phantasy, he or she is none other than the subject himself, in other words the speaking being who is born in a world of language, amongst other speaking beings.

Although Freud uses the designation “phantasies” in the plural, Jacques Lacan uses the concept “phantasy” only in singular. He places phantasy in its fundamental structure: $\$ \diamond a$. In this matheme, the phantasy writes a relation between two terms: the barred subject $\$$ and the object a . At the same time, Lacan says that any phantasy can be reduced to a single phrase, as, for example, the one that Freud wrote in his exploration of a clinical case: “A child is being beaten”. This phrase establishes two terms in a relation: a subject as already disappeared – called *aphanisis* – and an object as already appeared – called *phantasia*. The thesis that Lacan proposes is that in a

¹⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 14*, 7.

personal analysis the subject discovers his own alienation in “the phantasy as motor of the psychic reality”. Starting from the seminar about the formations of the unconscious from 1958, Lacan placed the formula of the phantasy on his graph of desire, saying that phantasy is what masks desire.

In *Hamlet*, there is a relationship of inversion between demand and object *a*: the demand of the subject corresponds to the object *a* of the Other and the object *a* of the subject develops into the demand of the Other. This is what takes effect and appears for the prince of Denmark: on the one hand, what he aims at as object is the demand of the Other, and on the other hand what he demands, when he demands to grip object *a*, the ungraspable object of his desire, Ophelia for that matter, is the object *a* as the object of the Other. Of course, things must be extricated theoretically at a general level: if one talks about the obsessional subject, then the preeminence and stress is on the demand of the Other, taken as object of his desire, and if one talks about the hysteric subject, then the preeminence is on the object of the Other, taken as support for the demand that the subject produces. Therefore, it is so important to structurally enlighten the relationship of the barred Subject to object *a*, namely the topological support that one can grant to phantasy. The main trouble for Hamlet, for example, is the object from the formula of phantasy, object *a*, the object of desire which has no image. His phantasy will always land in a jam, a standstill because in his search for object *a*, the object cause of desire, he stumbles on the encounter with the specular image, *i(a)*. Hitherto, “the specular image is not just an illusion, it is fundamentally an error in so far as the subject miscognises (*s’y meconnaît*) himself in it. (...) in so far as the origin of the ego and its fundamental miscognition are here reassembled in the spelling; and in so far as the subject is mistaken he believes that he has his own image in front of him; if he knew how to see himself, if he knew, what is the simple truth, that there are only the most deformed relationships in any identifiable fashion between his left-hand side and his right-hand side, he would not dream of identifying himself with the image in the mirror”¹⁹.

¹⁹ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre IX: L’identification*, English translation by Cormack Gallagher *The Seminar. Book 9: Identification*, www.lacaninireland.com, lesson from 30 May 1962, 249 (*Book 9* for further references).

This function of the specular image in so far as it is referred to the miscognition of what I called above the most radical asymmetry is the one which explains the function of the ego in the neurotic. (...) I will show you how in another reference of the cut, the subject qua structured by the signifier can become the cut a itself. But it is precisely what the phantasy of the neurotic does not accede to because he searches for its ways and its paths along an erroneous passage. Not at all that the neurotic does not know very well how to distinguish, like any subject worthy of this name, $i(a)$ from a , because they do not have at all the same value, but what the neurotic seeks, and not without foundation, is to arrive at a through $i(a)$. The path along which the neurotic persists – and this is very tangible in analyzing his phantasy – is to get to a by destroying $i(a)$ or by fixing it.²⁰

There is an inherent relationship between the subject of language and his object of desire which is represented in Lacan by the aforementioned “matheme of phantasy”, that is, a type of framed subjective ghost or spectrum that regulates and structures any subject’s life: $\$ \diamond a$. In that respect, one can better understand the seriousness of the formula of phantasy in relation to the appearance and evolution of desire in a subject like Hamlet:

This is our starting point: through his relationship to the signifier, the subject is deprived of something of himself, of his very life, which has assumed the value of that which binds him to the signifier. The phallus is our term for the signifier of his alienation in signification. When the subject is deprived of this signifier, a particular object becomes for him an object of desire. This is the meaning of $\$ \diamond a$.²¹

Hamlet, the Shakespearean drama, epitomizes the abstruseness and enigma of all speaking beings: they are all trapped in the entanglements, the nets of desire and cannot hide from them. The enigma of Hamlet is the enigma of any human being as well; that is, humans are subjected beings, in lack, imperatively divided, always desiring the object that is lacking from the picture. For instance, in the case of Ophelia, Hamlet rejects her as an object

²⁰ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 9*, lesson from 30 May 1962.

²¹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 227-228.

of his love when she is still alive. He declares it to Laertes, but he does this when she is already dead, in the cemetery, deep in the muddy abyss of death. Hamlet desires Ophelia given that she is absent. As stated before, *lack opens the road to desire*. Lack makes humans desire. The object which causes desire, object *a* that originates desire, is the phallus, that is, the primordial signifier as *signifier of a lack*. And for this reason, Lacan advances the idea that, for Hamlet, the son of king Hamlet, Ophelia is *O'Phallos*. Still the real problem is, and it is the precise point when anxiety as the only non-deceiving affect appears, when the lack itself appears to be lacking: the dialogue between Hamlet and Gertrude testifies for such a dreadful and hopeless position, as we shall take notice further on.

2. Objects: Impossible Everywhere

A subject who commits himself as subject is the one who puts himself in the balance to decide between the two options, which are “nothing maybe” and “maybe nothing”, therefore he poses himself as something from the real in face of the Other, namely he specifies himself as impossible. It is this dimension that Hamlet himself incarnates because he is too much – it is his form of the impossible – and that once he tries to come out of his ambush position as a hidden object, he must be a nowhere object. Hence there is this everlasting situation in which he would be the one who is everywhere in order precisely to be nowhere. Such a taste for ubiquity may be found in any obsessional subject. Yet Hamlet is more than that, since one cannot simply identify a clinical structure in a drama character. He cannot be everywhere or at least he cannot be in several places at the same time; thus, he can nowhere be laid hold of.

If we meticulously follow Lacan in his seminar about anxiety²², the constitution of the object *a* between the subject and the Other is explained at its five levels: oral, anal, phallic, scopic, and vocal. The phallic object can be seen throughout the entire play *Hamlet*, in various forms and manifestations; the scopic object pertains to the specificity of the construction of the Other

²² Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre X: L'angoisse*, 1960-1961, www.staferla.fr (Book 10 for further references).

and the veiling of the phantasy; the vocal object is mysteriously planted or, rather, unplanted when the poison is allegedly poured into the ear of Hamlet the king. All these objects are expressions of object *a* which, in the way of constitution of the subject in relation to the Other, lays in the intersection of the two Euler circles – the subject and the Other – because when the human being is born into language something from the organic being is lost: that is the lack of being. It is a loss which is at the same time fundamental and constitutive for any speaking being.

To say “lack of being” means to designate a place where the signifier representing the subject is missing: this lack of signifier is the condition for putting into this place an object. Later, in *Encore*²³, Lacan says about *a* that it is a simulacrum (*semblant*) of being²⁴, because the being of the subject is his being of jouissance. On the other hand, when we call *a* an object, this is only a metaphoric use of the term, borrowed from the subject-object relationship. In fact, the object *a* also appears in the Borromean knot, which belongs to the clinic from the last part of the Lacanian teaching, namely at the margins of the hole in the knotting of the three registers: Symbolic, Imaginary, Real. Therefore, as it appears in *Troisième*²⁵, the hole of the three registers has in its center a place, a *topos* which one can only plug with something, namely with the imaginary. However, this does not mean that *a* is imaginary, it only means that *a* is imagined with what one can imagine it: with what is being ingurgitated, with what is being excreted, with what makes gaze or, better, what tames the gaze, and with what makes voice. Object *a* is relatively at the margins of the hole of the Borromean knot.

Object *a* gives a written image, specifically the one which Lacan puts in the Borromean knot which, in fact, knots itself around the object *a*. There are two sides of this object *a*, one of them is as possible as it is real simply because it is written. Thus, the writing places itself as edge of the real, it is located on that very edge. For Lacan, logic, which is the science of the real, “could only clear its way from the moment when people had been able to sufficiently empty words of their meaning to substitute letters purely and

²³ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre XX: Encore*, 1972-1973, www.staferla.fr (Book 20 for further references).

²⁴ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 20*, lesson of 20 March 1973.

²⁵ Lacan, Jacques, *La Troisième*, 1974, http://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/la_troisieme_integrale.pdf, 65.

simply for them. The letter is in a way inherent to this passage to the real. (...) What we require in a mathematical logic, is very precisely the fact that nothing in the demonstration reposes on anything but a certain way of imposing on oneself a combinatorial perfectly determined by an interplay of letters.”²⁶

2.1. *Phallus*

The phallus is a ghost, it is the signifier of desire. The phallic object creates a mirage in the visual field²⁷: it is the imaginary effect of being surrounded by a series of reflections which act as inducements and lures and facades to the real object of quest. In *Hamlet*, the effect of such a lure is the displacement of Hamlet’s act into a whole collection of *faux pas* actions, all of which are deadly: Hamlet kills Polonius, he drives Ophelia to commit suicide, he is unable to counter the death of mother Gertrude, who swallows the poison that was meant for him, he kills Laertes, and, eventually he himself is touched by a deadly blow. And all these accidents take place without any glary intention: he alone commits actions that are unjust, but which are all misjudged, miscalculated, and, thus, are bungles.

We surely cannot fail to relate this to the fact that, in the tragedy of Hamlet, unlike that of Oedipus, after the murder of the father, the phallus is still there. It is there indeed, and it is precisely Claudius who is called upon to embody it. Claudius’ real phallus is always somewhere in the picture. What does Hamlet have to reproach his mother for, after all, if not for having filled herself with it (...) The phallus to be struck at is real indeed. And Hamlet always stops. The very source of what makes Hamlet’s arm waver at every moment, is the narcissistic connection (...) that Freud tells us about in his text on the decline of the Oedipus complex: one cannot strike at the phallus, because the phallus, even the real phallus, is a *ghost*.²⁸

²⁶ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre XXI: Les non-dupes errent*, www.staferla.fr, lesson of 9 April 1974 (*Book 21* for further references)

²⁷ Georgiou, Penny, *Lacan’s Hamlet*, 3.

²⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 29 April 1959, 246.

Lacan says of Hamlet that he “*incarnates the mortal phallus*”. To further progress with this, it is only when Hamlet the son knows himself to be stroke by death itself – “with not thirty minutes left” (5. 2.) – that he is capable of acting and of action with exactness and clarity, and at the same time with justice: he kills Claudius, he acts to prevent further mess by nominating Fortinbras as the King of Denmark and, most importantly, he charges Horatio with “the rights of memory” (5. 2.) to tell the story of all the events the latter had witnessed.

2.2. *The Time of the Other*

Lacan says that Hamlet “is constantly *suspended in the time of the Other*, an other with capital O, throughout the entire story until the very end”²⁹, which is, after all the time of his looming death. As an illustration, Hamlet has no capacity of killing Claudius because the sham king was praying, an ill-timed and unfortunate time to kill him since it was *the hour of the Other*, as one can see in Hamlet’s soliloquy:

HAMLET.

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. (3. 3.)

Thus, the tragedy of Hamlet³⁰ takes place at the hour of the Other, until the very end. When should Hamlet’s hour be then? It is definitely the time when his death comes to light. This compass, this strange assimilation of desire brings forth, again, the concept of the phallus. “The phenomenology of obsessional neurosis relies in a signifying scansion in which the subject finds himself immanent in every articulation.”³¹

²⁹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 15 April 1959, 219, emphasis ours.

³⁰ Calderon, Norman Marin, “A Lacanian Reading of Hamlet: The Mourning Subject of Desire”, 29.

³¹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 9*, lesson from 22 November 1961, 10.

What the obsessional subject articulates is “*Tu es celui qui me...*”, but he stops here, hereinafter it is a repeated “To be or not to be”³². “To be or not to be” indeed, because when one repeatedly pronounces it in French it becomes “You are the one who is killing me”: *tu es* and *me... tues*. The French language provides the fundamental schema³³ of the relation with the Other because this relation is grounded on an articulation which is itself founded on the destruction of the Other. However, because it is a significant articulation, it defends and preserves the Other. Well, within this significant articulation one should find the signifier phallus connected to two verbs: *to be* and *to have*. The phallus is not an image, it is not a phantasy, it is not an object, it is the *signifier of desire*. It is not the object of desire; it is merely a signifier and the subject can be either in the situation of having the phallus or that of being the phallus. The starting point for an obsessional subject, a point which will create all his later difficulties, is the fact that the desire of the Other is canceled: the desire of the Other is symbolized by the phallus, but, as such, it is denied. So, the primitive relationship of the obsessional with his own desire is based on the denegation of the desire of the Other³⁴. The Freudian *Verneinung* has two faces, as we mentioned above: on the one hand desire is articulated, symbolized, and on the other hand desire has a “non/no”. This is the very basis of the position of Hamlet and he needs create all sort of compensating formulae in this matter. Cancellation concerns the signifier: “this is not/it is not”. Therefore, he must cancel whatever he had formulated, and that is what Lacan calls the death demand³⁵: the death demand, when it appears early and its result is the destruction of the other and the destruction of the desire of the other, is all that the subject has left in order to be able to articulate something in language. So, there are parts of the discourse that must be isolated, and which can be kept and there are parts of the discourse that must be cancelled to prevent the subject itself being cancelled at the same time. Therefore, one can see a whole lot of game of yes and no, a game of separation of all that in the subject’s words, in his demand, destroys him or preserves him. It is in this contradiction that Hamlet is a true prisoner: maintaining the Other in relation with all the language formulations – to which he pays a lot of attention all the time – that are necessary

³² *Tu es celui qui me... tu es celui qui me tues*.

³³ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 18 June, 472.

³⁴ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 25 June, 484-485.

³⁵ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 25 June, 485.

for the preservation of an Other always in danger of falling – because of the death demand –, and this is a prerequisite condition so as the subject himself does not fall. The subject, he himself could not subsist if the Other were cancelled and what comes directly as that particular thing which can be cancelled at the level of the signifier, that is the phallus, namely that which marks the desire of the Other. Thus, desire here is an *impossible desire* and if he is to assume his own desire, to be human, it is to see the fact that the signifier phallus is there all the time in the unconscious articulation³⁶. The image of the phallus takes over the function of something which marks the incidence through which desire is hit by interdiction. Indeed, however interdiction is a complicated story, a *story of the Law*.

It is in so far as the father as bearer and founder of the Law has the phallus, he may give or refuse it. Either way, he must validate at a given moment the fact that he has it: he meddles as the one who has the phallus and not as the one who is it. This way, something can be produced that reinstates the agency of the phallus as the object desired by the mother³⁷. This is most important because it is something that cannot be read in *Hamlet*. Let us now plainly see how things are going further in the Oedipus complex and then in the idea of the paternal function.

Because the father can give the mother what she desires, identification can be made with this paternal agency which is realized in three moments³⁸. The first moment is in a veiled form: even if not yet unambiguous, there is a father existing in the realities of the world where the Law of the Symbolic reigns, and this means that already the question of the phallus is stanchd somewhere else in the mother and where the child must pinpoint it; the second moment is by his privative presence: the father is the one who supports the Law, and this occurs no longer in a veiled fashion but in a fashion mediated by the mother, because to the mother

³⁶ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 25 June, p 485-486.

³⁷ Lacan says that it is “no longer just as an object of which the father can deprive her, the all-powerful father is the one who deprives, moreover it is on this level that up to a certain time the analyses of the Oedipus complex dwelt, at the time when it was thought that all the ravages of the Oedipus complex depended on the omnipotence of the father, this was the only moment that was considered, except that it was not underlined that the castration that was carried out there, was the privation of the mother, and not of the child”, *Book 5*, lesson from 22 January 1958, 139.

³⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 22 January 1958, 139.

he is the one put forward as the one who, for her, unwinds the law; the third moment is the father in so far as he is revealed – acknowledged and exposed in so far as, he “has it”: and this is the way out of the Oedipus complex. It is in this moment that the identification with the father follows.

For desire to appear and fulfill its function in a subject, it takes a father who objects to the Oedipus, a singular version, a real father, whose enjoyment incompletes and undoes the register of the Law while putting a principled and honest veil on this transgression. But Hamlet is not a son whose father played his role like this. He mistook his role for a different one, that of a ghost. And we know that the only ghost existing for any speaking being is the phallus.

What did his father say to Hamlet that drove him to the situation of being in confrontation with his “to be or not to be”? The father told him *qua* ghost that he had been godsend and jolted by death “in the blossoms of my sin” (1. 5.). It is a matter of coming across the place taken by the sin of the other, the *unpaid sin*, as Lacan says. This is all the way opposite to the story of Oedipus. In Hamlet, the crime of existing remained unpaid, since the father did not pay, therefore the son is the one who should pay for it. Hamlet dwells in an impossible position: he can neither pay, nor not pay.

Hence, the main problem is precisely that when the ideal crashes one can witness the dispersal and exodus of desire in Hamlet. And his desire will be restored only when he enters in competition with his specular image, obvious in the character Laertes, but only in the context of the excessively loved object Ophelia.

2.3. *The Object: Ophelia*

In his dependency relationship with the object Ophelia, Hamlet is always knuckled to the rendezvous with his destiny. The term object is so much holding the reins here, that we could say that it is more persistent and insistent because the libido is no longer conceptualized as seeking for pleasure but seeking for the object³⁹.

³⁹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, 210.

The demand for death is not a mortifier tendency, nevertheless it is an articulated demand instead and, being so, it does not appear in a dual relationship, but it vises, beyond the other, his or her symbolized being, being thus lived by the subject only in its returning. Hamlet is a speaking being and for that reason he can get towards the Other only if the Other gets to himself first. Hence the demand for death is the death of demand: here we can see the avatars of the signifier phallus.⁴⁰ We can only understand the “polypresence of the signifier phallus” in various actions that Hamlet undertakes if we find there a confirmation of the fact that the function of the phallus is that of the “incidence of the signifier in the living” and this is destined to be fragmented in various effects of the signifier. Metonymy means that there is always only one phallus at play and Hamlet’s structure is dominated by a game of concealing this fact. For example, the obsessional remains much obsessed with regard to whatever his impulsive acts could generate in the libidinal order⁴¹; and under this libidinal impulse there can be seen the aggressive impulse because, in a way, the phallus is something dangerous. This idea is worth applying to the object relation that we can grasp with Hamlet.

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia represents the object that “causes” the subject’s desire. In this function, Ophelia is set up as Hamlet’s object *a*. Lacan suggests that “with the respect to the object *a*, the object is the object of desire only by virtue of being the end-term of the phantasy. The object takes the place, I would say, of what the subject is – symbolically – deprived of”⁴². It is the place of a fundamental and constitutive loss.

For Lacan, the subject is devastated not only when he has lost or is in danger of losing the object, but to a higher degree when he is in danger of finding it: when he is in danger of losing the loss itself. Rather than mourning for King Hamlet, we can see Hamlet as resentful and anxious of the fact that his father’s death has left him “too close”⁴³ to the maternal object. Without the interceding agent of the Law, who should be the father, to regulate desire in accordance with the Law, Hamlet is thrown too close to Gertrude who, as

⁴⁰ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 10*, lesson from 2 July 1959.

⁴¹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 2 July 1959, 500.

⁴² Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 227.

⁴³ Aristodemou, Maria, “To Be or Not to Be a (Dead) Father”, *Journal of International Dispute Settlement*, no 9 (2018), 113.

Claudius says, “lives by his looks” (4. 7.). Therefore, the main problem here, as we stated above, is that that in his function as a father, king Hamlet was a ghost even before dying. Not the function of the right one, though.

Hamlet’s revenge of his father’s death becomes a function of where the subject settles in relation to desire, an aftereffect of progressive searches within the relationship of the subject with his object. Three stages of this relationship appear in Hamlet’s relation to Ophelia: first, in which the subject desires and shifts in the direction of the object, along the pathways of desire; second, in which the subject rejects and repudiates the object; and third, in which the subject incorporates the object, reintegrating it as an object of desire, but only at the cost of mourning and of death.

Ophelia⁴⁴ is not the object of Hamlet’s desire because that object is nonentity other than Gertrude; Ophelia could, at some point, be the object, but she is comparatively the object which causes desire in Hamlet. Ophelia changes along the whole drama as a locus for desire. In the beginning, she is the *phallized partner*⁴⁵, then she develops into and represents a distinctive object of desire the moment she dies. For Hamlet, Ophelia is his object *a* in three different approaches⁴⁶, according to three stages as follows: trigger for desire, destruction and loss, and reintegration of the object.

2.3.1. *Trigger for Desire*

At the beginning of the play, Hamlet hastens and struggles with a strange distance from Ophelia the maiden – “HAMLET. The fair Ophelia! – Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered” (3. 1.) said the prince –, precisely because she represents for him a trigger for his desire. It is the moment when there is *something that vacillates in the structure of phantasy*, allowing its components to appear, and that is always anticipated and recognized as threatening and dangerous. He needs to run away, therefore he stays away from her because *he does not want to know* anything about his own desire. This is for Lacan a moment of “estrangement” marked by distance, “an experience of depersonalization”⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Calderon, Norman Marin, “A Lacanian Reading of *Hamlet*: The Mourning Subject of Desire”, 31.

⁴⁵ Calderon, Norman Marin, “A Lacanian Reading of *Hamlet*”, 31.

⁴⁶ Calderon, Norman Marin, “A Lacanian Reading of *Hamlet*”, 31.

⁴⁷ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 15 April 1959, 222.

The vacillation seems obvious when Ophelia describes how Hamlet enters her premises in a rather pathological and disordered state:

OPHELIA. He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
 Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
 And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow
 He falls to such perusal of my face
 As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
 At last, – a little sbaking of mine arm,
 And thrice his head thus waving up and down, –
 He raised a sigh so piteous and profound,
 That it seems to shatter all his bulk,
 And end his being: that done, he lets me go:
 And with his head over the shoulders turn'd,
 He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
 For out o' doors he went without their help,
 And, to the last, bended their light on me. (2. 1.)

It is now that Hamlet becomes a depersonalized subject who is “completely null and dissolved as a love object”⁴⁸. Away back, as Hamlet says to Ophelia: “I did love you once.” (3. 1.) However, in this scene he treats beloved Ophelia with cruelty and untamed aggression. “In the case of Hamlet, we find afterwards something in which Ophelia is completely dissolved *qua* love-object. 'I did love you once', says Hamlet. And things happen in his relations with Ophelia in this style of cruel aggression, of sarcasm pushed to such an extreme which makes of it one of the not least strange scenes in the whole of classical literature.”⁴⁹

Ophelia is endangered here not only as a life ready to blossom, but also a life which bears all of the possible lives. This is how Hamlet qualifies her, though only to reject her as the mother of filth and sinners, as an image of pure vitality and fecundity: “Why wouldst thou be a breeder of the sinners?” (3. 1.)

This is nothing else than a subtle, yet obvious at the same time, comparison where the maiden is the phallus: “the whole dialogue with Ophelia is indeed about woman conceived here uniquely as the bearer of this

⁴⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 15 April 1959, 223.

⁴⁹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 15 April 1959, 223.

vital tumescence which it is a question of cursing and putting an end to"⁵⁰. Lacan's analysis alleges the Homeric term *Ophelio* which means to make pregnant: there one can witness in *Hamlet* a genuine and brilliant transformation of the formula $\$ \diamond \Phi$ – where Φ is the symbolic phallus⁵¹ – in the form of rejection; *Ophelio* as vital ebullition, but, more far-reaching, its verbal form *O'phallos* makes reference to the phallus. "The confusion between Ophelia and *Phallos* does not require similarities in order to be obvious to us. It appears to us in the structure. And what it is now a question of introducing, is not the way in which Ophelia can be the phallus, but if she is, as we say, truly the phallus how Shakespeare made her fulfill this function."⁵²

2.3.2. *Destruction and Loss*

The second tone Hamlet articulates maiden Ophelia as his object of desire is not only in terms of cruelty and aggression towards her, but as "destruction and loss of the object"⁵³. Ophelia is an object that is not settled in the Symbolic order but rather crops up in the Real, no longer being part of Hamlet's phantasy. At this is why he rejects her in any way he is capable or suited to do so. Some would see a certain "horror of femininity"⁵⁴ that sums up Hamlet's love and destruction relationship to Ophelia, which suggests that if *Hamlet* is the drama of his fading desire, then Ophelia becomes the only representation of the rejection of desire. Thereupon, Ophelia is "at this point the phallus, exteriorized and rejected by the subject as the very symbol of the rejection as such of his desire"⁵⁵.

The matheme of phantasy, as outlined before, designates the relationship between a split subject alienated by language (S barred) to a specific object (object *a*) that commits to compensate for that fundamental lack. Phantasy is not only the Imaginary but is taken up into a certain signifying usage. The

⁵⁰ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 8 April 1959, 209.

⁵¹ Lacan differentiates between the symbolic phallus, written as Φ , and the imaginary phallus, written as φ .

⁵² Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 8 April 1959, 210.

⁵³ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1969, 224.

⁵⁴ Calderon, Norman Marin, "A Lacanian Reading of *Hamlet*", 31.

⁵⁵ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 233.

manifestations of phantasies – for example, the sadistic phantasies which play such an extensive role in the economy of the obsessional – cannot be qualified as phantastic, but as an operation in which the term imaginary is thoroughly articulated in the signifier. Every time that one speaks about the phantasy, the necessary scenario aspect should be considered, the story aspect which forms a crucial and imperative dimension of the phantasy. “It is something which the subject not only articulates in a scenario, but in which the subject brings himself into play in this scenario. The formula S with the little bar, namely the subject at the most articulated point of his presentification with respect to little a , is indeed here something valid in every kind of properly phantastical deployment of what we are calling in this instance the sadistic tendency, in so far as it may be implied in the economy of the obsessional.”⁵⁶

Hamlet’s desire vacillates and vanishes for him to the degree that he approaches it as something which is to be destroyed. And this happens because the reaction of the desire of the Other appeared to him as something which was first of all his rival. That is, he bounced back with the style of destructive reaction, “underlying the relationship of the subject to the image of the other as such, to this image of the other in so far as it dispossesses and ruins him”⁵⁷.

The first advances of the desire in Hamlet are determined from this starting point: the desire of the other was destroyed, cancelled. And this is posited even if in the starting point the desire structure was as it was for every speaking subject: a contribution to the desire of the other. “There is therefore this mark which remains in the approach by the obsessional to his desire which ensures that every approach makes it vanish.”⁵⁸ He only maintains himself in a possible relationship with his desire at a distance. It is imperative to uphold the distance from desire, but this is not a distance from the object because the object, as we have seen above, has a different function. So, for the desire to subsist, it is necessary that Hamlet keeps his distance from it. Still there is something more to this: “at the level of demand, that it is a question of the mother first of all (...) The demand demands to be pushed to the limit.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 21 May 1958.

⁵⁷ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 18 June 1958.

⁵⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 18 June 1958.

⁵⁹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 5*, lesson from 18 June 1958, 348.

Of course, one cannot infer that Hamlet the character is commonly a courteous obsessional subject, since he is first and foremost a character in a play, but one cannot avoid the idea that this character is a brilliant illustration of desire in many aspects of its manifestations. Hamlet is an excellent exercise for the reader or spectator who wishes to understand the function of desire and phantasy in a speaking being.

2.3.3. *Object Reintegration in Mourning*

The uttermost way Hamlet sees Ophelia as the object cause of desire appears in the scene of the graveyard: "HAMLET. I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum. What wilt though do for her?" (5. 1.) According to this "third paradigm"⁶⁰, it can be witnessed a reintegration of the object *a* that was "the function of the object as being here reconquered only at the price of mourning and of death"⁶¹. Because of her death beyond recall, Ophelia is "reincorporated" as Hamlet's object of desire. For Lacan, the graveyard scene is directed towards the battle at the bottom of the muddy tomb in which Ophelia, the object of Hamlet's desire, is in fact dead and makes him a subject capable of desiring something, an *impossible object*, that is now essentially faraway and unattainable. But, most importantly, with Ophelia Hamlet paves the way to the encounter with impossibility itself, hence Ophelia is merely the *signifier of impossibility*⁶². According to Lacan, Hamlet can only desire at the very crossroads of imminent life and death, right in the bounds of impossibility.

The awe of the object is established along the play according to the settling of a frontier between the characters of Ophelia, the maiden, and Gertrude, the incestuous mother, the "most pernicious woman" (1. 5.). Both female characters exemplify the drama of the feminine object cornered in the entrapment of male desire in so far as both women are, at the same time, the object, and the endorsement of desire: object *a*; but also, there is the phallus to be considered. Indeed, the object of Hamlet's desire can become his object of desire to the extent that that object is lost, so it is absent and, thus, an

⁶⁰ Calderon, Norman Marin, "A Lacanian Reading of *Hamlet*", 32.

⁶¹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, 15 April 1959, 224.

⁶² Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 234.

impossible object and, at the same time, the signifier of impossibility itself. Lacan affirms that “the very structure at the basis of desire always lends a note of impossibility to the object of human desire”⁶³. As already seen, the structure of this object is the phallus itself. But furthermore, there is some object of mourning which is in a certain kinship of identification. The question of what identification is should be formulated from the categories of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real.

Therefore, the only way a subject can accept and refine his object of desire is through loss and mourning. *Hamlet* becomes a drama of mourning and loss. It is a play where “all anyone talks about is mourning” so the phallus, as a signifier is ubiquitous: “(...) the phallus is everywhere present in the disorder in which we find Hamlet each time he approaches one of the crucial moments of his action”⁶⁴. An object exists only in so far as the subject identifies himself to it in the process of mourning. He can, thus, reintegrate it sooner or later. In mourning, “the subject is plunged into the vertigo of suffering, and finds himself in a certain relationship, here in some way illustrated in the most manifest fashion by what we see happening in the graveyard scene, Laertes leaps into the grave, and the fact that he embraces, beside himself, the object whose disappearance is the cause of this suffering, which makes of it in time, at the point of this branching off, in the most obvious fashion, a sort of existence which is all the more absolute in that it no longer corresponds to anything at all”⁶⁵.

We should understand by this that there is a loss in the real, an unbearable loss for the human being and that it provokes a hole in the real. Thus, it foments mourning and can be found in the reverse of the *Verwerfung*⁶⁶. “Just as what is rejected in the Symbolic reappears in the Real, that these formulae should be taken in the literal sense, likewise the *Verwerfung*, the hole of the loss in the Real of something which is properly speaking the intolerable dimension presented to human experience which is,

⁶³ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 234.

⁶⁴ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 234 *sqq.*

⁶⁵ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 234.

⁶⁶ It is a term which Lacan translates as *forclusion* and it means the rejection of Language at the dawn of the creation of the subjective structure; it is the origin of the psychotic structure, see Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre III: Les psychoses*, Paris, Seuil, 2018. (*Book 3: Psychoses*).

not the experience of one's own death, which nobody has, but that of the death of someone else, who is for us an essential being."⁶⁷

To progress with this idea, it is a hole in the real and there is a place where there is projected precisely the missing signifier, namely this imperative signifier in the structure of the Other. This means that the Other cannot give an answer to the subject. This is the path to the crash of the Symbolic, to the A barred. It is a signifier which the subject cannot pay for except with his or her own flesh and blood, it is foremost the signifier which is nothing else than the phallus under the veil. Still this signifier cannot be articulated at the level of the Other, of course, and there mourning gets its function: "to proliferate instead of it all the images that the phenomena of mourning give rise to, the phenomena in the foreground being those through which there is manifested not one or other particular madness, but one of the most essential collective madresses of the human community as such, namely that which is put here in the forefront, given pride of place in the tragedy of Hamlet, namely the ghost, the *fantôme*, this image which can surprise the soul of each and every one of us."⁶⁸ It is just as it should be and this is the role of funeral rites: an immense interference of the Symbolic operating.

3. Epilogue: Hopeless Truth

Hamlet is a drama about what happens when the Symbolic order crashes. The main crash appears as Hamlet's failure to mourn, that is, his absolute failure to mourn the loss of the object phallus. Ophelia's death as well becomes a ritual sacrifice for Hamlet in expiation of the un-mourned loss of his father which "attempts to institute a lack that can be adequately mourned". The object of desire is then reassembled and restored through mourning and death.

"To be or not to be – that is the question. (3. 1.)" Question to which Hamlet responds in this monologue, and his answer brings us closer to Lacan's allegation from 1972 in front of the audience of the University of Louvain, that

⁶⁷ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 235.

⁶⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 22 April 1959, 235.

"death pertains to the domain of faith"⁶⁹. The question concerns the impossible to know about death. His question is in the register of "what is there to be done" in a time when the Other – other than destiny – no longer answers. Faced with blows that the Moirai executes, must one live by supporting them, or must one die while struggling and fighting them? The issue here is not whether a human being should defy or resist the arbitrary strokes of life. There is no possibility to oppose the blows of chance; the alternative formulated by Hamlet is that either the speaking beings support the accidental and unplanned, or they oppose it, but then they just die in the process. They choose *not to be*.

The "rub" (3. 1.), as Hamlet puts it, is that death may not be lifeless⁷⁰. There is not a single thing he knows about it. But the Other simply *does not answer*. There, he must believe, but the spectrum of the father does not really do any good in that matter. So, Hamlet does not know what to rely on since the substratum and reason of knowledge are affected. This is why he will constantly turn towards the others to set to rights all of his acts. *To be or not to be?* What sets the question apart is not what knowledge allows to reckon as the most "noble", it is the faintheartedness, the indestructible drive of a life that persists in the defense towards the agonies of existing through the sustainment of desire. "L'au-delà de la vie nous délivre-t-il de la vie?" This is Hamlet's question, as Lacan puts it in his Seminar about transference⁷¹.

It is around this question concerning death⁷², of this weakening of his belief in death, that Hamlet stumbles, and it is around this that the disintegration and mishap of his desire is so well organized. Hamlet is trapped in an intolerable sequence of life always refreshing, like a computer game with infinite lives to spare. The Other simply does not answer. There, he must believe, but the spectrum of the father does not really do any good in that matter. So, Hamlet does not know what to rely on to take the plunge on anything.

Instead of a truthless truth, Hamlet stumbles upon a hopeless truth. "*The truth of Hamlet is a hopeless truth*. There is not a trace in the whole of Hamlet of a raising up towards something which could be described as the

⁶⁹ "Jacques Lacan à Louvain, le 13 octobre 1972", *Quarto* no 3, 1981, 8, <http://www.psychasoc.com/Textes/La-mort-est-du-domaine-de-la-foi>.

⁷⁰ Hoornaert, Geert, *Hamlet, la tragédie du désir. La douleur d'exister*, 5.

⁷¹ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 8*, 331.

⁷² Hoornaert, Geert, *Hamlet, la tragédie du désir. La douleur d'exister*, 4.

beyond, atonement, redemption."⁷³ The very foundations of the Other are revoked, the cancellation of any form of guarantee is absolute. The effect on Hamlet is numbness and stupor; language no longer offers him a lounge, and the affirmation that the land of death is the one of which no traveler returns is swapped to be superannuated and outmoded by this something that justly gives incentive to all that of Hamlet discourse that is there, in absolute unruliness, after the appearance of the ghost who just returned from a country in which everyone is kindly asked never to return from. This fall of the guarantee in the Other will lead to a very newfangled form of truth-checking, which consists of trying to make things speak, without the intervention of the signifier.

In 1964, in Seminar XI, Lacan underlines the toxicity of the father around an absence of a gift or donation: he did not "give to Hamlet the prohibitions of the Law which can make his desire"⁷⁴. Without desire, the human being is exposed to the illness and agony of existing. Life is perhaps the most threatened when the very idea of death as finitude becomes an object of absolute doubt and disbelief. There is certainly a sort of agony related to the finitude of existence; "but the one related to its eventual infinitude is a thousand times more paralyzing, more hopeless. There is no longer sadness and mourning, it is the impossible mourning and melancholy"⁷⁵. Let us say that the very existence of desire is conditioned by faith, by the belief in death.

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⁷³ Lacan, Jacques, *Book 6*, lesson from 8 April 1959, 205.

⁷⁴ Lacan, Jacques, *Le Séminaire. Livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris, Seuil, 1973), 55.

⁷⁵ Lacan, Jacques, "Kant avec Sade", in *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 777.

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